

# On digital and literacy education of European universities during the epidemic period

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**Abstract.** The paper discusses teaching mode of European universities during the epidemic period and proposes the characteristics of digital education which has realized another ideological change from face-to-face teaching to self-learning and from systematic teaching output to individual learning input. Hence the shift can also be understood as the change from digital education to literacy education centered on flexible learning. Based on shift from digital education to literacy education in European universities the developing trend of literacy education in European universities during the epidemic period are put forward in the construction of lifelong education in Europe.

**Keywords:** Digital education, Literacy education, European universities, Epidemic period.

## 1 Introduction

With the opening of the new semester in 2022, European universities during the epidemic have successively implemented the online and offline mixed teaching mode. At present digital learning may be the most frequently used concept in European universities. In 2020 the European Union issued the digital education policy of the digital education action plan 2021-2027, which strengthened the technical learning of digital teaching strategy, paid attention to mobile learning and integrated e-learning, collaborative learning, applied technology learning, mobile learning and online game learning. This means that the teaching mode of European universities during the epidemic has realized another ideological change from face-to-face teaching to self-learning and from systematic teaching output to individual learning input. It can also be understood as the change from digital education to literacy education centered on flexible learning.

## 2 European university education reform in digital age

The digital revolution has broken the separation between daily life and students' learning. The application of technology and flexibility in education provide individuals with the opportunity to learn to study and live. European university education in the epidemic era

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does not have to be completed in the classroom. Learning also leads to real problems which can be solved from the learning platform and real life. Digital education policy issued by EU has recognized this shift. While applying the concept of digital learning in European universities, the concept of applying technology to promote learning has been repeatedly emphasized. For example, ICT Information technology goes deep into all aspects of students' life and provides students with interactive learning. The application of technology learning should not be regarded as an independent learning form related to computer, Internet and technology, but related to various problems we face in life.

In the epidemic influence mixed learning is widely used in European university education, such as the mixed learning model in UK, France, Spain and Italy. It goes without saying that the online education mode is mixed, including face-to-face classroom teaching and online distance teaching. According to past experience, European universities first pay attention to face-to-face teaching in order to reduce the dropout rate of distance learning because pure online courses cannot motivate students to complete all courses, one of the reasons is the lack of peer interaction. In hybrid education, the most ideal mode is to have the best online teaching platform combined with classroom teaching, such as Coursera, EDX, futurelearn and Moodle teaching platform adopted by European universities. It is characterized by extensive courses, selectivity and strong pertinence, and supports learning through laptop, PC, mobile phones, iPads and smart TVs. At present, the digital trend of European universities is the combination of the advantages of distance education and face-to-face education, and the flexibility of campus education and distance education. The integration of two different educational paradigms promotes the development of flexible education.

It is worth mentioning that the Finnish Virtual University platform is a Finnish university online organization, namely an educational platform that provides information technology support, and also Swedish University Online Alliance platform. The reason for emphasizing the Internet refers to the sharing of information between the Internet and universities, such as the online game learning platform of Spanish universities. E-learning is adopted by European universities in the epidemic era reflects that emphasis on learning through the Internet has no distance or classroom restrictions, and can be flexibly transmitted to education recipients, send information and provide convenient learning through new technologies. It is contrary to the learning mode focusing on education providers previously proposed by the EU before 2000. It is a relatively new concept for cooperation in the field of international communication system between university institutions, which is characterized by its ability to process information quickly, deal with learning resources from different channels in parallel, interpret images with text, connect information and social relations synchronously or asynchronously, retrieve information and solve problems directionally, finally improve its positive attitude towards technology.

### **3 Shift from digital education to literacy education in European universities**

Firstly the bottleneck of the integration of digital education in European universities in the epidemic era is the language barrier. Europe is a multilingual society. In the integrated and globalized Europe, English is becoming more and more important as a media language. Now most of the teaching materials used in Digital Education in European universities are English. The EU encourages teachers and researchers to publish their achievements in English to reach more learners. The core of digital teaching is whether teachers can teach subjects in English and guide students to acquire literacy competence.

Secondly the interaction between students and social environment is being changed. Online learning students study alone and in isolation and communicate with teachers

through the platform. In the epidemic era, digital education in European universities has gradually realized the social factors of learning and the advantages of peer learning. Teachers use integrated groups to organize course learning. The interaction of group members can be carried out online or in platform interaction. Peer evaluation becomes an effective learning activity. This interaction can reduce the need for immediate feedback from teachers, students can get better feedback, and digital education becomes faster to motivate students' literacy competence..

Thirdly the return of teachers' digital teaching becomes less. In European universities, digital education and learning centers provide technical and social support. Workplaces and libraries assume the role of learning centers. In addition, the social environment of teachers is also a theme that European universities need to consider in the epidemic era. Digital teachers often work alone in teaching and scientific research, lacking a sense of return from face-to-face contact with students. Due to the lack of social background, digital teaching is difficult to attract many teachers and academic personnel to spend more time, which affects teachers' time in teaching and scientific research and their motivation to learn new technologies. In addition, digital teachers in European universities have no additional return in terms of salary and social status. Digital teaching takes time for teachers to engage in research, and the return of teaching achievement is lower than that of research, and the return of distance education is lower. To do a good job of online education, online teaching platform requires a lot of additional technology and ability of subject teachers, which is not just as simple as preparing teaching content in the university. Distance education needs to spend time to acquire teaching skills, so as to effectively guide distance online learners. For example, some European university teachers are ready to engage in distance education, but they soon give up, because they believe that academic personnel have invested time and energy in additional work and should be rewarded and compensated accordingly. The European Union or education department should pay more for online education teachers. At present such agencies as British Higher Education Bureau, French Education Agency, Spanish Ministry of Education have begun to consider how to encourage teachers to engage in Digital Education in the epidemic era for a long time to shift digital education to literacy education in European universities.

## **4 Literacy education in European universities**

Influenced by COVID-19 many European universities have suspended offline teaching and launched the online teaching mode since March, 2000. About 150 schools and educational institutions in France have announced the suspension of classes, but the French government has not closed all higher education institutions in the country. The online teaching mode of French higher education colleges and universities, including the French institutes of higher education and French institutes of business, has been implemented since March, 2000. French higher education agency required French higher education and scientific research institutions making various preparations for online teaching due to the spread of the epidemic in France. In the future, French universities will do all kinds of online teaching for the continuous prevention and control of the epidemic.

Open classroom, an online teaching platform implemented by French higher education institutions is the most popular large-scale open online courses platform at present, which is called French MOOC. The platform is an online sharing platform financed and developed by French companies. It is characterized by providing all-round online courses, and students can also obtain degree certificates recognized by the French government after registering for study. In addition, French universities also use coursera, EDX, teams and other online teaching platforms at the same time, because of their information sharing with European university students and teachers. French universities have accepted a large

number of European exchange students in the Bologna process, which makes these traditional teaching platforms continue to play a role in French universities. With a large number of foreign students entering French business colleges, French universities apply coursera, EDX online teaching platform to carry out mass and elite education, such as online lectures by well-known British and American scholars and professors. For example, some of platform lectures irregularly held online to share for students and teachers, which is significantly shifting from digital education to literacy education.

French higher education agency believes that on the premise that conditions permit and do not violate local epidemic prevention regulations, it is recommended that foreign students and exchange students who have suspended classes return to their homes for online learning, and those who are studying in French universities and whose residence is about to expire can apply for an extension in real time. French higher education institutions advocate the spread of COVID-19 will not interfere with online teaching of French universities. Universities will take all necessary measures to make timely adjustments to online teaching so as to ensure that students finish their studies and evaluate their effects and share their responsibilities on society to promote students' literacy education.

## **5 Development of literacy education in European universities during the epidemic period**

In different European countries during the epidemic era, teaching and learning methods of literacy education systems are different, but the digital participants of European universities have the same goals, which can be summarized as follows. First, they will study and listen to classes online at home or in other places separated from teachers, such as Imperial College London, University College London, Durham University, Lancaster University, etc. Teaching students are distributed all over the world. Coursera online teaching platform focuses on paid learning operation, EDX and futurelearn online platforms. Some of platforms are free online learning and Moodle platform gives full play to the function of teaching management. Secondly, students are free to choose their own time to study, choose their own learning progress, and can also study with other students. For example, UK and French universities apply coursera / EDX, teams and other online teaching platforms at the same time, because of their information sharing with European students and teachers, coupled with the fact that these universities have accepted a large number of European exchange students in the Bologna process, and continue to play the role of digital platform. Third, the university education software improves the effectiveness of flexible learning by adapting teaching materials, developing methods to evaluate students' knowledge and services provided during students' learning. Colleges and universities affiliated to such Spanish universities in Madrid, Catalunya, Castilla Leon and Andalucia, which first started online teaching, mainly focus on flipped teaching. Teachers upload course teaching videos to YouTube online platform to watch and study in advance, and then organize students for online discussion. Students can also watch all courses online through the video conference system. The long-distance online teaching platforms adopted by Italian universities are Zoom and Skype, are characterized by the synchronous use of long-distance video teaching and Moodle platform courses. The distribution of corresponding online reading materials to students between teachers and students through email or Skype promotes students' literacy education.

It can be seen that the concept of literacy education has been well spread in European universities in the epidemic period, affecting students' study and life. European universities need to consider the growing relationship between digital education culture and social environment in literacy education. Teaching development and design system will be

convenient so as to make literacy education play a greater role in the construction of lifelong education in the future.

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