

SWOT analysis and strategies to support college physical education through distance education

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ABSTRACT: Reported in this article is a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, which was carried out using the survey results of distance education in China. Strategies for dealing with the factors determined by the SWOT analysis are outlined. Then, the strengths and weaknesses of distance education are discussed. Finally, the factors affecting the development of distance education in China are presented and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The reform and opening up of society in China is exposing it to fierce, international competition. As a result, development of the society obviously requires talent of high quality. At the same time, given the rapid rate of change in society, there is an urgent need for the continuous updating of knowledge and skills, and so the demand for lifelong education has become stronger [1]. Hence, China's development requires the construction of a lifelong education system.

As information and communication technology have developed, distance education has become a main way of constructing such a lifelong education system. Until the end of the 1970s, the concept and terminology for distance education was confusing and non-standard. Official acceptance by the international community followed the UNESCO support for the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE) in 1982. Later, its name was changed to the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE).

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) is often used to analyse companies and enterprises. The analysis covers the internal factors that affect a company, i.e. strengths and weaknesses, together with the external factors, i.e. opportunities and threats.

For example, a company's strength could be good internal R&D; a weakness could be an inadequate distribution network; an opportunity could be new countries to sell to; a threat could be from competitor's products. The result of a SWOT analysis is often displayed as a matrix or table with cells for the internal and external factors.

The origin of the SWOT analysis is obscure, but American Professor K. Andrews from Harvard University played an important part in developing its academic underpinnings in the 1950s. It is widely used in the field of strategic management, often in conjunction with trend analysis (TA), which considers the trends of the opportunities and threats, i.e. the external factors.

SWOT Analysis for Colleges

A SWOT analysis could be performed for colleges to determine the effect of the internal and external factors on the development of the colleges [2]. This research approach could play a significant role in determining the future development strategy of colleges [3].

SWOT Analysis of College Physical Education Distance Learning

The author of this article surveyed 30 Chinese college physical education (PE) departments involved in distance education, as well as students and social groups. A SWOT analysis was used to determine the dominant factors in distance education of college PE, i.e. the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Strategies to deal with these factors were developed [4]. This provides a theoretical reference base to improve the Chinese distance education system of college physical education. The SWOT analysis matrix is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: SWOT analysis matrix for Chinese distance education.

	Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
	1. The favourable external economic environment. 2. Becoming an important way for the popularisation of higher education. 3. The development of education policy. 4. The rapid development of information technology.	1. Strong international competition. 2. Investment is less than that of developed countries. 3. The penetration of computers and the Internet is low. 4. Difficulty of going from planning to delivery of a system.
Strengths (S)	SO Strategy	ST Strategy
1. Accumulating experience. 2. Laying the foundation for the staff. 3. Getting rid of the limitations of traditional teaching. 4. It is a <i>the public service system</i> .	Further striving for policy support, developing educational channels and level of the school.	Referring to the management experience of foreign distance education, in line with international standards.
Weaknesses (W)	WO Strategy	WT Strategy
1. Students' lack of network learning skills. 2. Teachers' lack of long distance teaching experience. 3. The school lacks standardised management. 4. Quality control is difficult.	1. Focusing on size and quality, improving public recognition. 2. Strengthening the training of teachers in distance education teaching. 3. Strengthening the construction of teaching support services.	Strengthening research on management and practice, perfecting the supervision and management mechanism.

In this table, external factors (opportunities, threats) are listed across the top and the internal factors (strengths, weaknesses) are listed down the side. The other cells describe strategies for dealing with these factors, e.g. SO is the strategy for the opportunities taking account of the strengths; WT is the strategy for the threats taking account of the weaknesses.

As for Chinese distance education, SWOT analysis can be considered from the two angles of the external environment and internal environment, which is expected to result in change leading to development as shown in Figure 1.

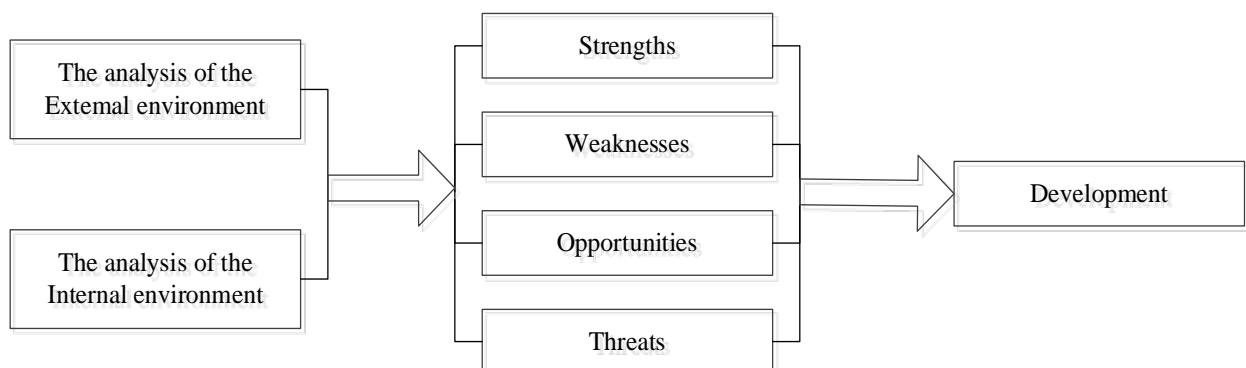


Figure 1: SWOT analysis process.

DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR CHINESE COLLEGE PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Strengths of distance education for physical education are as follows:

- Distance education in China developed over 30 years and has produced a distance education system with Chinese characteristics. Much experience has accumulated in operating and managing distance education during this period. Modern distance education using network and communication technology has developed rapidly and is a significant achievement. Almost all domestic colleges have network infrastructure [5]. All the 30 colleges and universities surveyed in relation to this study have campus networks and provide external access. Among them, 23 schools that have built network platforms hosting teaching resources.
- Distance education overcomes the limitations of geography and replaces traditional teaching. Advanced information and educational technology can be used to integrate educational resources and make them available on the Internet, to implement modern distance education. This high availability of courseware leads to the popularisation of higher education and, hence, can promote lifelong learning.

The research for this study included an investigation of the teaching equipment and teaching systems of the 30 surveyed colleges. The results showed they all had good sports facilities and modern educational technology facilities, which provide the basis for the construction of a physical education distance education system. Twenty-eight of the colleges were equipped with multiple cameras, non-linear editing systems or editing machines, the corresponding video coding table and other auxiliary facilities.

- That distance education in China developed over many years has resulted in there being a large number of professional teaching staff and researchers, providing the human resources needed to further develop distance education.

Weaknesses of distance education for physical education are as follows:

- Modern distance education is a system that students find easy to get into, but hard to get out of. This has made the quality of the students uneven, given that the backgrounds and learning conditions of the students differ greatly. Given the need for network learning skills, distance education institutions should strengthen the development of on-line learning abilities.
- Many teachers of distance education lack network teaching experience. They are from the traditional face-to-face teaching system and without formal training in distance education teaching. Many physical education teachers lack an adequate awareness of the application of modern education technology and are unprepared for the rapid development of distance education.
- At present, computer penetration is low in China, network transmission speeds are too slow, and network access costs are too high. Transmission quality and stability need to be improved for distance education, which requires broadband to support multimedia material transmission. All this has restricted the development of distance education.
- Some distance education institutions still lack long-term development plans, which hinder their growth. Though Chinese distance education is still not a mature system, it could become an important way to teach college physical education. The history of modern distance education in colleges and universities is relatively recent and the understanding of the theory and practice of distance education is not mature. There are many problems that need to be studied, such as how to develop criteria for a distance education system and the future development of distance education.
- The low quality of Chinese distance education makes it difficult to obtain public support. There is a shortage of distance education resources and the quality is not high. The amount of courseware for distance education of physical education is inadequate, with a consequent negative impact on the usage and sharing of teaching resources. In the survey of colleges and universities, nearly 50 per cent had no digital resources for physical education teaching and some had no physical education textbooks or guide books. The quality of physical education digital resources that have been developed is too low.

Development of Distance Education for College Physical Education

The development of distance education in China is influenced by a number of factors:

- The reform and opening up of China has brought great economic benefits, creating a good environment for the development of distance education, provided that the citizens have large savings to invest in their children's education.

- Lifelong and continuing education are widely accepted as necessary to enhance the competitiveness of the economy and improve the quality of life. Distance education is the most important factor in the spread of higher education and promoting lifelong and continuing education. There has been a gradual change in the view that physical education is only carried out at school to the realisation that sport is a lifelong activity. Distance education of physical education can inculcate into college students the need for a lifelong fitness regime.
- The state has attached great importance to distance education [6]. With the implementation of the *Project for Distance Education*, there has been a vigorous development of distance education in China. Chinese distance educational institutions have accumulated relatively rich resources and experience of distance education teaching and supporting systems.

The development of modern distance education makes full use of modern information technology, including the existing Chinese education and research networks and satellite TV. These developments promote reforms and improve the quality at all levels of education. This modern distance education network provides high quality net courses, organised by first-class teaching staff sharing educational resources.

- The rapid development of information technology has provided strong technical support for Chinese distance education. Text, graphical displays, sound, animation and other multimedia information can be used in physical education distance education. Hence, physical education teaching can have rich, abundant content that can be updated in a timely manner. This is not so for the traditional physical education teaching methods.

CONCLUSIONS

The construction of a modern distance education system for college physical education can enhance the influence and reputation of a college. Providing guidance for students of physical education can promote the goal of lifelong physical education.

A strengths weaknesses opportunities and threats analysis using survey results of distance education in China was carried out to identify the strategies for dealing with the factors identified as significant by the SWOT analysis.

The strategies focus on policy development, public recognition, strengthening teachers' training and support mechanisms, as well as broadening local experience by stronger awareness of international developments and standards, and emphasising the need for best practice and solid research.

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