Research on the Examination Organization Mode of Open University

-- Take Beijing Open University as an Example

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Abstract

As an important part of open education, open universities are mainly concerned with part-time education. Accordingly, the examinations are of huge scale, various forms, complex methods, and numbers of participants with wide age distribution. Based on the open university examination practice in recent two years, the author analyzes the characteristics of the open university examinations and the problems existing in them, and puts forward some suggestions on how to optimize the examination mode and management mechanism of open education.

Keywords

Open university; Examination; Formative assessment; Summative assessment.

1. Introduction

Open education conforms to the needs of study of all people, no matter how old or what they are. It provides certificate and non-certificate education, as well as a large number of education resources to the society, with various forms, different types and levels. So that, all people with learning desire can learn and learn from time to time. Open university is the main carrier of open education. Its certificate education mainly adopts part-time methods, together with the registration enrollment policy and a complete credit system. Examination is the key tool for open university to test whether its students complete the learning task and then get the credits.

2. Features of the Open University Examination

2.1. Various Forms and Complicated Methods

The examinations of open university can be divided into formative assessments and summative assessments. Formative assessment is a procedural assessment, and summative assessment is an achievement assessment. Different subject has different proportions of formative assessment. The final score is composed of formative assessment results and summative assessment results. Such a method gives consideration to the students' learning process and the completion of learning goals. In terms of the form of examinations, it can be divided into written examinations, online examinations, essays, assessments based on the learning network, comprehensive practice, etc. Among them, the written examinations and the online examinations need to gather the participants to a specified place at a specified time. As for the exam organization methods, open university can organize the participants at a specified place and at a specified time, or at a specified place and at any time, or at any place but at a specified time, or even permit the students to choose the where and when to take the examinations.

2.2. Large Scale

Due to the diverse forms of the open university examinations and the complex assessment methods, the scale of the exam is huge. Taking the exams organized by Beijing Open University

in recent years as an example, the statistics from 2019 spring semester to 2020 fall semester show that the number of application is between 220,000 and 250,000.
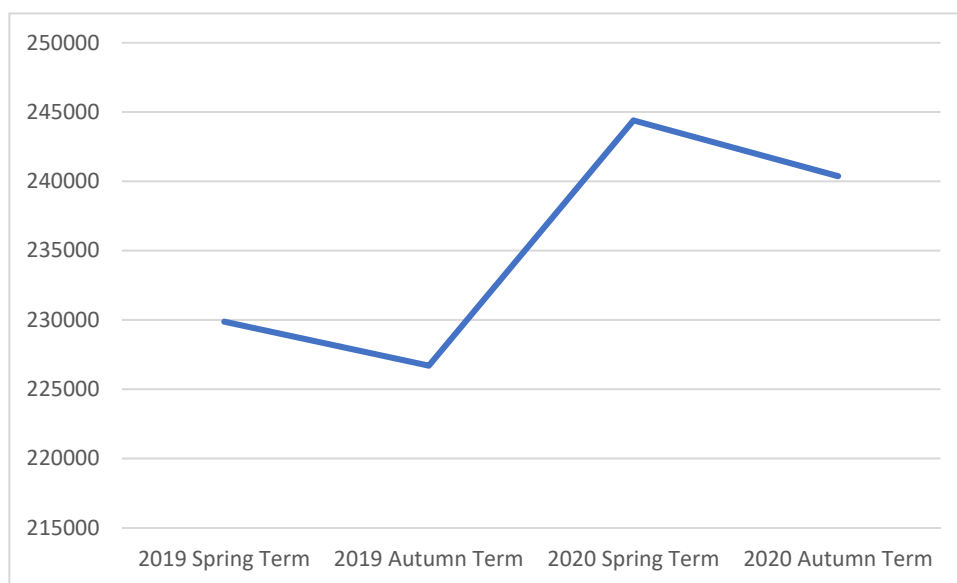

Figure 1. Number of examinees

2.3. Various Candidates and Learning Desire

Open education belongs to the category of adult education. The students have different ages, different occupations, and different experiences. Analyzing the application data from 2019 spring semester to 2020 fall semester, it is found that the number of candidates from 16 to 24 years old continues to increase, indicating that students in this age group have a strong desire to study. People aged 24 to 28 have a slight decline in their desire to learn, the probable reason may be the person in this age group has entered the working world, and feels that learning is not so necessary. However, people aged from 28 to 32 shows the strongest learning desire based on the data analysis. This meets such facts that the people in this age group have more understanding about the importance of learning, through which they can improve their professional abilities and change the quality of their life. The analysis also shows that the number of candidates older than 32-year-old ones declines, which means that the people in this age group probably have less desire as their lives have gradually stepped into stable state.
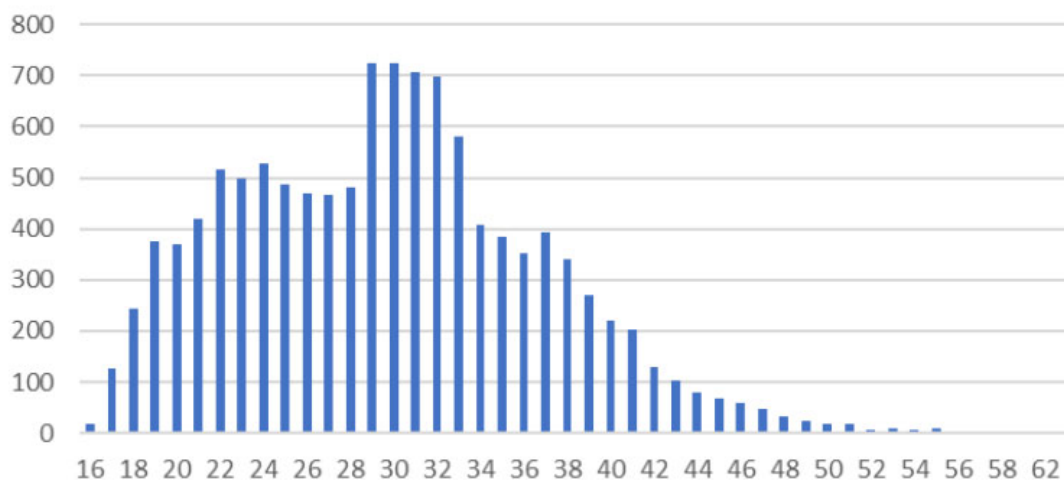

Figure 2. Application age distribution

3. Problems Existed

3.1. Serious Schedule Conflict

There are only two days for written examinations, which are divided into 8 time-unit. Since the exams includes many subjects, it is evitable for one candidate to be scheduled to take more than one exam at the same time-unit. In order to solve the problem, the candidate has to choose one course as the main test subject and the other ones as the remaining subjects. They take the main subject exam on time. And then, they will be led by to the appointed rooms to take the remaining subject exams. For example, of the 2020 spring semester final written examinations of Open University, there are 337 written examination subjects in the Beijing branch, and 3357 candidates are scheduled for two subject examinations at the same time, some candidates are even scheduled for 3 or 4 subject exams at the same time. Long-term and high-intensity exams can easily exhaust the candidates, and lower down the examination effectiveness. Such problems also increase the difficulty to maintain the order of the examinations.

3.2. Large number of Resits

For the students of open universities, if they do not pass the exam of one subject, they can resit again and again until they pass it before the graduation. This leads a large number of resits, for example, one student can even take one-subject-exam as many as 16 times. Analyzing the application data of the spring semester of 2020, 19.7% of the exam service is for those who resit one-subject-exam for the first time, and 7.63% is for those who have the second time resit. That is, about 30% of the exam service is for the students resitting the exam of at least one subject. Such situation means low effectiveness of the exam education, and also restrain the motivation of learning of the students of open universities in some degree.

Table 1. Analysis of resits of 2020 spring semester

Time of resits	1	2	3	4	More than 4 times
Number of examinees	48167	18657	3936	1428	1820
Proportion	19.70%	7.63%	1.61%	0.58%	0.74%

3.3. The High Absence Rate

According to the final exam data of the spring semester of 2020, among the five assessment forms, written exam and online exam need to be organized at the fixed time and fixed location. The absence rate of the written test was 23.97%, and it was 28.38% for the online test . It is significantly higher than other forms of assessment.

Table 2. Analysis about Absent examinees of 2020 spring semester

Assessment Methods	Number of Examinees	Number of Absence Examinees	Absence Rate
100% Formative assessment	71840	0	0.00%
Written Examinations	64243	15396	23.97%
Online Examinations	57893	16428	28.38%
Assessments Based on the Learning Network	21839	0	0.00%
Comprehensive Practice	28263	27	0.10%
Essays	377	1	0.27%
Oral Test	10	3	30.00%

4. Suggestions

4.1. Enhance the Application of New Technologies in Open Education Exam Organization

Improve the examination service mechanism to meet the needs of students, so that they can use computers, tablets, mobile communication equipments or other terminal devices to take the examinations more conveniently, leaving the restrain of time and location out of consideration. Gradually transitting the exam form from the fixed methods to the methods through which students can choose the examination time and place as they will.

4.2. Refine the Assessment Methods and Optimize the Course Assessment Designs

Based on the characteristics of adult students, such as enhanced logical reasoning ability, part-time learning, and limited learning time, it is an urgent job that we must optimize the curriculum evaluation design, which should increase the process evaluation, and reduce the result evaluation.

4.3. Reduce the Resit Opportunities to Improve the Candidate'S Determination to Pass the Exam

The facts show that too many resit opportunities make the students pay less attention to the exams and make insufficient preparation. Open universities should give their students a clearly defined resit times much less than before, for example ,1 or 2 times for one subject. This can gives the students proper pressure to motivate them to study and prepare for the exam hard.

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