Modern Distance Education

Background

The main difference between traditional distance education and modern distance education is different educational technologies used in distance education. Traditionally, radio and television are used for distance education. Though system of satellite education still plays a significant role in distance education, it is not as effective and efficient as the distance education system based on computers and network. The Internet accelerates the rate of information delivery. Moreover, the volume of information is much larger than that radio and televisions can offer. The time and place for learning in modern distance education is more flexible.

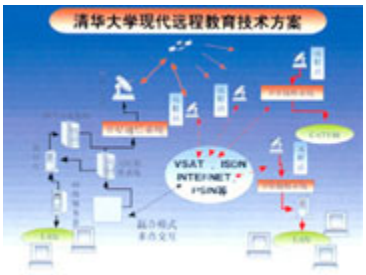
The Action Scheme for Invigorating Education towards the 21st Century proved by the State Council in 1999 regarded modern distance education as one of the key projects. The target of the project is to set up initially the modern distance education network, to construct a series of backbone courses and to search for a teaching and administration pattern suitable for China's modern distance education through three years of efforts. The network with complete structures will be formed by 2010 to meet the need of education and life-long education system will be set up. Based on educational science and research net and making use of the country's telecommunication net and cable television net, the professional platform has formed through upgrading and conforming. The main tasks are to develop continuing education, provide teaching resources for school's teaching and students' self-learning, improve teaching in poor regions£, make higher education accessible to more people and raise the literary level of the public. The Decision on Strengthening Educational Reform and Boosting Education of Overall Qualification, which was promulgated by the State Council and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, points out that the government supports the construction of modern distance education based on China educational science and research net and satellite education system and strengthens the construction of practical terminal platform system and campus net or regional net provides opportunities of life-long education for the public with modern distance education and provides education suitable for the necessity of rural and outlying districts. In order to search for the proper modern distance education patterns and to better the modern distance education system, Tsinghua University, Beijing Post and Telecommunication University, Zhejiang University and Hunan University were designated as the key experimental universities and the relevant experiments are being carried out at present.

Modern Distance Education Program at Tsinghua University

In the 21st century, distance education has grown rapidly in developed countries, and people in China are in great need of opportunities for higher education. This need has accelerated the buildup of modern distance education in the country.

In February 1996, Tsinghua President Wang Dazhong first put forward the suggestion to develop a modern distance education program at the University. In 1999, Tsinghua was one of the experimental universities approved by the ministry of Education to start a pilot project. After four years of exploration and practice, Modern Distance Education of Tsinghua University has so far set up more than 100 off-campus teaching centers covering 31 provinces, cities, autonomous regions and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, with total enrollment of 15,000 students. In addition, Modern Distance Education of Tsinghua University was elected as the supervisory unit at the inaugurating conference of National Modern Distance Education Cooperation Organization of Experimental Colleges and Universities in 2000.

ICT in Modern Distance Education



Modern Distance Education at Tsinghua has constructed a distance education transmitting system covering the whole country, combining the internet, satellite digital network and cable TV broadcasting network. Tsinghua On-line Lyceum is the platform used for on-line activities such as registration, course-selection, answering questions, courseware loading and assignment submitting. Via satellite, ISDN, and IP Wideband, it is able to transmit lectures given at the University to Tsinghua's off-campus teaching centers nationwide. In this way, real-time two-way communication is conducted through "virtual" classrooms. In addition, the digital broadcasts shown on the cable TV network can transmit numerous teaching programs to various users.
The Department of Distance Education, as the authorized management branch for modern distance education of Tsinghua University, is responsible for the establishment of off-campus teaching centers, enrolment of new students, carrying out teaching plans, education administration, administration of network resources, making and distribution of multimedia courseware, and maintenance and updating of the LAN for distance education.
With the development of information technology and network technology, the mode of modern distance education of Tsinghua University has been continually improved. Now, a nationwide transmission system of distance education combining of IP Wideband, satellite digital network, and cable TV network has been formed. All courses are made available to the off-campus teaching centers all over the country through 6M bandwidth of KU wave band of Comsat. And the transmission system provides the means for either real-time two-way communication simultaneously among several users or non-real-time two-way communication

Off-campus teaching centers

In keeping with the guidelines of the Ministry of Education that by 2010 China should have a modern distance education network of multi-standards, multi-levels, multi-forms and multi-functions with Chinese features, distance education offered by SCE has followed the guideline of integrating Internet, satellite digital networks and cable TV broadcasting networks together to establish the transmission system for distance education. To date, more than 100 off-campus teaching centers have been set up in 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities. A preliminary distance education network system which has the combined advantages of three networks has been set up, which covers the whole country and fits the situation in China

Tsinghua On-line Lyceum

July 2000 marked the establishment of the Tsinghua On-line Lyceum, which is the teaching and administration platform of distance education. The popular Lyceum has taken full advantage of the Internet to develop on-line teaching. At present, more than 100 courses have been offered, and the distance-learning students can register, select courses, ask questions, download courseware and hand in homework through the system. Currently, more than 10,000 students use the On-line Lyceum, and its web site has logged more than 2,050,000 clicks since the program started. Teaching management and education administration are carried out via the network.

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