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RESEARCH ON THE REFORM OF THE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM OF CHINA'S OPEN EDUCATION SYSTEM

As an important component of China's higher education system, open education has made its due contribution to promoting economic and social development. However, with the rapid transformation of the economy and society and the continuous deepening of educational reform, the structural contradictions inherent in the current management system characterized by "two-level coordination and four-level operation" have become increasingly disconnected from the development needs of the new era, severely constraining the overall effectiveness and sustainable development of open education. There is an urgent need for in-depth research on the management system of the national open education system, which is not only a practical requirement for enhancing governance capacity and educational quality but also a strategic measure for building a learning society and strengthening the education system. This paper aims to systematically diagnose the shortcomings of the current management system, propose actionable reform measures, and outline an implementation path for the smooth execution of these reforms.

Keywords: management, governance, human resources, personnel, system, open education, educational reform, educational institutions, mechanism.

of Formulation the problem. The management system of China's open education system is now facing several major issues: excessive administrative layers lead to low efficiency and policy implementation delays; grassroots institutions (including municipal and county-level open universities) severely lack autonomy in areas like student recruitment, program establishment, and teaching innovation, making it difficult to respond promptly to rapidly changing local needs; there is tension between unified quality standards and differentiated local practices, with blind spots in the quality mechanism insufficient monitoring and application effectiveness of evaluation results; the tuition fee remittance mechanism increases the operating costs of local open universities and Increases the financial burden on learners; teaching and research achievements by faculty at local open universities receive low recognition provincial education administrative professional departments, impacting the development and motivation of the teaching staff.

Analysis of the latest research and publications. A comprehensive study based on three key concepts: "Open education, management system, and reform". Wang

Liangxi, Lan Wenting, Xia Ying note that the traditional internal governance structure of the national open education system, characterized by "overall planning, hierarchical operation, tiered management, division of labor, and cooperation," also possesses inherent deficiencies. It lacks a high degree of value consensus, faces a crisis of weakened support from the operating system, and has yet to achieve a state of conscious adherence to open education principles in its daily operations. Specifically, they identify an urgent need for deepening reforms and improvement in aspects such as the leadership system, management standards, and governance models [1, 11].

Considering the inherent shortcomings of the traditional internal management structure of the Open University of China, Chen Zhongyu, Fan Wei, Ding Xiaxia, Li Xue propose four countermeasures: the management system should adhere to fundamental principles, greatly strengthening the leadership potential of the party and the administration; the management model should maintain integrity amidst innovation, allowing administrative power and academic power to flourish together; management systems should be scientific and efficient, implementing the system of

"democratic school management + professorial academic management"; management standards should be reasonable and precise, practicing the deep integration of "unified management +

responsibility sharing" [6, 8–10].

În turn, researcher Ma Ming identifies four problems within the internal governance system and operating mechanism of provincial open universities: lack of an open concept and insufficient awareness of innovation; absence of an institutional environment and ambiguous powers and responsibilities; lack of autonomous authority and unclear legal status; absence of an effective incentive system and egalitarian distribution [2].

In view of these four problems, Deng Hao, Wang Xiaoyan at els., propose four countermeasures, including the introduction of innovative development concepts and improving the ideological understanding of all personnel, clarifying the legal status, and strengthening operational autonomy [7, 11].

Promote "de-administration" and build a rational hierarchical system. As Xia Ying points out, the Open University of China should focus on business management for provincial open universities, properly delegate authority, separate management authority from operational and academic autonomy, and provide provincial open universities with space for development and reform. Reform the distribution system and improve the incentive and constraint mechanism [12].

Highlighting previously unresolved parts of the overall problem. This study focuses on resolving four key issues that have not been effectively addressed first, the issue of functional boundaries between the Open University of China, the Ministry of Education, and local open universities. Existing research focuses only on internal reforms within the Open University of China or provincial universities, without addressing cross-level governance structure optimization or clearly defining the boundaries between national macro-management and business guidance. This study proposes: transferring the business guidance functions of the Open University of China to a newly established "Open Education Department" within the Ministry of Education, achieving "separation of management and operation" – the Open University of China returns to being a pure educational entity, while the Ministry of Education strengthens macro-planning and supervision, eliminating the role conflict of "acting as both player and referee". Second, the issue of institutional articulation during the reform transition period. Existing research has

not addressed the protection of rights and interests for millions of currently enrolled students, yet a smooth transition is crucial for the success of the reform. This study innovatively designs an 8-year transition period, aligning with the current 8-year student status validity policy. Based on the principle that "student status attributes are linked to the enrollment time," it ensures that the rights and interests of current students are unaffected, thereby reducing resistance to reform. Third, the issue of broadening career development channels for grassroots faculty. Existing research only points out the difficulty in recognizing faculty achievements but does not propose institutional solutions. This study addresses this by fully integrating local open universities into the provincial education administrative department's business management system, providing an institutional entry point for faculty to participate in provincial and above teaching competitions, research projects, and academic awards, fundamentally resolving the challenges in professional title evaluation. Fourth, the structural solution to the problem of high tuition fees. Existing research often calls for reducing tuition fees without addressing the root cause of costs. This study tackles this by eliminating the management tiers of the Open University of China and the corresponding tuition fee sharing, directly reducing the cost pressure on local universities (especially at the county level), thereby providing a practical path for reducing tuition fees at the source and alleviating the financial burden on students.

Statement task. of the This paper aims to systematically analyze the current situation, drawbacks, and causes of the "Two-Level Coordination, Four-Level Operation" management system in China's open education, and propose feasible reform plans to promote optimized system governance. The specific tasks include the following four. To outline the current state of the management system explain the historical evolution of the open education system and the operational mechanism of "Two-Level Coordination, Four-Level Operation," clarifying its positioning within the higher education system (core vehicle for lifelong education) and its functions (emphasizing both degree and non-degree education). To analyze the systemic drawbacks: From the five dimensions of management efficiency, grassroots autonomy, quality assurance, tuition burden, and faculty development, and combining with examples (such as policy transmission delays, restrictions on program establishment, tuition comparison data), reveal the internal contradictions within the current system that constrain high-quality development. To propose a reform plan integrating the direction of national education policies with local needs, design a path centered on "Transferring Functions Upwards, Reconstructing Responsibilities and Powers," constructing a new "Provincial Coordination, Three-Level Operation" structure, and clarifying the direction of functional adjustments for open universities at the national, provincial, and local levels. To formulate implementation strategies based on the principle of "existing stakeholders and new entrants," design an 8-year transition period plan to ensure a smooth articulation between the old and new systems, safeguarding student rights and interests and system stability.

Summary of the main material. In China, the Higher Education Law stipulates that "the state supports the implementation of higher education through radio, television, correspondence, and other distance education methods" [5]. Open education is an important type of distance education. China's open education was founded in 1978, when Deng Xiaoping, the chief architect of China's reform and opening up, personally approved the launch of open education nationwide. Today, the national open education system has developed into a huge distance education system consisting of 1 National Open University, 31 provincial open universities, 333 prefecturallevel open universities, and 2411 county-level open universities (see Figure 1) [3–5].

Over more than 40 years of operation, the national open education system has always adhered to the Party's educational policy and taken "fostering virtue through education" as

its fundamental task. It has offered a total of 44 undergraduate and specialized programs covering 7 disciplines, including liberal arts and law, education, science and engineering, economics and management, agriculture and medicine, and art. "It has cultivated 19.61 million graduates in total, accounting for 8.5% of the total number of college graduates in China since the resumption of the college entrance examination in 1978. At present, there are 4.567 million current students in national open education, nearly one-tenth of the total scale of higher education students in the country" [6] making due contributions to improving the national quality and promoting economic and social development.

The Ministry of Education's "National Open Reform University Comprehensive stipulates that "the National Open University is a new type of institution of higher learning directly under the Ministry of Education, carrying out open education nationwide. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, the National Open University independently conducts academic continuing education at the specialized and undergraduate levels. It coordinates construction of the national open education system and guides and serves national open education operations; local open universities, as institutions of higher learning under local governments, are subject to the leadership of the people's government at the corresponding level and the management of the education administrative department, and their operations are subject to the guidance and management of the National Open University" [3–5].

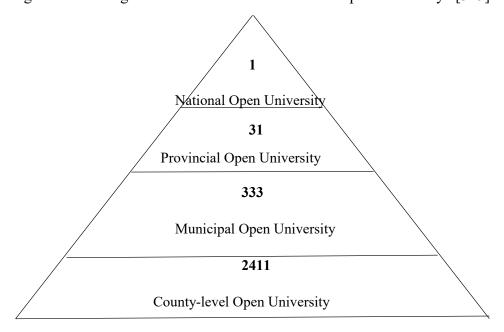


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the number and structure of open universities at different levels nationwide

Source: generated by author [3–5]

In addition, provincial open universities play a key role in connecting the upper and lower levels, responsible for the specific implementation of the policies and standards of the National Open University and conducting localized operations based on the actual situation of the province. This forms a "two-level overall planning" management model with both "National Open University coordination" and "provincial open university coordination".

Local open universities are established in strict accordance with administrative divisions and are all run by the local government at the corresponding level, including provincial, prefectural, and county-level open universities. Both the National Open University and local open universities at all levels enroll students directly within their respective administrative regions and cultivate students directly. The academic system is uniformly 2.5 years, and the validity period of student status is uniformly 8 years.

Prefectural-level and higher open universities have the right to guide the school-running business of lower-level open universities. However, local open universities at all levels have no right to independently decide on matters related to student graduation and bachelor's degree applications. Only provincial open universities can first conduct a preliminary review of graduation and bachelor's degree applications for students within their provincial administrative regions, and then submit them to the National Open University for final approval. Finally, the National Open University issues graduation certificates and bachelor's degree certificates to qualified students. This constitutes a school-running model of "National Open University, provincial open universities, prefectural-level open universities, and countylevel open universities" (See Table 1).

Although the "two-level overall planning and four-level school-running" management system

of the national open education system has made due contributions to building a lifelong learning system for all people in a specific historical stage, with the development of the times, its inherent drawbacks have become increasingly prominent, mainly reflected in the following five aspects.

The inherent bureaucratic structure with long chains and multiple levels in this management system results in administrative orders and policies needing to be transmitted through three key links: "national – provincial – prefectural – county", which easily causes information attenuation and delays in implementation. In addition, too many levels tend to lead to blurred responsibility boundaries. When problems such as teaching quality and student complaints arise, it is easy to cause buck-passing between levels.

First, the lack of enrollment autonomy. The enrollment quota of the national open education system is mainly uniformly approved and allocated by national and provincial open universities, so grassroots school-running units cannot flexibly adjust the enrollment scale and professional directions according to the specific needs of the local labor market or the characteristics of student sources. Second, insufficient flexibility in program offerings: The right to set programs is highly centralized, and applications for new programs must be uniformly approved by the National Open University. The cumbersome procedures and long cycles make it difficult for grassroots units to quickly respond to talent demand changes brought by local industrial upgrading. Third, restricted teaching management rights: Teaching plans, curriculum syllabi, assessment methods and standards are uniformly stipulated by national and provincial levels, leaving grassroots units with no right to make personalized adjustments based on students' actual situations.

"One-size-fits-all" quality standards. Although the National Open University has formulated

Diagram of the 'two-level coordination, four-level schooling' management system

Level	Coordinating function	School operational functions	
National Open University	Coordinate the construction of the national open education system and guide the operation of local open universities	Development and quality assessment of national-level courses for open education	
Provincial Open University	Coordinate open education across the province and provide guidance to municipal and county-level open universities	Provincial-level curriculum development and core teaching implementation for open education	
Municipal Open University	(No coordinating function ,but guides the business operations of county-level open universities)	Carry out open education county-level management, local teaching organization, and student management	
County-level Open University	(No coordinating function)	Carry out grassroots enrollment, face-to-face tutoring, and learning support services for open education	

Source: generated by author [3–5]

Table 1

a unified quality standard framework, it fails to fully consider the huge differences in economic development levels, student quality, and faculty conditions between regions, and lacks differentiated standards for different disciplines and programs, resulting in a lack of relevance and scientificity in evaluation in some cases [13, 14].

Insufficient quality monitoring. Open universities at or above the provincial level mainly rely on regular teaching inspections, annual reports and annual reviews, and data reporting from grassroots units, making it difficult to achieve dynamic and real-time monitoring of the entire teaching process at the grassroots level (especially online teaching and tutoring).

Under the current management system of the national open education system, there is a multilevel deduction mechanism for tuition income: county-level open universities must hand over 10% of their tuition income to prefecturallevel open universities, 10% to provincial open universities, and about 20% to the National Open University; prefectural-level open universities must hand over 10% of their headquarters' tuition income to provincial open universities and about 20% to the National Open University; provincial open universities must hand over about 20% of their headquarters' tuition income to the National Open University. This multi-level deduction mechanism has led to a substantial reduction in the disposable operating funds of local open universities. In particular, county-level open universities can only dispose of about 60% of their total tuition income (See Table 2).

As a result, provincial open universities have to apply to the provincial government's price authorities for increasing open education tuition standards to maintain the operation and basic quality of grassroots open universities, making the tuition of open education nearly twice that of adult higher education, which undoubtedly increases the economic burden on students.

Teachers in local open universities face special career development difficulties under the current management system, mainly reflected in two aspects. Unsmooth channels for teacher achievement recognition: Since the Ministry of Education's "National Open University Comprehensive Reform Plan" stipulates that the National Open University "coordinates the construction of the national system and guides and serves national school-running operations", this has in fact resulted in the operational guidance rights of open education being exercised only by the National Open University and authorized prefectural-level and higher open universities. Therefore, in practice, provincial government education administrative departments often consider themselves unauthorized or inconvenient to directly manage the open universities within their jurisdictions. When organizing provincial university teaching competitions, scientific research activities, etc., they usually only notify ordinary universities in the province and often ignore or fail to formally notify open universities to participate.

Inappropriate professional title evaluation standards: Except for the National Open University, all other open universities in the country are institutions of higher learning run by local governments, and their teacher professional title evaluation policies are formulated by provincial government education administrative departments in conjunction with provincial government human resources administrative departments. However, due to the "absence" of provincial education administrative departments in open education business management, when formulating general conditions for professional title evaluation, they mainly base on the schoolrunning models and achievement forms of ordinary universities, failing to fully consider the particularities of open universities. As a result, the core work achievements of open university

Table 2
Tuition revenue multi-level commission diagram

Level	Income Type	The recipients and proportions of contributions	Proportion of disposable tuition revenue
County-level Open University	Total Tuition Revenue	Municipal level 10%, provincial level 10%, national level 20%	60%
Municipal Open University	Total Tuition Revenue	Provincial level 10%, national level 20%	70%
Provincial Open University	Total Tuition Revenue	National level 20%	80%
National Open University	The tuition fee commissions submitted by local open universities at all levels	(No superior, no need to pay commission to a superior)	100% (All to be managed and used by itself)

Source: generated by author

teachers in curriculum resource development, distance teaching design and implementation, online learning support services, etc., are often undervalued or difficult to be scientifically evaluated in professional title evaluation, making it difficult for open university teachers to be promoted.

The Ministry of Education's "National Open University Comprehensive Reform Plan" clearly states that it is necessary to "further rationalize the system, innovate mechanisms, clarify positioning, strengthen overall planning, solve bottlenecks restricting development through deepening reform, promote the transformation and development of the National Open University in the new era, and improve the quality of school-running" [8].

The proposed reform involves a radical redistribution of functional responsibilities between key players in the open education system, starting from the national level. The powers of coordination, macro-planning and methodological management of the national open education network, which previously belonged to the National Open University, are fully transferred to a higher level - the Ministry of Education. Given the significant amount of work associated with more than two thousand institutions, a specialized unit – the Department of Open Education – will be incorporated into the structure of the Ministry of Education's, which will take on all the work of management, regulation and provision of services.

As a result of these changes, the Open undergo University will a fundamental institutional transformation. From a structure that combined a dual mandate (its own educational activities and management of lower levels), the Open University will transform into an independent educational institution. It will retain its status as a university directly subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Science and its nationwide scope of activity, but will completely abandon the functions of general planning and business management of local institutions. In addition, the Ministry of Education will grant the National Open University the right to independently award state-recognized academic degrees and issue open education diplomas. The key value of this restructuring lies in the clear separation between policy formulation and implementation, which eliminates the conflict of roles, when the National Open University acted as both a "player and a judge". The practical consequence of this will be the abolition of the mandatory deduction of a share of tuition fee income (which usually amounted to 20%) in favor of the National Open University. This will

radically reduce the operating costs of local open universities and create a real basis for reducing the financial burden on students. Following the national strategy, the function of regional management and support of open education, which was performed by provincial open universities, will also be transferred to provincial education management bodies. Provincial open universities, like National Open University, will receive full autonomy in conducting educational activities and the right to independently issue higher education documents. At the same time, municipal and county open universities, due to the lack of the necessary institutional qualifications, will remain educational and methodological centers of provincial open universities and will not acquire the status of independent legal entities. At the provincial level, where the number of institutions is smaller, instead of creating a new department, it is proposed to integrate the functions of open education management into the already existing Department of Vocational and Adult Education, creating a separate Open Education Sector within it to ensure planning, management and guidance of business processes at the provincial level.

After the reform, provincial open universities will achieve a fundamental role transformation. They will no longer be levels or teaching centers within the National Open University system, no longer accept its business guidance, and no longer need to pay tuition revenue shares. Instead, they will be formally granted independent open education school-running entity status by the Ministry of Education, with the right to independently issue state-recognized academic and degree certificates. In terms of administrative subordination, they will remain institutions of higher learning run by provincial governments, with enrollment restricted to the province. Meanwhile, authorized by the provincial government's education administrative department, provincial open universities will still have the right to guide the operations of prefectural and county-level open universities within the province, forming a regional open education alliance led by provincial open universities. The aim of the reform is to stimulate the viability of provincial open universities and ensure the integrity of the entire grassroots education network. Provincial open universities acquire a high level of autonomy for flexible formation of curricula, plans and resources. This approach allows them to respond promptly to the needs of regional economic development and the specifics of the contingent, ensuring maximum relevance of the educational process to local realities.

Transformation of subordination of grassroots links. The positioning of municipal and county open universities remains stable in the context of administrative subordination to local authorities. This maintains their close connection with regional management. However, their operational links are changing: they are completely removed from the business management of the National Open University and are integrated into a new regional operational vertical. In the field of educational activities, they become, in fact, educational and methodological centers of the Open University, forming a clear chain of operational management: "Open University -Municipal – County Open University".

Financial self-sufficiency and reduction of the load. One of the most noticeable changes is the adjustment of the mechanism for distributing tuition fees. The abolition of the mandatory 20 percent share of income, previously transferred to the benefit of the Open University, is a key financial lever of the reform. This measure leads to an increase in the operating income of grassroots universities by 20 percentage points, which significantly strengthens their operating budgets. This creates the necessary conditions for reducing the financial burden on students through a decrease in tuition fees, since the main costs of quality assurance are now covered at the local level.

To ensure the unity of quality standards within the province, municipal and county units do not receive the right to independently issue educational documents. The function of final approval of qualifications and issuance of staterecognized bachelor's degrees is fully entrusted to the Provincial open universities. This mechanism guarantees the authority of the issued certificates and unified quality control of the educational process at the provincial level.

A structured nine-year transition plan. The reform is implemented over a ten-year transition period, synchronized with the maximum term of validity of the student status (8 years), which ensures stability. The first stage (Year 1): Organizational preparation. Includes the creation of the Department of Open Education at the Ministry of Education and Science, amendments to the Statute of the National Open University and the development of new regulations that consolidate the powers of the Provincial open universities (in particular, "Measures on the Awarding of Academic degrees of the Provincial open universities"). The second stage (Years 2-9) the "Dual-track operation" model. During this period, universities work with two categories of students: "Old students" (registered before the reform) complete their studies and receive diplomas according to the rules of the National University. "New students" registered after the reform began) are fully subject to the management and standards of the Provincial open universities. This approach ensures the protection of the rights and interests of all existing students, minimizing resistance to change, and by the end of the 9th year, all students will have the status of Provincial open universities only.

Conclusion. Based on fully drawing on existing research results and identifying their blind spots in solutions, this paper proposes a deepening reform plan characterized by "upward transfer of functions, provinciallevel overall planning, and three-level schoolrunning," and also elaborately designs a 9-year transition plan. It embodies the unity of the reform's principle, flexibility, and prudence, ensures the legitimate rights and interests of millions of current students, and provides an operable roadmap for the smooth transition between the old and new management systems. Through this reform, a more flexible, efficient, and high-quality open education system is expected to be built, thereby making greater contributions to the country's construction of Chinese-style modernization

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ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ РЕФОРМИ СИСТЕМИ УПРАВЛІННЯ КИТАЙСЬКОЮ СИСТЕМОЮ ВІДКРИТОЇ ОСВІТИ

Дослідження присвячене системній реформі управління Китайською системою відкритої освіти, яка функціонує за існуючою моделлю «дворівневої координації та чотирирівневого функціонування». Визначено низку системних недоліків як надмірну забюрократизованістю адміністративних ланок, що призводить до низької ефективності та затримок у реалізації політики; критичною нестачею автономії у низових освітніх закладів муніципального та повітового рівнів у питаннях набору студентів та інновацій; невідповідністю уніфікованих стандартів якості регіональним потребам; високим фінансовим навантаженням на студентів через багаторівневий механізм відрахування плати за навчання (низові ланки отримують лише близько 60% доходу), а також низьким визнанням професійних досягнень викладачів на місцях. Попередні дослідження лише частково вирішують ці проблеми, вказуючи на необхідність посилення лідерства, поєднання адміністративної та академічної влади, а також «деаміністрування». Однак вони не пропонують комплексної оптимізації крос-рівневої структури управління. Здійснено аналіз недоліків поточної моделі та розробка комплексного плану реформ. Ключова інновація полягає у впровадженні концепції «передача функцій нагору, реконструкція повноважень». Вона передбачає передачу функцій бізнес-керівництва Національного відкритого університету до новоствореного «Департаменту відкритої освіти» Міністерства освіти, що забезпечує відокремлення управління від власної освітньої діяльності. Цей крок дозволяє НВУ зосередитися на освітньому процесі та скасовує його частку близько 20% у платі за навчання, що є кореневою причиною високих цін. Реформа також передбачає інтеграцію місцевих відкритих університетів до провінційних адміністративних систем для підвищення визнання кваліфікації викладачів. Для забезпечення стабільності та захисту прав мільйонів студентів, які навчаються, пропонується дев'ятирічний перехідний період на основі принципу «старі правила для старих студентів, нові правила для нових». Результатом стане нова управлінська структура «Провінційна координація, трирівневе функціонування», спрямована на підвищення ефективності, автономії та якості відкритої освіти Китаю.

Ключові слова: менеджмент, управління, людські ресурси, персонал, система, відкрита освіта, реформа освіти, заклади освіти, механізм.

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