Research on the Peer-assisted Learning in Open Education

Xiaowen Hu

Ningbo Open University Teaching Center 315016

Abstract: Open education aims at promoting individual lifelong learning and all-round development, and peer-assisted learning is an effective way to support continuous learning of open education students. This paper discusses the practical value of peer-assisted learning, and proposes some application strategies in view of the dilemma of peer-assisted learning of open education students, such as refining the characteristics and needs analysis of open education learners, actively guiding peer-assisted learning in the teaching process, and expanding the form and content of peer-assisted learning, so as to meet the psychological needs of open education learners, promote the effective learning of individuals and enhance their comprehensive quality, and ultimately improve the quality of open education.

Keywords: Open education; Peer-assisted learning; Student needs

The changes in society, occupation and lifestyle pose new challenges to individuals' ability to learn and adapt effectively. Therefore, how to meet the psychological needs of learners, how to design teaching methods that meet the characteristics of open education learners, and how to improve their continuous learning ability and comprehensive proficiency have become the key issues to be solved urgently in the process of creating excellence and improving proficiency in open education. Peer-assisted learning based on the "learner-centered" idea provides an effective way and a good means to solve these problems. Peer-assisted learning is a learning activity in which knowledge and skills are acquired through active help, communication, and support from peers of equal or matched status. Peer-assisted learning can be applied to any age, race, gender or social status, and its scope can be applied to any subject, place or organization, which fits well with the differentiated background of open education learners and the purpose of learning, and its application in the field of open education is worthy of attention and discussion.

1.Practical Value of Peer-assisted Learning
1.1 Meeting the Psychological Needs of Open Education Learners

Peer-assisted learning can strengthen the Learning Motivation of Open Education Learners. Learning motivation is the source of supporting learners' learning process. It is the premise of ensuring the effectiveness of learning to know the characteristics of learners' motivation and strengthen their learning motivation. The research found that: the extrinsic motivation of open education students is dominant, while the intrinsic motivation to be interested in the learning content itself is relatively weak; In addition to the motivation to improve academic qualifications, expanding interpersonal relationships and making friends is one of the important motivations. Guiding peer-assisted learning in the process of open education is an important way to provide them with interpersonal communication and meet their social needs, which helps strengthen the learning motivation of open education students and improve their learning initiative.

Peer-assisted learning can meeting the emotional needs of open education learners. If learners have no peers in their studies, they are prone to anxiety and fear of difficulties, and are psychologically prone to fall into a state of loneliness and self-imposed isolation, so it is difficult for them to experience the happiness of learning. A large proportion of open education students have a strong sense of frustration and low self-confidence due to their previous learning experience. They tend to adopt an avoiding attitude when encountering problems, are not used to asking for help, and treat the difficulties in the learning process more negatively. Peer-assisted learning will increase the frequency of communication and exchange between similar groups. It is easier for peers to understand, accept and tolerate each other, and develop a friendship and form a good peer relationship in the process of mutual help and promotion, which has a positive impact on learners at the emotional level, so that open education learners can gain a stronger sense of belonging and enhance their self-esteem and self-confidence in peer-assisted learning.

1.2 Promoting Effective Learning and Improve Comprehensive Quality

Peer assistance improves learning efficiency. Due to the limited teaching format of open education, it is difficult for teachers to give adequate attention and timely feedback to each student. Many surveys have shown that learners felt that teachers' guidance and feedback are not timely enough. Open education learners seek support from their teachers, classmates, friends and family in turn when they encounter problems, and the research proves that after peer guidance and discussion, students can significantly improve their mastery of knowledge points. The cooperation formed in the process of peer assistance can also help learners at different levels to make progress together. Therefore, guiding peer-assisted learning can better make up for the lack of teachers' guidance feedback and promote effective individual learning.

Peer communication improves comprehensive quality. Higher requirements are put forward for the training of talents in open education in this era. In addition to enhancing students' professional knowledge and ability, it is necessary to cultivate students' good interpersonal skills, high psychological proficiency and sound personality to better adapt to social changes. Peer-assisted learning can fully develop learners' interpersonal communication skills, their ability to actively build and obtain interpersonal support, as well as cultivate individuals' cooperative attitude in groups and form optimistic, positive and upward personality characteristics.

1.3 Promoting the Sustainable Learning of Open Education Learners

Peer-assisted learning can supervise each other and promote joint participation. Open education learners lack learning time and learning skills. Most of them are not ready for self-directed learning, and only a few open education learners have strong autonomy. Moreover, the learning motivation of open education learners often gradually weakens with the time of enrollment. At the beginning of enrollment, learners are more enthusiastic and participate more actively in online and offline classes, but their enthusiasm gradually weakens with the passage of time. Peer-assisted learning and giving full play to the role of supervision between peers play an important role in helping individuals to strengthen their willpower for continuous learning.

Peer-assisted learning can support peers to enhance belief and motivation.Research shows that most open education learners lack social support, and the younger the students and the shorter their working hours, the less social support they get. Peers themselves are an important source of social support for learners. Therefore, it is of great significance to attach importance to and guide learners to establish peer relationship and get stable support for individual continuous learning. Learners often communicate, exchange and share with each other to accomplish their learning tasks together, forming an interpersonal support system that influences and promotes each other imperceptibly. This has a positive impact on every learner and will enhance learners' belief and motivation for continuous learning.

2. Dilemma of Developing Peer-assisted Learning

2.1 Lack of Understanding of Learners' Characteristics and Needs

The characteristics and needs of open education learners have obvious regional differences. In many regions, the research on learners' characteristics and needs is still blank. Some scholars have called on open educators from all over the country to make efforts to understand the characteristics and needs of local learners, so as to provide a basis for the follow-up teaching process and talent training.

The lack of understanding of the characteristics and needs of open education learners directly leads to the neglect of peer relationship among learners and the development of learners' comprehensive quality in the existing teaching process, which cannot meet the real needs of learners. The needs of open education learners are changing, but the teaching content and methods of open education are relatively lagging behind, and they are still stuck in the diploma-oriented knowledge transfer-oriented talent training mode, which leads to the failure to respond to learners' needs, especially emotional needs, and it is difficult to improve their satisfaction with open education.

2.2 Insufficient Peer Assistance and Guidance During the Teaching Process

Open education learners are basically in a passive state in the learning process of planning, organizing, guiding, monitoring and evaluating, and learners are less likely to share, discuss and negotiate with their peers. Whether in online learning or offline teaching, open education learners interact more with learning medium and communicate with the teachers, with only a very small percentage of peer interaction behavior. There is still much room for teachers to guide learners to carry out peer-assisted learning and construct peer assistance relationship.

This is related to the lack of awareness of the importance of peer-assisted learning and the lack of in-depth understanding of the "student-centered" concept among open education teachers. With the progress of the times, in addition to the traditional teaching and management roles, open education teachers actually need to play the role of guides, supporters and resource providers. Currently, teachers have not played their due role in guiding, supporting and improving the way of interaction between learners and their peers, and giving

advice and assistance to learners in building social support.

2.3 The Form and Content of Peer-assisted Learning is Single

In addition to the initial learning needs (academic upgrading and skill training), open education learners also have diversified learning needs such as improving interpersonal communication and improving comprehensive proficiency, and have more expectations for the open learning process, hoping to get more additional services. But in the actual learning process, the communication platform for open education learners is limited to BBS, QQ groups and a limited number of face-to-face classes. There are few peer communication activities organized by the school. Moreover, due to the contradiction between work and study, the attendance rate of face-to-face classes is low, and the opportunities for learning and communication among peers become less. The single form and content of peer-assisted learning also leads to the alienation of peer relationship among open education learners, making it difficult to develop a sense of group identity and to gain a sense of belonging.

3.Application Strategies of Peer-assisted Learning
3.1 Refining Learners' Characteristics and Needs Analysis

The characteristics of open education learners are regional, professional, temporal, and collective. It is necessary for each region to conduct learner characteristics and needs analysis based on regions, majors and time. The author suggests that regions that are in a position to do so should establish a database of learner characteristics and needs in the region, and conduct the corresponding psychological needs analysis. With the help of information technology, teaching and management personnel can extract information to understand learners, which can serve as an important reference for follow-up peer-assisted learning. For instance, on the basis of conducting learner portraits, schools can design appropriate forms and frequencies of peer-assisted learning content in accordance with learners' age characteristics and enrollment motives, guide peer-assisted learning groups in accordance with work nature and personality characteristics, and design corresponding peer communication activities in accordance with learners' interests and hobbies, so as to meet the diverse and personalized needs of open education learners.

3.2 Guiding Peer-assisted Learning in the Teaching Process

Open education advocates online and offline integrated teaching, with a focus on the needs of students. Teachers should adopt more teaching strategies to promote peer-assisted learning and provide personalized guidance, help learners build peer relationships of mutual assistance and promotion, form a high-quality learning community, and truly put the student-centered concept into teaching details. Specific suggestions are as follows:

3.2.1 Establishing Peer-assisted Learning Groups or Pairings.

Group or pair in accordance with the characteristics of open education learners after enrollment. For instance, cross-major learners are grouped or paired with learners from their respective majors in proportion, and learners with relevant work experience are grouped or paired with those without work experience. Guide students in the group or in pairs to communicate and share spontaneously online and offline, help each other, supervise and encourage each other, and improve learning efficiency. And in this process, deep interpersonal connection is established which lays the foundation for cooperative learning and enables open education learners to obtain the most direct support from peers for better continuous learning.

3.2.2 Guiding Peer Interaction Online and Offline.

With BBS as the main peer collaboration learning communication platform online, organizing learners to regularly publish course-related topics. Peers browse each other's comments, or conduct online peer sharing sessions. For offline classroom teaching, we should choose the topics with high online discussion, and guide learners to actively interact with their peers in the form of discussion, debate and group presentation, so as to broaden their thinking and deepen their understanding in an atmosphere of equality and respect. Offline teaching not only needs to enhance the stickiness and attraction of teaching materials, classrooms, tutoring and face-to-face teaching, but also needs to go out of the classroom, cooperate with vocational colleges to form efficient and collaborative internship training centers and school-enterprise cooperation bases, build offline learning experience and learning service centers, and form a teaching and learning environment that integrates online and offline. These measures provide more choices and broader space for peer-assisted learning, and have a greater attraction for open education learners to participate in peer-assisted learning.

3.2.3 Utilizing the Advantages of Peer-assisted in Formative Assessment and Practical Stages.

For instance, peer evaluation can be adopted for formative assessment. Learners change from passive recipients to active learners and participants in the evaluation process. Mutual evaluation helps to deepen the understanding of assessment knowledge points, and learners' attitude towards grades will also change, and the evaluation results will be regarded as a useful learning feedback rather than a "punishment". In practical stages, such as interview and writing an investigation report, it is possible to change from writing a report individually to researching in groups under a general theme. For instance, group surveys by region to take advantage of the fact that open education learners come from different regions. Divide work and cooperate within the group to form a group report, and finally summarize it to form a comprehensive investigation report, fully demonstrating the achievements of peer assistance. Peer assistance in the practical stage allows learners to no longer fight alone, but learn to share resources and accomplish tasks together in the process of cooperation, discussion and negotiation.

3.3 Developing the Form and Content of Peer-assisted Learning

Carrying out various forms and rich content of peer activities for mutual learning can gather popularity and warm people's hearts. In addition to organizing learning activities for open education learners in their own majors, it is suggested to focus on and actively explore the potential needs of open education learners, provide them with cross-major learning activities and free value-added services, so as to promote the development of multiple qualities of learners. The design and development of activities should focus on practical results, pay attention to details, and provide supporting services well throughout the whole process, so as to enhance the learners' sense of acquisition and satisfaction in open education.

For instance, Ningbo Open University has adopted the strategy of empowering open education by establishing Open Education Student Society and proposing the concept of "Learning +". Through a series of activities such as "Learning + Communication", "Learning + Proficiency" and "Learning + Life", the school builds a platform for open education learners to interact with peers, enhances learning communication among peers, helps learners build a good peer support system, and makes learning a sustainable process to improve their proficiency, realize themselves and enjoy life, which greatly enhances the learning motivation and enthusiasm of open education learners, gives them a sense of belonging and happiness, and provides higher proficiency talents for social development.

References

[1] Degang Jing. Open University Reform: Mission, Development, and Challenges [J]. *Open Education Research,* 2020, 26(04).

[2] Topping K，Ehly S．Peer-assisted Learning〔M〕.*Mahwah，New Jersey：Lawrence Erlbaum Associate.*1998.23.

[3] Tingliang Zhang, Yichuan Hao. A Review of the Research Literature on the Characteristics of Learners in Open Universities [J]. *China Adult Education*, 2017,(12).

[4] Lei Fu. Related Research on the Psychological Health Service Needs and Social Support of Open Education Students [J]. *Distance Education In China,* 2016, (02).

[5] Min Tan. Application of Social Support Theory in Educational Research [J]. *Education Review,* 2019,(03).

[6] Jingxia He. Peer-assisted Learning: A New Talent Growth Strategy under the Background of Informatization [J]. *Theory and Practice of Education,* 2016, 36(11).

[7] Lanqin Zheng , Xin Li, Ronghuai Huang, Fengying Chen. The Study on the Focus and Means of Peer-assisted Learning in Learning Cyberspace [J]. *China Educational Technology,* 2017, (03).

[8] Yuming Yang. Exploration on Curriculum Design of Open Education from the Perspective of Student Needs [J]. *The Theory and Practice of Innovation and Entrepreneurship,* 2020, 3(08).

[9] Xuelian Weng. Meet Diversified Educational Needs with "Learning+" China Education Daily, October 27, 2020, the 10th Edition).

[10] Haipeng Wan, Shengquan Yu, Qi Wang, Shangbing Feng, Min Chen. Research on Open Learner Model Based on Learning Cognitive Map [J]. *Modern Educational Technology,* 2021, 31(04).

Author Introduction: Xiaowen Hu(1981—), Female, Han nationality, was born in Ningbo City, Zhejiang Province. Lecturer, graduate degree. Work place: Ningbo Open University. Research direction: open education, mental health education.