

The “Internet +” Competition Boosts the Reform of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Colleges and Universities

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Abstract: With the continuous in-depth development of information technology, the Internet, as an important product of informatization, is playing an increasingly important role in the field of education. Among them, in order to improve the innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities of college students, the “Internet +” Competition has become an important platform for colleges and universities to cultivate professional talents, and its scale and influence have also increased. Based on this, this paper focuses on the construction of the innovation and entrepreneurship education platform of the “Internet +” Competition, analyzes the existing problems in the innovation and entrepreneurship education of colleges and universities, and puts forward corresponding reform strategies accordingly, so as to cultivate high-quality innovative and entrepreneurial talents.

Keywords: “Internet +” competition; Colleges and universities; Innovation and entrepreneurship education

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1. Introduction

With the continuous integration and development of educational innovation and internet technology, “Internet + Education” has become an important form of empowering high-quality development in the industry^[1]. In 2021, to stimulate the enthusiasm for innovation and entrepreneurship among college students, the relevant departments of the Ministry of Education issued the Implementation Plan for Undergraduate Education and Teaching Audit and Evaluation in Regular Higher Education Institutions (2021-2025). This regulation officially incorporates the innovation and entrepreneurship education of colleges and universities as an independent educational audit indicator into the evaluation requirements, emphasizing that colleges and universities should actively respond to the national call to vigorously carry out diversified innovation and entrepreneurship projects. Relying on internet education platforms, they should actively implement the tasks of dual-creation education (innovation and entrepreneurship education) and promote the innovation and progress of innovation and entrepreneurship education in colleges and universities.

2. The background of the “Internet +” competition boosting the reform of innovation and entrepreneurship education in colleges and universities

Tracing back to its origin, the first entrepreneurship plan competition was held by the University of Texas at Austin in the United States in 1983. The innovation and entrepreneurship model it advocated is similar to the current “Internet +” competition model. Both rely on the innovation and entrepreneurship competition platform, with financial support from entrepreneurship foundations, and colleges and universities actively mobilize students to participate, thus forming a talent cultivation paradigm for the “Internet +” competition to jointly promote the benign and efficient cyclic development of innovation and entrepreneurship education in colleges and universities in the new era ^[2].

In order to further deepen the comprehensive reform of higher education, China held the first “Internet +” Competition in 2015, which promoted the formation of a new “Internet + education” business format and stimulated the innovation and entrepreneurship motivation of college students. Since then, the innovation and entrepreneurship competition has built a professional practice platform for the development of college education, strengthened the communication and connection between colleges and universities, and improved the employment quality of college graduates ^[3]. Nowadays, in order to implement the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and deeply implement the important reply spirit of the General Secretary to the college students of the “Youth Red Dream Building Journey” of the 3rd China “Internet +” College Students Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition, the “trinity” coordinates the promotion of education, science and technology, and talent work. Colleges and universities should run innovative education through the whole process of educational activities, cultivate creative talents with creative education, and provide basic and strategic support for the comprehensive construction of a socialist modern country. Therefore, the “Internet +” Competition has gradually become the most widely covered and most influential innovation and entrepreneurship education platform in China, providing great help for the innovation of college double-creation education ^[4].

3. Dilemmas in the “Internet +” competition boosting the reform of college innovation and entrepreneurship education

3.1. Relatively backward double-creation education model and one-sided cognition

For colleges and universities, their cognition of innovation and entrepreneurship is relatively shallow. Although the state has strengthened the implementation supervision of innovation and entrepreneurship education simulation in colleges and universities, the innovation and entrepreneurship model of colleges and universities has not yet been completed. The construction of innovation and entrepreneurship courses in colleges and universities does not match the innovation and entrepreneurship capabilities of college students, and it is relatively backward compared with the education models of other European and American countries ^[5]. In terms of curriculum design, the current innovation and entrepreneurship education courses in some colleges and universities focus on the construction of entrepreneurial practice, emphasize the innovation and entrepreneurship achievements of college students, and lack the cultivation of their innovation and entrepreneurship spirit. Although some colleges and universities have improved the design quality of innovation and entrepreneurship courses, they mainly focus on theoretical explanations, which is inconsistent with the original intention of holding the “Internet +” Competition. The knowledge obtained by college students in the classroom cannot be completely and effectively applied to real competitions ^[6].

3.2. Educators lack professionalism and practical experience

With the rapid expansion of the scale and appeal of the “Internet +” College Students Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition, local governments at all levels have successively introduced policies and regulations to support the development of college students’ innovation and entrepreneurship. While universities have strengthened their recognition, they have also paid more attention to cultivating front-line teachers for science and technology innovation and entrepreneurship ^[7]. However, most teachers engaged in innovation and entrepreneurship education in universities are

confined to theoretical knowledge in teaching entrepreneurship courses for college students. The standards of innovation and entrepreneurship educators hired by universities also vary widely, making it difficult to carry out stable, continuous, and systematic educational guidance activities on campus.

Since these educators lack specific entrepreneurial experience, their teaching mainly relies on textbook cases. Most of these materials lack pertinence. For a competition like the “Internet +” Competition, which emphasizes practical implementation, the professional knowledge taught by front-line teachers only serves as an elementary introduction. It is difficult to arouse college students’ entrepreneurial enthusiasm or cultivate their pioneering spirit. Moreover, teachers struggle to provide entrepreneurial support to students based on market demands.

3.3. The construction of the Internet Plus Competition lags behind, and the target positioning is vague

The “Internet Plus” Competition is closely linked to innovation and entrepreneurship education, and the integration of the two has jointly promoted the development of various industries. This systematic project requires huge network resources and professional theories as the operational foundation. However, the construction of the “Internet Plus” Competition in some universities has relatively lagged behind, the investigation of the job market is debatable, and the cultivation objectives for innovation and entrepreneurship (double-creation) talents are rather vague^[8]. Under such influence, some college students have only a superficial understanding of the role of the “Internet Plus” Competition, lack the ability to investigate the positioning of industry-related products, are unable to obtain substantial financial support for innovation and entrepreneurship, and thus may have their entrepreneurial enthusiasm dampened. In addition, some college students who have just entered university have limited social experience, have not yet established a cognitive framework for innovation and entrepreneurship, and lack market sensitivity, making it difficult for them to fully adapt to the competitive system of the job market. As a result, the innovation and entrepreneurship education in some universities has achieved minimal effectiveness, and it is difficult to form a sound double-creation education system.

4. Strategies for the “Internet +” Competition to promote the reform of innovation and entrepreneurship education in colleges and universities

4.1. Implementing the national innovation development strategy to assist the reform of double creation education in colleges and universities

The “Internet +” Innovation Competition is not only a benchmark for college competitions but also positioned by the Ministry of Education as an important starting point for deepening the reform of innovation and entrepreneurship education. Employment is the foundation of people’s livelihood, entrepreneurship is the source of employment, and innovation is the soul of entrepreneurship.

The “Internet +” Innovation Competition is the “leader” in the reform of innovation and entrepreneurship education, and its status and significance are of great importance^[9]. The “Internet +” Innovation Competition is a grand gathering of innovation and entrepreneurship for thousands of universities in hundreds of countries. Supported by important programmatic documents issued by the State Council, such as the Implementation Opinions on Deepening the Reform of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Higher Education, Action Plan for Promoting the Transfer and Transformation of Scientific and Technological Achievements, and Several Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Industry and Education, the “Internet +” Innovation Competition has achieved full coverage of domestic and foreign universities, regions, and student types. For example, in the 5th “Internet +” Innovation Competition, in addition to the Chinese mainland, college students from 1,153 universities in 120 countries and regions participated, making it a veritable global university innovation and entrepreneurship event. The “Internet +” Innovation Competition is known as the world’s largest roadshow platform by the industry. It has a long schedule, a large number of participating teams, and can carry out innovation and entrepreneurship achievement exhibitions, university-enterprise cooperation forums, investment and

financing docking meetings, etc. in the same period ^[10].

The “Internet +” Innovation Competition serves as a booster for higher education reform. Most excellent projects are the integration of science and technology as the primary productive force and talent as the primary resource. Entrepreneurial projects need to size up the situation, have broad prospects, and seize the trend of the times. Therefore, projects applying modern technologies or tools are favored by everyone. The “Internet +” Innovation Competition has rapidly promoted the penetration and application of artificial intelligence, big data, 5G technology, robots, etc., in various disciplines of colleges and universities, which helps the iteration of the higher education content system.

The “Internet +” Innovation Competition is the igniter of innovation and entrepreneurship education. Different from the bottom-up entrepreneurship education in some developed countries, China’s innovation and entrepreneurship education is a top-down national coordinated promotion model ^[11]. This model is fast and efficient in the initial stage, but due to the lack of a complete innovation and entrepreneurship education ecosystem, there may be insufficient stamina for sustainable development, which requires continuous momentum for in-depth development. At the present stage, provinces, cities and colleges and universities have listed the competition results as assessment indicators, attracting the high attention of college managers, front-line teachers and college students, and playing a role in promoting colleges and universities to attach importance to innovation and entrepreneurship education.

The “Internet +” Innovation Competition serves as an incubator and accelerator for college students’ entrepreneurial projects. It combines the two functions of talent cultivation and project selection. Education is a long - term process, and it is difficult to demonstrate its effectiveness in the short term. In terms of project incubation, acceleration and the resulting social and economic value, the “Internet +” Innovation Competition has played a good role. For example, more than 80% of the gold award projects in the creative group of the first competition were incubated into formal enterprises, and 50% of the gold award projects in the practice group obtained financing.

4.2. Innovating the teaching organization model of universities and improving the innovation and entrepreneurship curriculum system

Cultivating morality and fostering people is the top priority. In this process, integrity serves as the foundation. Since 2015, entrepreneurship competitions have emerged like mushrooms in domestic universities. However, many of these competitions suffer from low distinctiveness and weak complementarity, creating a confusing array of events. As a component of universities’ double innovation education, the Internet+ Innovation Competition must address hidden concerns beneath its booming development ^[12]. Organizers need to seriously deliberate on fundamental questions: “what kind of people to cultivate, how to cultivate them, and for whom to cultivate them.” There must be zero tolerance for dishonesty in the competition. Currently, the Internet+ Competition only requires evidential support for projects with revenues or investment and financing of 10 million yuan or more. To cultivate future outstanding entrepreneurs, the competition should establish a supervision mechanism for the financial descriptions of all projects, advocate moderate capital-based entrepreneurship, and guard against grandiose exaggeration. Additionally, cultivating morality and fostering people should be combined with practical application for social benefit.

The Internet+ Competition is a “key measure” to solve the disconnect between university scientific research achievements and national requirements, people’s needs, and market demands. To effectively implement this measure, we must focus on critical issues. For example, the competition system of “10-minute project presentation plus 5-minute Q&A session” needs re-evaluation. It is a significant challenge to understand and determine a project’s product/service, core team, business model, competitive comparison, financial financing, risk control, etc., in just 15 minutes. Effective due diligence should be carried out to ground research in real-world applications, integrate industry, academia, research, and application genuinely, and prevent scientific research achievements with no actual transformation value from being packaged as entrepreneurial projects. It is crucial to avoid the spread of formalism and utilitarianism among participating universities and students ^[13].

Improving the innovation and entrepreneurship education ecosystem is fundamental. Innovation and entrepreneurship

education should shift from focusing on the entrepreneurial activities of a small number of people to cultivating the innovation and entrepreneurship thinking and skills of the majority. There is no perfect competition, only continuously improving education. A lush tree with dense branches and leaves originates from its root. The fundamental for the sustainable development of the “Internet +” Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition is to build an innovation and entrepreneurship education ecosystem. The “Internet +” competition serves as the traction “locomotive”, while the integration of professional education and innovation and entrepreneurship education, as well as the integration of industry and education, act as the load-bearing “train body”, jointly constructing the “framework” of the innovation and entrepreneurship education ecosystem. The innovation and entrepreneurship education in domestic universities started late and is currently limited to the internal scope of universities, even staying at the stage of single or a few courses. It has not yet formed a complete ecosystem where universities, the government, enterprises, and society collaborate with each other, and where scientific research, courses, practice, etc., are interconnected. With the attention and encouragement of education authorities, the “Internet +” competition has changed the wait-and-see attitude of some university decision-makers towards innovation and entrepreneurship education. The next key steps are as follows: the top-level design should clarify the positioning of innovation and entrepreneurship education, formulate national standards for innovation and entrepreneurship education, give full play to the guiding role of policies, strengthen school-local and school-enterprise cooperation, truly integrate knowledge and technology innovation with commercialization into a complete chain, and gradually transform innovation and entrepreneurship education from government-driven to the conscious action of university teachers and students.

4.3. Building a multi-level and full-coverage competition system to stimulate college students’ double innovation thinking

Contemporary college students are in an uncertain environment, and the profound changes in the international situation, the ups and downs of the economic situation, and the rapid development of science and technology have further aggravated the uncertainty of college students’ entrepreneurial and employment scenarios. If college students are divided into three categories: entrepreneurs, those with more employment opportunities, and those with fewer employment choices, the Internet + Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition should expand from focusing on the “top” (i.e., entrepreneurs) at the current stage to “focusing on both ends and promoting the middle”^[14]. For entrepreneurs, variables exist everywhere on the road to entrepreneurship, so the Internet + Competition must enhance the risk control capabilities of college entrepreneurs. While success is commendable, failure requires even more reflection so that later generations can learn from it. In this regard, the Internet + Competition empowers entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial teams. For those with fewer employment choices, entrepreneurship is a reliable career development direction to cope with an uncertain future. The current phenomenon that the self-employment rate of female college students is continuously rising and that the entrepreneurship rate of disabled college students is higher than that of ordinary college students illustrates this point, and the Internet + Competition needs to pay attention to this phenomenon and provide reasonable guidance. From only dividing into two groups: Creative and Practical in the first session to developing into nine groups in the sixth session, including Creative, Start-up, Growth, Teacher-Student Co-creation, Red Tourism Public Welfare, Red Tourism Business, etc., it can be seen that the Internet + Competition is gradually shifting from single classification according to the entrepreneurial process to composite classification according to different entrepreneurial processes, contents, and teams. In the future, the classification can be further refined, especially to increase the appeal and influence on those with fewer employment choices. For those with more employment opportunities, it is necessary to advocate entrepreneurship as a way of life, thinking, and behavior^[15]. For young entrepreneurial elites, the Internet + Competition should serve as a value amplifier, guiding technology for good and emphasizing issues such as the digital divide, data security, emotional dependence, and ethics that are easy to encounter in the double innovation process. This is an inevitable choice for the Internet + Competition to maintain its true nature and create highlights.

5. Conclusion

In summary, with the continuous implementation of the “Internet +” Competition in various universities, its scale and competition rules have been continuously improved, and its influence has been expanding. Therefore, in the reform of innovation and entrepreneurship education, universities should focus on constructing the “Internet +” Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education Competition. It should not only meet the demands of the national innovation-driven strategy in the new era but also demonstrate the determination and achievements of universities’ dual-creation (innovation and entrepreneurship) education, injecting fresh blood into the cause of innovation and entrepreneurship education reform in universities and cultivating a continuous stream of high-quality talents for social and industrial development.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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