The Practice Exploration of the Library of Open University Serving the Learning Society——Take the Library of Zhejiang Open University as an *Example*

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Abstract: The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed to advance the digitalization of education and build a learning society and a learning- oriented country for all citizens. University libraries, which serve as key institutions in this effort, have been given new missions for the modern era. However, extensive research has revealed that university libraries, primarily serving on- campus faculty and students, face challenges such as limited resources and a lack of social service platforms. Open university libraries, with their focus on lifelong education and access to high-quality learning resources, can leverage their strengths to provide comprehensive and multifaceted social services while offering educational programs to the broader community.

1. Introduction

A learning society is one that has mechanisms and means to promote and ensure lifelong learning for all citizens. Its key feature is a strong commitment to continuous learning, fostering a social atmosphere of lifelong learning and positive engagement. The core concept is lifelong learning for all. The Open University aims to build a high-quality system as the core pillar of lifelong education, making lifelong education more accessible and convenient, thereby contributing to the development of a lifelong learning society. As a support service department for learning in the Open University, how the Open University Library can serve society and contribute to the construction of a learning society is an important topic for library professionals to explore. This article analyzes the current status and shortcomings of domestic university libraries in building a learning society through openness, and draws on the practical approaches of the Zhejiang Open University Library to propose pathways for the Open University Library to serve society from aspects such as service targets, service platforms, and service content.

2. The Significance of Open University Library Service to Learning Society

2.1 The Importance of Building a Learning Society

A learning society is a theoretical description of the characteristics of modern social development. In today's information society, with the rapid advancement of science and technology

and the rapid growth of information and knowledge, learning has become an urgent need for individuals, organizations, and society. The concept of a learning society was introduced relatively early, with American scholar John H. Hancock proposing it in the 1960s. In China, since the early 21st century, the state have prioritized building a learning society as a key development task.

2.2 The Construction Goal and Guiding Ideology of the Open University to Serve Lifelong Learning

Since its establishment, the Open University has consistently upheld the principle of serving society. Its vision has evolved from initially aiming to "enable more people to attend university" to today's goal of "ensuring everyone has access to books and can learn anytime." The main objectives of Zhejiang Open University's recent plans are to create a high-quality, distinctive core pillar of lifelong education in Zhejiang Province and a center for remote open education services. The guiding principles include making lifelong education more accessible and convenient, meeting the public's need to learn anytime and anywhere, and contributing to the development of a model for a lifelong learning society in Zhejiang.

As a learning support service department of the Open University, the library also plays an indispensable role in the process of building a learning society. At the same time, providing social services is also one of the library's main functions. In the process of development, open university library should take serving the society as an important task and contribute to the construction of learning society.

3. The status quo and problems of university library services to the society

To meet the trends and requirements of building a learning society, in 2002, the Ministry of Education issued the 'Regulations for the Management of Libraries in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions (Revised Edition),' which stipulates that ' libraries in higher education institutions with the necessary conditions should be open to the public as much as possible.' In 2015, when revising these regulations, the Ministry of Education proposed that 'university libraries should, while ensuring internal services and maintaining normal operations, leverage their resource and professional service advantages to provide services to the public.' In 2018, the ' Public Library Law' stated that 'the state supports school libraries, research institution libraries, and other types of libraries in opening to the public.' Under the active promotion of national policies, university libraries have played a significant role in promoting nationwide reading and enhancing the cultural literacy of the public over the following years.

Since proposed building a learning society in 2002, theoretical research on university libraries opening to the public has flourished. Papers have introduced and summarized the current status, experiences, and issues of university libraries serving society, with two peaks in theoretical research occurring in 2007 and 2011. After 2012, the research gradually decreased, and after 2019, it sharply declined. The peak period of research after 2007 indicates that practical explorations of university libraries serving society were widespread during this time. After 2015, the relative decline in theoretical research suggests that university libraries faced bottlenecks in their efforts to serve society. The sharp decline after 2019 can largely be attributed to the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university libraries, which led to universities entering a state of closed epidemic control, naturally affecting policies for serving society.

The author's extensive literature survey, website survey and data analysis basically confirm the analysis results in Figure 1. Through these survey results, we can understand the current situation and problems of university library services to the society.

4. The Current Situation and Problems of Social Service in University Libraries

4.1 Basic Information of Social Services

In 2012, over 30 university libraries in Beijing gradually opened to the public. In 2013, a survey of 110 "211 Project" university libraries nationwide found that all had achieved varying degrees of public access [1]. In 2016, a questionnaire survey of 120 universities in Anhui Province revealed that 49 libraries were open to the public [2] [3]. The survey results indicated that 985 and 211 universities were the first to open to the public, but not all ordinary universities did so. From 2013 to 2017, Liu Jing and colleagues conducted research on university libraries in the United States and Japan, finding that libraries in developed countries had a higher degree of public service openness and more mature services [4-8]. The basic content of social services provided by university libraries mainly includes:

Open borrowing service, scientific and technological novelty checking service, digital resource service, enterprise service and so on [9-10]

4.2 Problems with Social Services

(1) The concept of social service is somewhat vague. To adapt to the broader trend of societal openness, libraries have been somewhat constrained by social pressures, with open services often just a slogan, a superficial trend- following effort. The service content is limited, and librarians lack enthusiasm. However, library services to society should not only respond to societal calls but also consider the broader perspective of promoting social development and human progress. Additionally, university services to society can enhance their social influence and reputation, attracting higher-level scientific research talents and high-quality faculty and student groups. University libraries serving society can form a community of shared destiny, mutually promoting and developing together.

(2) There is a contradiction between the relative balance of resources and the increasing social demand. The human, financial and material resources of university libraries are allocated according to the needs of teachers and students. The phenomenon of "one seat hard to come by" for students studying in university libraries is widespread. The demand for open hours has increased from being available all day to all night. The cost of purchasing literature resources has also risen annually. Libraries typically allocate their human resources and funding based on the number of faculty and students, which is either insufficient or already in balance to meet the needs. In this situation, opening to the public further tightens the resources.

(3) Institutions of higher education libraries, which primarily serve the teaching and research needs of their own faculty and students, have relatively limited ways to expand social services. These libraries are largely independent from society, with limited collaboration between the school and the community, making it challenging for them to broaden their service channels. Scholars advocate that university libraries should proactively engage with society. However, while they can meet the needs of their own faculty and students, they struggle to allocate additional resources to develop platforms for social service. Libraries can only effectively serve society by providing complementary support services alongside their primary role in serving the school, as relying solely on library resources is relatively weak.

5. The Practice Exploration of Open University Library Serving the Society

Unlike traditional universities, Open University has a broader student base and a more comprehensive social service philosophy. Currently, there are over 45 Open Universities

nationwide, including the National Open University, provincial Open Universities, and municipal Open Universities, all sharing a similar educational system. Zhejiang Open University, a provincial higher education institution, is dedicated to lifelong learning, supported by modern information technology, and characterized by "Internet+". It provides lifelong education and services. The university operates under a system of systematic management and hierarchical administration, guiding the teaching activities of 10 municipal Open Universities, 59 county-level Open Universities, and 5 provincial Open University-affiliated teaching points across the province. It offers various forms of educational programs, including open education, adult education, online education for regular universities, TV secondary vocational education, and non-degree education such as community education and elderly education. The high-quality teaching resources of Open University can provide guidance to hundreds of thousands of students across different age groups. The vision of "everyone has access to books, and learning is always possible" remains unchanged, and the commitment to serving society and building a core pillar of lifelong education is deeply rooted in people's hearts. This distinction between Open University and traditional universities makes its library services more distinctive and promising in their content and model.

5.1 Extend the Library's Social Service to All Social Groups Covered by School Teaching

Zhejiang Open University has over 70 branches and teaching points across the province, each with a considerable scale. However, the number of public libraries around these branches is insufficient, especially in remote areas where public libraries are scarce, leaving residents 'library needs unmet. The Open University Library serves all social groups of various levels and age groups across the province, providing services to both academic and non-academic readers within the system through its teaching institutions. The library should shift its service philosophy, not only serving the faculty and students on campus but also taking various measures to serve all teaching objects within the system. The educational mission of the Open University is to benefit every member of society, and the service mission of the Open University Library should be to serve every member of society within its capabilities. The Open University Library's practice of serving society also enriches and fulfills the social service functions of university libraries.

5.2 Rely on the School's Various Types of Teaching and Education Departments Facing the Society to Develop Library Social Service Channels

Zhejiang Open University currently offers not only academic programs such as open education and secondary vocational education, but also non-academic programs like elderly education, community education, family education, and rural education. The university's library serves both on-campus faculty and students while actively expanding its services to readers of non-academic programs. As early as 2008, Zhejiang University of Science and Technology (Zhejiang University) Library launched community education and simultaneously opened digital library services to the community, including community residents in the user base for digital resources. In recent years, the library has actively collaborated with the school's elderly education institutions, family education centers, and future rural education initiatives to provide learning support. The library has established special sections for "elderly education", "family education", and "future rural education". It also provides venue and literature support services for organizations like the Zhejiang Community Family Education Guidance Service Center and the Future Rural Education Research Institute, which are based at Zhejiang University. The library opens its physical collections and reading rooms to the elderly education program. Additionally, the library frequently organizes lectures on elderly intellectual enrichment, innovates service models, and actively engages in community and social classroom activities. The library can integrate its excellent resources into the

regular and long-term work of these non-degree educational institutions, leveraging its strong literature retrieval capabilities to join their core research teams. Furthermore, the library's services are embedded in the work plans and processes of these institutions.

5.3 Give Full Play to the Advantages of Open University Characteristic Learning Resource Platform to Promote Library Digital Resources for Social Services

The Zhejiang Open University Library and the Zhejiang Open University Learning Resource Center share office space and jointly undertake the construction of the Zhejiang Province Lifelong Learning Digital Resource Repository. This project, part of the "12th Five-Year Plan" for educational informatization in Zhejiang Province, represents an innovative approach to providing lifelong learning public services, which is crucial for meeting the growing lifelong learning needs of the general public. The core objective of the repository's development is to leverage modern information technologies, including emerging multimedia, cloud computing, and intelligent big data processing, to create a digital education resource public service platform that serves the entire province. The resource system covering higher education, vocational education, continuing education, and community education, provides high-quality resources to support the development of Zhejiang Province's lifelong education system and the construction of a learning society. Currently, the first phase of the resource library system has completed key modules including resource management, navigation, application, and sharing. This has largely achieved efficient resource management, standardized resource description, open resource aggregation, cloud-based resource services, personalized resource services, and multi-terminal resource display.

The teaching and education in ordinary universities primarily focus on learning within their campus walls, with a focus on offline instruction and a small amount of online resources. In contrast, open universities have long emphasized online teaching, offering a wide range of online resources. The Zhejiang Open University Library and Learning Resource Center have jointly developed the Zhejiang Province Lifelong Learning Digital Resource Library, which not only provides a wealth of academic resources but also includes a large number of high- quality non-academic educational resources. These resources cover various categories such as moral cultivation, cultural refinement, health care, and family education, and currently include 48,339 multimedia learning resources. The rich and diverse learning resources make this library more suitable for the general public, and it is freely accessible to all, allowing anyone to use the database for free for learning and research at any time and place.

Due to its unique educational model, the Open University has developed a rich repository of learning resources. The Open University Library leverages its excellent learning resources to provide digital resource services to a broad range of the public. It also utilizes its expertise in literature retrieval, integration, and secondary development to offer more precise information resource services tailored to different special groups of society.

6. Conclusion

The Open University Library should respond to the national call, actively support lifelong learning education at the Open University, and provide comprehensive, professional, and all-around social services to the community. Serving society is also a crucial way for the Open University Library to fulfill its responsibilities, improve its services, and enhance its social influence. After conducting surveys and analyses, it was found that ordinary university libraries face issues such as insufficient concepts, resource shortages, and lack of platforms for social services. The Open University Library can leverage its unique educational advantages and excellent digital learning resources to provide extensive and comprehensive social services while conducting teaching and

education at the school, thus advancing the new journey of university libraries serving society.

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