Research Ethics and Academic Norms Boost the Development of Higher Academic Continuing Education—Taking Guiding Adult Learners' Research Value Orientation as the Breakthrough Point

Xiaowen Duan [1,*]

1   College for Continuing Education, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, 201600, China
*   Correspondence: Xiaowen Duan, College for Continuing Education, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai, 201600, China

Abstract: As a crucial component of the lifelong learning system, higher academic continuing education plays an irreplaceable role in enhancing the overall quality of society and adapting to a rapidly changing social environment. However, in current higher academic continuing education practice, prominent issues persist, such as a weak quality assurance system, low teaching pertinence, and insufficient faculty qualifications. Particularly, the inadequate education on academic norms and insufficient punitive measures within higher education institutions have led to frequent occurrences of academic misconduct, further constraining the high-quality development of higher academic continuing education. In view of this, at the individual level, education on research ethics and academic norms for adult learners should be strengthened to help them establish a correct research value orientation. Furthermore, at the practical level, it is necessary to construct a comprehensive research ethics education system, clarify normative standards, and strengthen supervision mechanisms. This will propel the academic development of higher academic continuing education, achieving the dual goals of knowledge innovation and social progress under a well-regulated institutional framework.

Keywords: higher academic continuing education; research ethics and academic norms; value orientation; practical path

1. Introduction

Higher academic continuing education plays a significant role in China's education system, particularly in providing lifelong learning opportunities for working adults. Yet, while facing the challenges of the knowledge economy and social transformation, it also encounters numerous problems. The lack of clear understanding of research ethics and academic norms, the rise in academic misconduct, and issues such as the perceived devaluation of academic degrees and disorder in the educational market severely impact educational quality and academic integrity. In August 2022, the Ministry of Education issued the Implementation Opinions on Promoting the Reform of Academic Continuing Education in Regular Higher Education Institutions in the New Era. This policy clarifies the direction and specific requirements for higher education institutions to conduct academic continuing education and deliver high-quality programs in the new era. It emphasizes the

need to prioritize both standardization and development, strengthen connotation building, and promote the standardized, orderly, and healthy development of higher academic continuing education. Establishing a correct value orientation for research ethics and academic norms is not only vital for personal academic integrity and professional growth but also serves as the cornerstone for enhancing the quality of higher education and social development [1]. The construction of a high-quality higher academic continuing education system must keep pace with the times. It should explore new models for academic norm governance, reform and optimize existing educational organizational structures and research ethics frameworks. This will help create a clear and healthy environment for the reform and development of higher academic continuing education, thereby better supporting the establishment of a learning society.

Therefore, it is necessary to reaffirm the important value of research ethics and academic norms in the academic development of higher academic continuing education, examine existing academic norm problems, and explore a practical path that aligns with the unique characteristics of higher academic continuing education while meeting realistic demands [2].

2. The Important Value of Research Ethics and Academic Norms in Higher Academic Continuing Education

In contemporary society, higher academic continuing education has become a vital part of China's higher education sector and a major pillar of continuing education. It is a large-scale, diverse, and complex artificial educational system, primarily targeting all social members, especially adults, after formal schooling, aiming to obtain academic credentials corresponding to their educational goals. With the advent of the international era of lifelong learning, China's higher education has evolved from focusing on mass access to aiming for universal participation and inclusiveness [3]. Against this backdrop, developing high-quality education with Chinese characteristics and world-class standards, and building a lifelong learning system serving all citizens, has become a key strategic task in advancing educational reform and modernization in China. How to establish a training system that prioritizes strict adherence to research ethics and academic norms while focusing on strengthening research capabilities, thereby comprehensively enhancing the quality of academic development in China's higher academic continuing education, has become a critical issue. In this process, forming correct value guidance for research ethics and academic norms is particularly important. This not only provides moral and ethical guidance for academic research but also reinforces academic integrity, fair evaluation, and knowledge sharing, ensuring the transparency and fairness of academic research, playing a pivotal role in improving the overall quality and effectiveness of education [4].

2.1. Ideological Guidance

Globally, with the rapid development of lifelong education and the establishment of learning societies, traditional universities are transforming into "lifelong learning universities". The enthusiasm and willingness of adult learners in various countries to participate in higher academic continuing education are continuously increasing. In this process, adhering to the value guidance of research ethics and academic norms has become a key support for ensuring academic quality and educational effectiveness [5].

Research ethics, in essence, are the values, social responsibilities, and behavioral norms that scientific and technological workers should uphold in research activities. Research ethics play a critical role in two aspects. Firstly, they reflect the responsibilities and values within social ethics, ensuring that scientific research does not neglect societal moral and social responsibilities. On the other hand, research ethics also help maintain the openness of scientific exploration, enabling research to continue even in the face of uncertainty. Research ethics can be seen as a bridge connecting science and society, promoting the

alignment of their values [6]. If the scientific and technological community disregards ethical considerations and public concerns while aggressively advancing research projects, it will raise societal doubts about the legitimacy and necessity of research, thereby undermining public trust and support for scientific inquiry.

Academic norms, on the other hand, refer to the various rules and requirements formulated collectively by the academic community based on the laws of academic development, which are conducive to academic accumulation and innovation [7]. They represent the summarized experiences of the entire academic community over long-term academic activities. Academic norms cover a wide range of aspects that guide scholarly conduct. They include not only humanistic care for academic activities but also specific requirements for such activities. This covers academic systems and structures, while also focusing on the specific mechanisms of academic operation. Academic norms emphasize not only the standardization of academic research itself but also the scientificity and reasonableness of academic evaluation systems. They demand rigor and adherence to facts in academic research while encouraging innovation. Promoting compliance with academic norms helps not only to rectify the academic environment but also to cultivate a new generation of academic talent, enhancing the level of academic research and international competitiveness [8].

It can be said that individuals engaged in academic research can only conduct academic research activities and ensure the order of academic activities when they possess an awareness of ethical norms under the value guidance of research ethics and academic norms, apply them to guide their behavior, and consciously adhere to them in their research. The core of this concept lies in establishing a system containing principles such as academic integrity, fair evaluation, and knowledge sharing. These principles not only cover the fundamental norms of academic activities but also embody respect for knowledge, responsibility towards learners, and commitment to society [9]. Only under this premise can outdated frameworks be overcome, continuous innovation pursued, researchers' academic and innovative capabilities enhanced, the academic environment improved, and academic prosperity promoted. Therefore, strengthening research ethics and academic norms is not only key to improving the academic quality of higher academic continuing education but also an inevitable choice for building a healthy and efficient academic environment. It helps mitigate risks and challenges brought by technological development, promotes trust-building within the academic community, enables higher academic continuing education to better adapt to societal development needs, and provides learners with a more comprehensive and profound academic experience.

2.2. Safeguarding Status

China's higher academic continuing education began in the early years of the country's modern higher education development. It traversed the elite education stage and the massification stage of higher education, long serving primarily as compensatory education for academic credentials. It has long lacked a clearly defined social role aligned with each stage of national educational development. Society has always scrutinized the quality of higher academic continuing education using the standards of regular higher education, which greatly affects its academic reputation [10]. Academic reputation, as a crucial criterion for determining academic standing, comprehensively considers the performance and contributions of individuals or institutions within the academic field. Simply put, academic reputation is the recognition and respect granted by the academic community to individuals or institutions for their meaningful contributions to the advancement of knowledge. The reputation of higher academic continuing education concerns not only the credibility of individual students and teachers but also determines its social recognition and status. Therefore, maintaining and enhancing the academic reputation of higher academic continuing education is vital for the development of this field [11].

Adhering to the core values of research ethics and academic norms means safeguarding the honesty and credibility of academic activities. The educational quality and academic level of higher academic continuing education depend largely on the research outcomes and academic activities of its faculty and students. By complying with ethics and norms, educational institutions can ensure that their faculty conduct rigorous research, reduce the impact of errors and biases, and enhance the credibility and value of academic outputs. This helps attract more academic elites and outstanding students, further boosting academic reputation. Simultaneously, the academic reputation of higher academic continuing education institutions is influenced not only domestically but also by the international academic community. Adhering to norms helps build trust in international academic exchanges, bringing more international opportunities to the academic community. Through international exchange and cooperation, institutions can disseminate and share academic achievements, thereby further enhancing their academic reputation [12].

Currently, a prominent issue in higher academic continuing education is that many institutions prioritize economic gains over educational management. They tend to favor scale expansion at the expense of cultivating academic talent. This situation reflects short-sighted development strategies in higher academic continuing education, preventing it from developing alongside regular higher education. Societal concern over educational quality and academic integrity is increasing. An educational institution with a good academic reputation is more likely to gain support and recognition from the government, enterprises, and society, thereby obtaining more resources and opportunities to promote the sustainable development of higher academic continuing education. Compliance with research ethics and academic norms is a key factor in maintaining academic reputation and enhancing social recognition. By conducting honest, high-quality, internationalized, and socially responsible academic activities, building a clear and healthy academic environment, higher academic continuing education institutions can stand out in the competitive educational market, provide better learning opportunities for students, and contribute more talent to social sustainability under lifelong education [13].

2.3. Goal Integration

The fundamental goal of continuing education is to promote the all-round development of learners and enhance social cultural quality. Education in research ethics and academic norms plays a crucial role in achieving this goal. This education focuses not only on enhancing learners' knowledge and skills but, more importantly, aims at cultivating their critical thinking, innovative ability, and sense of social responsibility. Establishing correct values of research ethics and academic norms helps researchers discern the authenticity of information, critically analyze and evaluate data and arguments, thereby making reasonable and responsible decisions in academic research. This way of thinking is essential for learners to understand complex social and technological issues and form unique insights [14].

The core of academic research lies in innovation. It promotes or re-examines existing research by introducing new perspectives, unique angles, new materials, innovative argumentation methods, or new evidence, thereby fostering continuous development and progress in academic fields. This innovative spirit is the main driving force for academic research and the development of the academic community. Scientific and reasonable academic norms do not hinder academic innovation; rather, they better promote it. In this sense, establishing, improving, and adhering to ethics and academic norms is not only a long-term and arduous task but also one that accompanies the entire process of education and academic research.

Cultivating a sense of social responsibility is another important aspect of research ethics and academic norms education [15]. This education system emphasizes not only the transmission of knowledge and skills but also the inculcation of values and a sense of responsibility, targeting adult learners. By cultivating students' correct views on research

ethics, learners can understand the impact of their academic activities on society and learn to take social responsibility in research and practice. It is evident that the goals of both are inherently integrated. By emphasizing the value positioning of research ethics and academic norms in higher academic continuing education, we can promote the professional academic development of educators and learners, help build a harmonious academic and social environment, and advance sustainable social development. Therefore, integrating education on research ethics and academic norms into higher academic continuing education is an important pathway to enhancing overall academic quality and educational effectiveness [16].

3. The Current State of Practicing Academic Norms in Higher Academic Continuing Education

To date, China's higher academic continuing education has formed an independent operating system. Since entering a new stage of development, guided by the concept of lifelong education, it has shifted towards developmental education. The state has implemented strategies to build a lifelong learning education system serving all citizens and establish a high-quality education system. Consequently, the developmental stage and tasks undertaken by higher academic continuing education have changed accordingly. There is an urgent need to establish and improve the academic quality supervision system and the legal protection system for higher academic continuing education, which are crucial guarantees for it to fully function as an independent educational system in the new stage. In April 2022, the Ministry of Education issued the Notice on Strictly Regulating the Establishment and Management of Off-Campus Teaching Sites for Higher Academic Continuing Education [17]. The notice requires higher education institutions to rigorously enforce academic discipline and examination integrity, seriously address academic misconduct such as plagiarism and ghostwriting of theses, strictly control the granting of degrees, and improve the supervision system for the talent cultivation process. This shows the state's strict and prudent approach to ensuring a clear and bright academic environment where research strictly adheres to norms.

Currently, developed countries like the UK and the US have established unified quality assurance systems, adopting a single-track model for higher education. In this single-track system for higher education qualifications and degrees, there is no distinction between regular higher education qualifications and higher continuing education qualifications, which generally ensures the quality of higher academic continuing education. Because China's higher education adopts a dual-track system separating regular higher education and higher academic continuing education, the quality standards between the two often suffer from inconsistency and insufficient enforcement [18]. Currently, in China's higher academic continuing education, due to the lack of adequate punitive measures and effective exit mechanisms, quality assurance is generally characterized by well-established systems but poor implementation. The effective implementation of research ethics and academic norms in practice remains a problem to be solved, leading to frequent occurrences of academic norm violations and misconduct, further constraining the high-quality development of higher academic continuing education.

3.1. Frequent Occurrence of Academic Misconduct in Higher Academic Continuing Education

With continuous social progress, academic research is no longer merely the pursuit of personal interest but has become a professionalized occupational field. As more scholars rely on publishing research results to gain social recognition, students in higher academic continuing education, like those in regular higher education, must complete standardized graduation theses to meet graduation requirements [19]. Many students and teachers also have the need to publish papers for awards and professional titles. The intensification of academic competition has led to the emergence of a series of improper behaviors. Due to the particularity of its teaching subjects and the lack of a strict quality

supervision and control system, academic norm violations are more prominent in higher academic continuing education than in other fields.

3.1.1. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a common form of academic norm violation in academia, causing serious negative impacts on the development and academic environment of higher academic continuing education. This behavior severely violates the principle of academic integrity, stripping away the foundation of originality and academic honesty. If plagiarism is not strictly combated, it will severely undermine educational quality and academic reputation. When students or teachers obtain degrees or academic honors through plagiarism or misappropriation, their actual knowledge level and research ability are awarded without proper evaluation, seriously damaging the educational quality of higher academic continuing education. Furthermore, such scientific fraud not only deceives the public and undermines societal principles of fairness but also wastes valuable research resources, severely pollutes the academic ecological environment, affects the academic reputation of higher academic continuing education institutions, and reduces societal recognition of this field. Today, we urgently need to eradicate these academic counterfeits thoroughly, severely punish plagiarists and misappropriators, restore purity and honesty to academia, and return scholarship to its inherent value.

3.1.2. Data Falsification and Fabrication

Data falsification refers to the deliberate alteration or manipulation of experimental data, survey results, statistics, or other information in research to deceive or mislead. Fabrication involves entirely inventing research data or results, producing non-existent outcomes to obtain improper academic recognition or rewards. The existence of these behaviors not only destroys academic integrity but also damages the credibility and reproducibility of academic research. When academia is filled with false data and research results, it severely harms academic reputation and diminishes the value of academic research. Simultaneously, these behaviors exacerbate unfair competition, creating an unfair competitive environment for students and teachers who adhere to academic norms. Fabricators gain degrees or awards through false data and results, while those relying on genuine effort face unfair exclusion. It can be said that data falsification and fabrication severely compromise the quality of academic outcomes and teaching. If teachers or students support their research or theses with fabricated data, it leads to the transmission of erroneous knowledge and undermines academic standards and practices, affecting students' academic level and professional development.

3.1.3. Improper Co-authorship and Authorship

Improper co-authorship and authorship practices are particularly prominent in the field of higher academic continuing education. Authorship of academic papers should be limited to those who participated in selecting the research topic and formulating the research plan, directly participated in all or the main part of the research work and made major contributions, participated in writing the paper and can take responsibility for its content, and are capable of defending the paper. Authors should be listed in order of their contribution. Occasionally, authorship lists include individuals who did not actively participate in the research. Furthermore, there can be unfairness in the ranking of contributions among members, where those who made significant contributions are listed later, while those who made little or no effort are listed earlier, sacrificing academic integrity for personal favors, allowing the unhealthy trend of academic misconduct to prevail. These improper co-authorship and ranking practices bring a series of negative impacts to the field of higher academic continuing education. Firstly, they severely undermine academic integrity and the fairness of research, lowering the reputation and trustworthiness of the entire field. Secondly, this misconduct creates an unfair competitive environment

for students and teachers who work hard according to academic norms, as their efforts and talents may be overshadowed by those ranked higher without commensurate effort. Most importantly, improper co-authorship and ranking can lead to the breakdown of collaborative relationships, damage trust among members, and consequently affect future cooperation opportunities.

3.1.4. Duplicate Submission

According to relevant provisions in China's copyright law, if a publisher does not respond within a specified timeframe after a work is submitted, the copyright owner may submit the same work to another publisher, unless otherwise agreed. However, some authors, in pursuit of publication opportunities, simultaneously submit the same research results or academic paper to multiple academic journals or conferences, disregarding academic norms. This phenomenon of duplicate submission severely undermines academic integrity and the peer review process of academic journals. When the same article is accepted by multiple journals simultaneously, it wastes reviewing resources and affects the publication opportunities of other scholars. This behavior is not only unfair but also lowers the quality of journal reviews, damaging the reputation of academic journals. Duplicate submission can also lead to duplicate publication of academic results, which contributes nothing to the development of the academic field and instead wastes research resources.

3.2. Diverse Causes of Academic Misconduct in Higher Academic Continuing Education

3.2.1. Weak Quality Assurance System

The construction of the quality assurance system in the field of higher academic continuing education is relatively lagging, providing fertile ground for the emergence of academic misconduct. Although internal quality assurance systems have been established, considerations of reducing operating costs often leave them idle, making it difficult to effectively ensure educational quality. External quality assurance relies mainly on specialized evaluations, but there are significant issues with the scientificity of evaluation indicators, the frequency of evaluations, and the coverage of specialized fields. Evaluation indicators focus more on static inputs of educational resources, neglecting the examination of the educational process and outcomes, which may contribute to the occurrence of academic misconduct or norm violations. Simultaneously, there is a lack of coordination between internal and external quality assurance systems, hindering effective collaboration. These two systems should form an integrated whole, but because they operate based on different frameworks and independently, achieving effective interaction and synergy is difficult, limiting the overall quality assurance capacity. The disconnection between internal and external quality assurance systems also makes it difficult to promptly detect and correct academic misconduct, leading to the accumulation and escalation of problems.

3.2.2. Specificity of the Learner Population

Higher academic continuing education primarily targets working adults in society, typically older than the traditional university-age population. Learners are geographically dispersed, come from diverse professional backgrounds, and exhibit significant differences in learning motivation and ability. This specificity of the learner population increases the risk of academic misconduct. Work pressure and time constraints are significant factors; working adults typically have full-time jobs and need to cope with work pressures, overtime, and family responsibilities. This may leave them with insufficient time for academic tasks, potentially inducing behaviors like plagiarism, misappropriation, or purchasing ghostwritten work. Furthermore, learning motivation is a major inducement; some participate in continuing education solely for career advancement. Driven by this motivation, some students seek shortcuts to obtain degrees rather than engage in genuine learning. Higher academic continuing education mainly consists of three learning formats:

traditional adult higher education, self-study examination education, and modern distance education. This model of distance and self-directed learning may lead some students to be academically underprepared, struggling to complete research tasks and adhere to academic norms when finishing their graduation theses.

The current content of higher academic continuing education lacks sufficient alignment with its training objectives and the needs of its learners. The educational content differs little from regular higher education, often being simply processed or adapted versions of it. Such teaching content lacks pertinence for adult working learners and fails to consider their developmental characteristics and genuine needs. Students commonly face problems such as insufficient professional knowledge reserves, unskilled mastery of research methods, and lack of disciplinary perspective, further contributing to the frequent occurrence of academic misconduct in this field.

3.2.3. Insufficient Faculty Qualifications

Due to the particularity of higher academic continuing education, its faculty has long faced unique challenges. Compared to full-time universities, the entry threshold for higher continuing education is typically lower, with lower admission scores. This leads to limited faculty resources and allocation challenges for some operating units. Often, these institutions may rely on young teachers or graduate students to undertake teaching tasks, or may even have to temporarily hire social educators. In this situation, the faculty often appears as a "temporary" team, making it difficult to form a stable, high-level teaching team. Young teachers or graduate students, facing pressures from research and career development challenges, may sometimes resort to academic misconduct to enhance their academic reputation or cope with work pressure. Simultaneously, due to the generally shallow qualifications of the faculty and limited resources, the number of truly renowned scholars and masters in adult higher academic education is relatively small, creating a pronounced Matthew Effect. American sociologist Robert K. Merton first introduced the concept of the "Matthew Effect" in 1968 to describe a phenomenon of cumulative advantage in the scientific community. This effect manifests as scientists who have already achieved considerable reputation in academia tending to receive more honors and recognition, while those not yet known find it difficult to gain due attention and recognition. This imbalance can lead to intense competition among teachers, with some resorting to improper co-authorship and authorship to secure publication opportunities and enhance their academic standing.

3.2.4. Insufficient Accountability and Punishment

In the field of higher academic continuing education, there is a lack of clear and strict accountability mechanisms for academic misconduct. The definition and handling procedures for academic misconduct are often unclear, leaving management bodies without sufficient guidance when dealing with violations. The lack of clear systems can result in some violations going undetected or being downplayed. Even when academic misconduct is discovered, penalties are often insufficient. Occurrences of misconduct may only result in verbal admonishment, lacking substantive disciplinary action. Inconsistency and leniency in punishment significantly weaken the deterrent effect on violators. Management bodies may be reluctant to take firm measures, fearing negative repercussions or controversy. Furthermore, deficiencies in supervision and auditing mechanisms exacerbate the lack of accountability. If academic activities are not subjected to sufficiently rigorous supervision and auditing, the risk of misconduct increases, and violators may act with impunity, believing they are unlikely to be discovered or sanctioned. This insufficiency in accountability and punishment is also a significant factor contributing to the frequent occurrence of academic misconduct in higher academic continuing education.

4. Practical Paths for Research Ethics and Academic Norms to Boost the Academic Development of Higher Academic Continuing Education

Currently, in the process of enhancing the academic development of higher academic continuing education, the integration and strengthening of research ethics and academic norms is becoming a core issue. It is necessary to explore a new path for the development of higher academic continuing education under their ideological guidance, to promote the continuous improvement of this field's academic status, and truly establish a higher academic continuing education system oriented towards cultivating high-quality talent.

4.1. Construct a Comprehensive Quality Assurance System

At the current stage of development, China's higher academic continuing education indirectly engages in scientific research and knowledge production through talent cultivation, thus possessing an academic nature. Insisting on the equivalence of higher academic continuing education and regular higher education has become an inevitable requirement for ensuring academic integrity and high-quality development. It is necessary to clarify the quality positioning of higher academic continuing education from a higher education perspective, strengthen the connection between internal and external quality assurance systems, and establish a sound quality assurance and supervision system.

4.1.1. Internal Quality

Host universities should establish standardized and institutionalized continuing education training systems, refine working mechanisms, and continuously enhance teaching management. The tasks and objectives of higher academic continuing education should be clearly defined based on regional social and professional needs, as well as requirements for professional knowledge and skills. Indicators related to the quality standards of students' graduation theses and academic research papers should be detailed and quantified. Simultaneously, the training and enhancement of the faculty is crucial. A high-level, well-trained professional faculty is the foundation of high-quality teaching activities. Their capabilities and methods play a key role in curriculum construction, textbook development, teaching reforms, and practical teaching. Continuously improving their teaching and research capabilities and levels is an important guarantee for enhancing the quality of talent cultivation. Based on this, on the one hand, targeted guidance on research capabilities can be better provided according to the learning characteristics and needs of adult students. On the other hand, the quality of teachers' own professional competence and academic output can be continuously improved. Furthermore, strengthening the construction of teaching supervision teams is also an important link in monitoring the operation of the quality assurance system, identifying problems, and providing continuous feedback. Supervision teams need to be conscientious and responsible, consistently providing valuable feedback, and strictly investigating academic misconduct issues in faculty/student academic journals and graduation theses. By standardizing graduation thesis design management, supervisor guidance, and plagiarism checking systems, efforts should be made to continuously reinforce the correct value concepts of research ethics and academic norms among teachers and students.

4.1.2. External Quality

The construction of the external quality assurance system for higher academic continuing education needs to fully consider the roles and responsibilities of government and social participation to ensure its coordination, stability, and sustainable development. The government should strengthen its service orientation, improve the government-led comprehensive evaluation system to promote the characteristic development of universities and the enthusiasm for social participation in quality supervision. Simultaneously, it is necessary to improve relevant laws and regulations, standardize the participation of multiple stakeholders, and create a favorable environment and institutional safeguards for

quality assurance. Additionally, the government needs to fully leverage its accountability function, establish and improve qualification certification mechanisms, and strengthen supervision over social participation in evaluation. The independence and professional level of third-party evaluation agencies need to be enhanced to ensure the reliability and fairness of evaluation results. Evaluation and supervision bodies need to consider factors of research ethics and academic norms, ensuring that the evaluation process not only focuses on teaching quality but also on whether research activities comply with ethical and normative requirements. Concurrently, evaluation activities need to be professionalized, establishing professional norms for industry evaluation activities and information disclosure systems to enhance the credibility of evaluation results, ensuring that research activities in the field of higher academic continuing education comply with norms and are not affected by misconduct.

4.2. Establish a Targeted Philosophy for Higher Academic Continuing Education

Adult learners in higher academic continuing education often have discontinuous study time. Simultaneously, their theoretical foundation, research capabilities, and innovative thinking are relatively weaker compared to students in regular higher education. Therefore, higher academic continuing education should fully consider the specificity of its learners, adhere to a student-centered approach, and ensure that teaching design meets student characteristics and needs.

4.2.1. Reform Teaching Models

The conflict between work and study is one of the major obstacles affecting the learning quality of students and is also an inducement for some students to choose shortcuts leading to academic misconduct. Teaching models primarily based on face-to-face instruction often struggle to effectively reconcile this work-study conflict and are frequently underutilized. Online education, due to its convenience for learning in the context of current educational modernization, is favored by students. Therefore, higher academic continuing education should reform teaching models dominated by face-to-face instruction, utilizing modern information technology to provide multi-terminal online learning platform support.

4.2.2. Reform Educational Content

Educational institutions should integrate academic tasks closely with students' career development. Adult students usually have certain professional backgrounds and work experience. Their primary motivation for choosing continuing education is career development. Therefore, educational institutions and educators should make adult students fully aware of the inherent importance of continuing education itself, providing course content closely related to career development. This means courses should have practical applicability, helping students solve real problems at work. Curriculum design can fully consider industry needs and trends, ensuring that the knowledge and skills students acquire are competitive in the workplace.

4.2.3. Strengthen Education on Research Ethics and Academic Norms

Strengthening education on academic norms for students is also crucial for promoting the academic development of higher academic continuing education. It is essential to clearly communicate the importance of academic integrity to students. By sharing real cases and emphasizing the serious consequences that academic misconduct can cause, learners' sense of responsibility and integrity awareness can be enhanced. Simultaneously, curriculum design should fully consider the educational needs of research ethics and academic moral norms, integrate resources to develop relevant courses and teaching materials, thereby making them compulsory components of the adult education curriculum system. Furthermore, through specialized lectures, workshops, and other forms, learners

can gain a deeper understanding and practice the requirements of research ethics and academic norms, truly integrating them into their own value systems.

4.3. *Improve the Scientific Evaluation System*

The existence of the Matthew Effect clearly violates the basic principles of research ethics and academic norms. Establishing a scientific evaluation mechanism can reduce the pressure on less qualified young teachers to engage in improper competition and deviant behavior in a fiercely competitive academic environment. A scientific evaluation mechanism should value the quality and originality of research, rather than relying excessively on existing reputation and accumulation. It is also necessary to further enhance the transparency and credibility of academia.

4.3.1. Clarify Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation system should have objective criteria and evaluation basis, not based on subjective bias or personal relationships. The learner population and objectives of higher academic continuing education differ from those of regular higher education. Therefore, evaluation criteria need to be customized according to these characteristics. Considering the diversity of teachers' disciplinary backgrounds and the actual situation of professional needs, evaluation criteria should be more flexible. By clarifying research evaluation standards and encouraging teachers to focus on the quality rather than the quantity of research, the phenomenon of blind article publication and subsequent academic misconduct can be reduced. Teachers will also focus more on in-depth research and solving practical problems, promoting academic development in the field of higher academic continuing education.

4.3.2. Establish an Anonymous Review System

An anonymous review system helps exclude non-academic factors related to reviewers, such as personal favors and relationships. This enables reviewers to make fair and objective evaluations in similar situations. Secondly, the anonymous review system can effectively eliminate the influence of the "Matthew Effect". By removing information unrelated to the reviewed material during the review process, this system reduces the informational basis on which the Matthew Effect relies, helping to prevent its occurrence. Therefore, it is important to establish "single-blind" or "double-blind" anonymous review systems in various academic review activities.

4.3.3. Strengthen Supervision and Feedback Mechanisms

Strengthening supervision and feedback mechanisms is crucial for ensuring the fairness and impartiality of research evaluation. It is necessary to ensure that the supervision mechanism can monitor all aspects of the review process, ensuring reviewers follow prescribed procedures and standards without interference or pressure, to guarantee the objectivity of review results. The supervision mechanism should effectively monitor and document improper conduct during the review process, providing a basis for subsequent feedback and correction. Simultaneously, establishing a feedback mechanism is also an important means to promptly detect and correct improper competitive behavior. Reviewing bodies should openly accept feedback from the research community and relevant stakeholders, understand potential problems and misconduct during the review process, and take measures to rectify unfair competition to ensure the fairness of evaluation. Furthermore, the feedback mechanism can provide information about review results and suggestions to the evaluated researchers, helping them better understand the evaluation process and improve their own research work. This helps establish a positive feedback loop, promoting communication and cooperation between researchers and reviewing bodies, and improving the quality and fairness of research evaluation.

4.4. Strengthen Penalties for Academic Misconduct and Accountability Mechanisms

Relevant official guidelines issued by authoritative education bodies have emphasized standardizing investigation procedures for academic misconduct and handling such cases with seriousness. This shows that the state requires universities to attach great importance to student academic misconduct, strengthen penalties and accountability systems, resolutely oppose unhealthy academic practices, effectively curb academic misconduct, and create a clean and upright educational environment and a pragmatic academic atmosphere.

4.4.1. Issue and Formulate Penalty Regulations for Academic Misconduct

Clearly define different types of academic misconduct and corresponding penalty measures. Penalty measures should be fair and targeted. Different types of academic misconduct should have corresponding penalties, considering severity and frequency. For example, different penalties can be adopted, such as verbal warnings, written warnings, clearing academic records, academic sanctions, or even expulsion. Currently, there are few national-level legal documents regarding the prevention and control of academic misconduct, and many existing provisions are non-binding or have limited legal effect. Universities and the state should improve legislation, clearly formulate penalty regulations for academic misconduct. Based on existing legal documents and regulations, opinions from various departments and journal publishers should be solicited. Unified legislation should be pursued to construct and improve a diversified legal system for governing academic misconduct. Of course, Penalties should encompass not only punitive measures but also educational and preventive efforts. Universities should actively carry out academic integrity education activities, help students recognize the seriousness of academic misconduct, and provide guidance and support to prevent recurrence.

4.4.2. Effectively Improve the Accountability System

Supervisors play a crucial role in guiding higher academic continuing education students' graduation theses. However, irresponsible or improper behavior by some supervisors can negatively impact students. Therefore, establishing a supervisor accountability system is necessary. Supervisors should sign academic integrity responsibility statements, clarifying their responsibilities in student cultivation. If a supervisor fails to provide scientific ethics education, condones or participates in academic misconduct, corresponding responsibilities should be pursued, including public criticism, cancellation of supervisor allowances, restrictions on professional title promotion, etc. Simultaneously, journal editors play a key role in academic publishing. If editors fail to detect academic misconduct during review or do not promptly stop the practice of buying, selling, or ghostwriting papers, it constitutes a dereliction of duty. Journal publishers should incorporate the work of preventing and controlling academic misconduct into editors' performance evaluation indicators to ensure editors actively fulfill their responsibilities and promptly detect and stop misconduct.

5. Conclusion

This paper highlights the importance of research ethics and academic norms in improving the quality of higher academic continuing education in China. To address challenges like academic misconduct and weak quality assurance, it proposes strengthening internal and external supervision, adapting teaching to adult learners, and enhancing academic integrity education. Implementing fair evaluation and strict accountability systems is essential to foster a trustworthy academic environment. Integrating these measures will promote sustainable development, academic excellence, and lifelong learning in higher education.

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