

Exploration on the Dilemmas and Paths of the Professional Development of the Teaching Management Team in Local Undergraduate Universities

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Abstract: As an important part of Chinese higher education system, the professional level of the teaching management team in local undergraduate universities directly affects the quality of applied talent cultivation and the efficiency of the university's transformation and development. Based on the current situation of the construction of the teaching management team in local undergraduate universities, this study deeply analyzes the core dilemmas they face, such as structural staff shortages and insufficient professional qualities, weak professional identity and lack of incentive mechanisms, imbalance of rights and responsibilities and weak institutional support. It proposes professional development paths such as the construction of a hierarchical and classified training system, digital-enabled transformation, cultivation of teaching academic abilities, and collaborative innovation of institutional culture, providing theoretical references and practical guidelines for the modernization of teaching management in local undergraduate universities.

Keywords: Local undergraduate universities; Teaching management team; Professional development

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1. Introduction

In the process of Chinese higher education transformation from elitism to popularization, local undergraduate universities have become the main force to bear the scale expansion through mergers and upgrades. Most of these universities are formed by the merger of junior colleges, undertaking the core mission of serving regional economic and social development, but they face the problems of weak teaching foundation and lack of undergraduate management experience. With the deepening of the popularization stage of education, local undergraduate universities need to complete the dual tasks of applied transformation and quality improvement simultaneously, which puts forward higher requirements for the professionalism of the teaching management team. However, with the continuous deepening of Chinese higher education reform, the teaching work in higher education institutions, especially the newly-upgraded applied undergraduate universities, is facing various new problems. At present, the teaching management teams in local universities have problems to varying degrees, such as not being fully staffed in a timely manner, being unstable and difficult to flow, having a poor professional survival state, and lacking attractiveness in terms of identity. In higher education research,

how to standardize and improve the teaching management level has always been an important topic worthy of attention. Affected by factors such as school-running conditions and history, local undergraduate universities have gaps with key universities in terms of the standardization of teaching management work and the quality of teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of the teaching management team. With the expansion of the school-running scale, the number of teachers and students is increasing year by year, and the teaching management tasks are becoming more and more onerous. The traditional decentralized teaching management model is no longer suitable for the current teaching management work, and the teaching management model needs to be reformed. In addition, with the development of information technology, the teaching methods of teachers are showing a diversified development trend, and the teaching operation data is showing a continuous growth trend. In this situation, it is even more necessary to strengthen the construction of the teaching management team to achieve “good governance” in teaching. Therefore, further strengthening the professional construction of the teaching management team in local undergraduate universities, improving the comprehensive quality and professional ability of teaching management personnel, continuously exploring new ideas for teaching management work, promoting the innovation of work models, improving the efficiency of teaching management work, effectively guaranteeing the quality of talent cultivation, and demonstrating the mission and responsibility of universities in the new era have profound theoretical value and important practical significance.

2. Literature review

Teaching management work is the core of the teaching system in higher education institutions and an important guarantee for the quality of teaching in universities. This paper divides the research objects of teaching management personnel into three levels: senior, middle-level, and grass-roots. The senior level refers to the leaders and decision-makers engaged in teaching management work, including the vice-presidents in charge of teaching in universities; the middle-level refers to the directors of the Academic Affairs Office, a functional department, and the deans in charge of teaching in each secondary college; the grass-roots level refers to the personnel engaged in specific teaching management work in the Academic Affairs Office and the teaching offices of departments and colleges in universities, such as teaching secretaries and educational administrators.

2.1. Research on the connotation of the professional construction of the teaching management team

Domestic relevant research shows that teaching management is mainly the organization and coordination of people, things, and objects in a certain sense. The research on the teaching management team is mostly reflected in the research scope of university management personnel or administrative personnel. The professional construction of teaching management personnel has intersections with relevant research on career planning, professional qualities, and management abilities. First, research on the definition and system of the professionalism of the teaching management team. Jiang Dongmei and Li Xiaoshun believe that undergraduate education and teaching management covers a wide range and involves many departments, and a student-centered undergraduate education and teaching management framework should be formed; through the linkage of the university-level and college-level academic affairs, a management team aiming at managing, serving, and cultivating students is constructed ^[1]. Second, research on the connotation and quality requirements of the professionalism of the teaching management team. Documents such as the Implementation Measures for the Qualified Evaluation of Undergraduate Teaching Work in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions put forward requirements for the structure and quality of the teaching management team: the structure is relatively reasonable, the team is basically stable, and the service awareness is relatively strong; attention should be paid to the training of the teaching management team; teaching management research should be actively carried out, and there should be a certain number of research and practice results. Ren Liqing believes that professionalism refers to strengthening a certain occupation on the basis of professional knowledge and professional ethics, making it develop from an ordinary occupation to a specialized occupation, and obtaining a professional status is the ultimate goal ^[2]. Gu Jianhui believes that the process of the professional construction

of teaching management personnel is a process of continuously improving professional qualities and gradually growing into professional teaching management workers^[3]. Third, research on the ways of the professionalism of the teaching management team. Hong Zaoqing analyzes the mechanism and path of teaching management reform from the perspective of benchmarking first-class undergraduate education^[4]. Chen Xingming believes that professionalism is the process in which the teaching team reaches professional standards at the entire professional level and the process in which individual management personnel continuously develop and improve^[5]. In foreign research on the connotation of the teaching management team, scholars pay more attention to the higher education in some developed countries. First, in terms of research content, it is more focused on the research on the current situation, reform trends, and basic characteristics of foreign education management. According to the relevant foreign materials consulted, most of the literature comes from comparative education. Second, due to different systems, foreign cognition and relevant research on teaching management professionalism are significantly different from those in China. Forgie points out that this trend of internal management reform is the professionalism of school management and teaching management^[6]. Third, research on a unified professional organization for teaching management. Behling proposes to improve the pre-job and on-the-job training of school management personnel^[7].

2.2. Research on the professional characteristics of the teaching management team

At present, the content of teaching management is more abundant, the complexity is increasing, the requirements for teaching management are higher, and the requirements for the professional qualities and professional management abilities of teaching management personnel are also getting higher and higher. First, analysis of the basic characteristics of university teaching management. Wang Ying points out that the basic characteristics of the professionalism of university teaching management include integrity, dynamics, academic nature, orientation, democracy, and service^[8]. Therefore, it is necessary to create a high-quality and high-level teaching management team. Second, research on the characteristics of the teaching management process. Scholars believe that teaching management takes the whole process of teaching as the object, follows the objective laws of teaching activities, and uses the theories, principles, and methods of modern scientific management to mobilize the enthusiasm of teachers and students to the greatest extent. Third, research on the professional qualities of individual teaching management personnel. Qin Yefei believes that the professional qualities of teaching management personnel should include professional qualities, professional knowledge and skills, and professional practical abilities^[9]. They need to have a high sense of responsibility and dedication, a good service attitude, master modern and scientific educational concepts, and professional knowledge of teaching management. Similar to the prevailing research in China, in the relevant research of foreign scholars, the higher education system is regarded as an academic organization, which is mainly composed of groups that produce knowledge. The basic elements of teaching management professionalism include beliefs, power, and work. On this basis, the development laws and characteristics of higher education are explored.

2.3. Research on the paths of the professional construction of the teaching management team

Regarding the main dilemmas and problems faced by universities in the construction of the teaching management team, domestic scholars' research focuses on different aspects. First, analysis of the problems in the professional construction of teaching management. Huang Jianxiong summarizes the problems into four aspects: the team is not fully staffed, the personnel are unstable, the professional survival state is poor, and the overall attractiveness of the position is not high^[10]. Hu Jinxia believes that the main problems faced by the professionalism of university teaching management personnel are the lack of professional guidance and long-term planning, and universities must attach importance to improving the professional level of teaching management personnel^[11]. Second, research on the professional management system of the teaching management team. Yang Guangying proposes that university leaders should attach great importance to the professional construction of the teaching management team^[12]. In terms of implementation paths, domestic scholars conduct research from the school level and the individual level, and establish a professional training system relying on the teacher development center. Gong Yuqiang points out that the teacher training mechanism in secondary colleges should

be strengthened^[13]. Third, analysis of the optimization measures for the teaching team. Deng Zhibin points out that the optimization of the teaching management team belongs to the category of the optimal allocation of human resources^[14]. Foreign scholars have the following main views on how to build a professional teaching management team: First, organize and implement the professionalism of teaching management personnel together with the knowledge and skills, professional organizations, professional ethics, and professional autonomy required for promoting and developing the teaching management profession. Second, Kolomitro proposes to improve the professional development of teaching managers and the professional development of the teaching management profession, but the professionalism of teaching managers is the main aspect^[15].

2.4. Research review

Overall, there is less research on this topic in the academic community. There is more research on top-level design, ability evaluation, basic principles, etc., but less research on specific connotation sorting, dilemma analysis, and institutional design. The domestic and foreign understanding of the connotation of the professional construction of the teaching management team includes the specialized construction and ability improvement of knowledge, skills, qualities, psychology, etc., involving two levels of teaching professionalism and management professionalism. Local undergraduate universities are a unique group in the development of Chinese higher education. Although foreign community colleges or regional universities are similar, there are significant differences in school-running orientation and management concepts.

3. Realistic dilemmas in the professionalization of the teaching management team in local undergraduate universities

Modern teaching management has shifted from traditional academic affairs operation to systematic projects such as strategic planning, quality assurance, and teaching reform coordination. The university-level teaching management team, as the center of the teaching governance system, needs to coordinate core functions such as the design of talent cultivation programs, teaching quality monitoring, and the promotion of teaching reform. However, restricted by resource endowment and historical evolution, local undergraduate universities generally have a tendency of “emphasizing use and neglecting cultivation” in their teaching management teams, and the lag in their professionalism has become a bottleneck restricting the deepening of education and teaching reform. Facing up to their development dilemmas and exploring solutions is of urgent significance for promoting the modernization of governance in local undergraduate universities.

3.1. Problems of imbalance in personnel allocation and structure

The teaching management teams in local undergraduate universities have long faced the structural contradiction of the co-existence of “shortage in quantity” and “insufficiency in quality”. Surveys show that more than 60% of local undergraduate universities have not staffed teaching management personnel according to the ratio of teachers to students, and there are problems such as low educational levels and misaligned professional backgrounds. Most of the management personnel are transferred from administrative personnel, and those with professional backgrounds in education and management account for less than 30%, and the proportion of those with a doctoral degree is even lower. This kind of allocation causes management activities to stay at the transactional level such as course scheduling and examination organization, lacking professional support for strategic work such as the OBE concept, discipline and professional optimization, and teaching quality diagnosis.

3.2. Dilemmas in professional survival state and identity recognition

In the aspect of the professional ecosystem, teaching management personnel face a survival state of “three lows and one high”: low attractiveness of the position, low salary and benefits, low professional prestige, and high workload. Their positions are mostly positioned as the “teaching support sequence”, the salary levels are generally lower than those of

full-time teachers, the promotion channels for professional titles are narrow, and the evaluation and appointment criteria are vague. In a survey of local universities in a certain province, 78% of teaching management personnel thought that “the professional development prospects are unclear”, and 53% regarded the position as a “transitional choice”. This identity anxiety and loss of value lead the team to fall into the paradox of “difficult to stabilize” and “difficult to flow”: the backbone personnel continue to leave, while the personnel who are not suitable for the position remain and solidify.

3.3. Problem of the lack of a professional support system

Local undergraduate universities have long lacked a systematic design for the professional development of the teaching management team, which is prominently manifested in the following aspects:

(1) Fragmented training system

Only 29% of the universities have established a hierarchical training system, and the average annual training time of department-and college-level management personnel is less than 16 hours

(2) Lack of professional standards

The job responsibilities are vaguely described, lacking a core ability model and a certification system

(3) Weak academic support

Teaching management research is not included in the scientific research evaluation system, and management personnel have insufficient motivation to carry out teaching academic research.

This lack of support makes management personnel fall into an experience-dependent work mode and difficult to cope with professional challenges such as credit-system reform and the construction of a quality assurance system.

3.4. Obstacles in the management system and power allocation

There is a significant phenomenon of “inverted power and responsibility” in teaching management: The university-level departments have excessive centralization of power, and the autonomous space of departments and colleges is compressed. Some studies point out that more than 40% of local undergraduate universities still implement a vertical control-type management model, and departments and colleges lack the right to speak in key matters such as curriculum setting, teacher recruitment, and quality evaluation. This leads to two major drawbacks: First, management decisions deviate from the actual situation of disciplines and majors, resulting in the mismatch of “applying liberal arts templates to engineering management”; Second, management personnel become the terminal executors of transactions, and their innovation ability is institutionally suppressed.

4. Path innovation for the professional development of the teaching management team

4.1. System reconstruction and top-level design

4.1.1. Re-creation of career development channels

Establish a three-channel development system, setting up a management expert sequence, a professional and technical title sequence, and a dual-track sequence of teaching and academia to break through the bottleneck of career promotion.

4.1.2. Construction of professional standards

Formulate the “Capacity Framework for Teaching Managers”, covering four major dimensions: teaching strategic planning ability, quality assurance technology, digital governance literacy, and leadership in teaching reform.

4.1.3. Reform of establishment and salary

Set up a separate establishment for teaching managers and establish a salary model that combines job value and performance contribution to ensure that the salary competitiveness of core positions is not lower than the average level of teachers in the same institution.

4.2. Competence remodeling and classified training

Implement a precise empowerment plan for managers at different levels. The school-level management should focus on strategic planning and governance capabilities, and carry out special research on policies of higher education, institutional research, and international comparative education. Department-level teaching directors need to strengthen practical abilities such as discipline and professional construction, curriculum development, and OBE program design. Young teachers should master basic skills such as operation and maintenance of the educational administration system, data analysis, and process optimization.

4.3. Technological empowerment and improvement of digital literacy

Digitalization is the key lever to break through the bottleneck of management efficiency. Efforts should be made to promote the construction of a smart management platform, integrating functions such as educational administration management, quality monitoring, and learning analysis. Support functions such as classroom inspection and evaluation, school situation analysis, and visualization of disciplinary data.

In-depth application of AI technology: Deploy tools such as intelligent course scheduling systems, academic early-warning models, and virtual teaching and research offices to reduce the workload of routine administrative tasks.

4.4. Cultural identity and innovation of incentive mechanisms

4.4.1. Construction of a teaching and academic community

Incorporate teaching management research into the scientific research evaluation system, and encourage managers to participate in curriculum design research, learning science experiments, and theoretical research on quality assurance.

4.4.2. Re-shaping of value identity

Enhance the sense of professional dignity, promote the management reform at both school and department levels, delegate powers such as professional construction, curriculum approval, and teacher evaluation to departments to stimulate innovation in grass-roots management.

5. Conclusions and prospects

The professionalization of the teaching management team in local undergraduate institutions is the key support for the connotative development of higher education. To solve the development dilemma, we need to get rid of the fragmented repair thinking and instead construct a systematic solution covering system design, capacity building, technological empowerment, and cultural reconstruction. Future research needs to further explore: the balance mechanism between management ethics and efficiency in the digital transformation; the path for the academicization of teaching management to be in line with international certification standards; the resource-sharing model of regional university management alliances. Only by placing the teaching management team at the core of the modernization of higher education can we truly unleash the educational vitality and innovation potential of local undergraduate institutions.

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