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# Faculty Resource Allocation in Public Higher Education of the Global South: Challenges and Optimization Strategies of Rural Universities in South Asia

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**Abstract:** Faculty resources are the core of high-quality higher education development, and their equitable allocation is a key to realizing inclusive education in the Global South. This study takes rural public universities in three typical South Asian countries (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan) as research objects, adopts literature research, comparative analysis and critical analysis methods to explore the practical predicaments of faculty resource allocation in regional rural public higher education. The results show that rural public universities in South Asia face four interlocking challenges: severe shortage of qualified full-time faculty, serious brain drain of excellent teachers, uneven disciplinary distribution of faculty resources, and insufficient professional development support for teachers. From a critical perspective, these predicaments are not simply caused by resource scarcity, but are the concrete manifestation of social inequality reproduction in the higher education field, rooted in colonial education legacies, urban-biased policy orientation, inadequate public funding, and marginalized social identity of rural higher education. Based on the actual development of rural higher education in South Asia, this study puts forward targeted optimization strategies: constructing an equity-oriented faculty resource allocation mechanism, improving the faculty incentive and retention system, strengthening professional development support for rural university teachers, and promoting resource sharing through urban-rural university collaboration. This research provides practical references for the equitable allocation of faculty resources in rural public higher education in the Global South and the high-quality development of rural higher education.

**Keywords:** Faculty Resource Allocation; Rural Public Higher Education; Global South; South Asia; Educational Equity; Rural Higher Education Development

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background and Significance

Higher education is an important driving force for social and economic development in the Global South, and rural public higher education, as an integral part of the national higher education system, undertakes the mission of cultivating applied talents for rural revitalization, narrowing the urban-rural development gap and promoting social equity. Faculty resources,

as the core human capital of higher education, directly determine the teaching quality, talent cultivation level and social service capacity of universities (Altbach & Balán, 2021)<sup>[1]</sup>. The rational and equitable allocation of faculty resources is the basic guarantee for the sustainable development of rural public higher education, and also an important embodiment of the inclusive development of higher education in the Global South.

South Asia, a core region of the Global South with the world's largest rural population, has witnessed rapid expansion of rural public higher education scale in recent decades with the promotion of higher education popularization<sup>[2]</sup>. However, the development of rural public higher education in South Asia is severely restricted by unreasonable faculty resource allocation: a large number of rural public universities are troubled by faculty shortage, low quality, serious brain drain and uneven disciplinary distribution, which directly leads to low teaching quality and poor social recognition of rural higher education, and further exacerbates urban-rural inequality in the higher education field<sup>[3, 4]</sup>.

Exploring the challenges and optimization strategies of faculty resource allocation in rural public universities in South Asia is of great practical significance. On the one hand, it can help South Asian countries solve the practical predicaments of rural higher education development, improve the level of faculty resource allocation and promote the high-quality development of rural public higher education. On the other hand, it can provide empirical references for other countries and regions in the Global South facing similar rural higher education development problems, and enrich the research results of faculty resource allocation in the Global South's higher education field.

## 1.2. Literature Review and Research Gaps

International scholars' research on faculty resource allocation in the Global South's higher education mainly focuses on the current situation, influencing factors and optimization strategies. Altbach & Balán (2021)<sup>[1]</sup> pointed out that the Global South's higher education generally faces faculty shortage and brain drain, and rural higher education is in a more disadvantaged position in resource competition. UNESCO (2024) emphasized that government funding and policy orientation are the key factors affecting faculty resource allocation in the Global South's rural higher education. For South Asian higher education, local and international scholars have carried out targeted research: Singh & Kaur (2023)<sup>[3]</sup> analyzed the faculty shortage and brain drain problems of rural public universities in India; Aziz & Sharif (2022)<sup>[4]</sup> studied the impact of faculty resource scarcity on teaching quality in Bangladesh's rural higher education; Ali & Khan (2024)<sup>[5]</sup> pointed out the uneven disciplinary distribution of faculty in Pakistan's rural public universities.

However, the existing research still has obvious gaps: first, most studies focus on a single South Asian country, lacking cross-national comparative analysis of rural public universities in South Asia, and failing to summarize the common challenges of regional faculty resource allocation; second, most studies stay at the level of phenomenon description, lacking in-depth critical analysis of the root causes of faculty resource allocation dilemmas from the perspective of social structure and inequality reproduction; third, the proposed optimization strategies are relatively general, lacking targeted and operable measures combined with the actual situation of rural higher education in South Asia.

Based on the above research gaps, this study takes rural public universities in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan as research objects, carries out cross-national comparative analysis, deeply explores the common challenges and root causes of faculty resource allocation in South Asia's rural public higher education, and puts forward targeted optimization strategies, so as to make up for the deficiencies of existing research.

## 1.3. Research Methods and Structure

This study mainly adopts three research methods: literature research method, which collects and sorts out policy documents, statistical yearbooks, research papers and reports related to rural public higher education in South Asian countries to obtain basic data and research results; comparative analysis method, which carries out cross-national comparative analysis of the faculty resource allocation status of rural public universities in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan to summarize common challenges; critical analysis method, which reveals the deep-seated causes of faculty resource allocation dilemmas from the perspective of social inequality and structural factors.

This paper is structured as follows: the first part is the introduction, expounding research background, significance, literature gaps and research methods; the second part analyzes the common challenges of faculty resource allocation in rural public universities in South Asia through cross-national comparison; the third part makes a critical analysis of the root causes of the allocation dilemmas from four aspects: historical, political, economic and social factors; the fourth part puts forward targeted optimization strategies combined with the actual situation of South Asian rural higher education; the fifth part is the conclusion, summarizing main research findings, pointing out research limitations and future research prospects.

## **2. Common Challenges of Faculty Resource Allocation in Rural Public Universities in South Asia**

India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are the most populous countries in South Asia, and their rural public higher education development is highly representative. Through the comparative analysis of the three countries' rural public universities, four common and interlocking challenges of faculty resource allocation in South Asia's rural public higher education are summarized, which are the core bottlenecks restricting the development of regional rural higher education.

### **2.1. Severe Shortage of Qualified Faculty and High Proportion of Part-Time Faculty**

The most prominent problem of faculty resource allocation in South Asia's rural public universities is the severe shortage of qualified full-time faculty, and the proportion of part-time faculty is extremely high, which seriously affects the stability of the teaching team and the continuity of teaching. In India, the student-teacher ratio of rural public universities is as high as 40:1, far exceeding the national higher education standard of 15:1, and more than 50% of the faculty in most rural public universities are unqualified part-time teachers<sup>[3]</sup>. In Bangladesh, the student-teacher ratio of rural public universities reaches 50:1, and the proportion of part-time faculty in some rural universities is even as high as 60%, most of whom have no formal teaching qualifications and unstable teaching time<sup>[4]</sup>. In Pakistan, the proportion of part-time faculty in rural public universities is about 45%, and the shortage of full-time faculty leads to the cancellation of many professional courses, resulting in a single disciplinary structure of rural universities<sup>[5]</sup>.

In addition to the absolute shortage of quantity, the relative shortage of faculty quality is also prominent: the proportion of faculty with master's degree or above and associate professor or above in South Asia's rural public universities is only about 30% and 15% respectively, while the corresponding proportions in urban elite public universities are as high as 80% and 60%<sup>[3]</sup>. The double shortage of faculty quantity and quality directly leads to the low teaching quality of rural public universities and cannot meet the needs of applied talent cultivation for rural development.

### **2.2. Serious Brain Drain and Difficulty in Retaining Excellent Faculty**

Brain drain is another serious challenge faced by South Asia's rural public universities, and a large number of excellent faculty flow to urban elite universities or foreign countries, resulting in the loss of core teaching resources of rural universities. The annual brain drain rate of excellent faculty in India's rural public universities is as high as 20%, and most of them flow to well-known urban universities such as the Indian Institute of Technology or go to Europe and America for employment<sup>[3]</sup>. In Bangladesh, the annual brain drain rate<sup>[3]</sup> of rural public university faculty is about 18%, and the main flow direction is urban elite universities in Dhaka and Chittagong and Southeast Asian countries with better economic development<sup>[4]</sup>. In Pakistan, about 15% of the excellent faculty in rural public universities flow out every year, mostly to urban universities in Islamabad and Lahore or the Middle East<sup>[5]</sup>.

The brain drain of South Asia's rural public universities shows the characteristics of "high-quality and young-oriented": the lost faculty are mostly young and middle-aged teachers with high academic qualifications, strong professional ability and good development potential. This kind of brain drain forms a vicious circle: the loss of excellent faculty leads to the decline of teaching quality and social recognition of rural universities, which in turn makes it more difficult to attract and retain excellent faculty, further exacerbating the shortage of faculty resources<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 2.3. Uneven Disciplinary Distribution of Faculty and Shortage of Applied Discipline Faculty

The disciplinary distribution of faculty in South Asia's rural public universities is extremely uneven, showing the characteristics of "surplus in liberal arts and shortage in applied disciplines", which is seriously inconsistent with the positioning of rural public universities to cultivate applied and technical talents for rural development. In India, the proportion of liberal arts faculty in rural public universities is as high as 70%, while the proportion of applied discipline faculty such as STEM, agriculture and engineering is only about 30%<sup>[3]</sup>. In Bangladesh, the proportion of liberal arts faculty in rural public universities is about 65%, and many rural universities have no full-time faculty in agricultural engineering and medical care, unable to offer relevant professional courses<sup>[4]</sup>. In Pakistan, the shortage of STEM and vocational technical discipline faculty in rural public universities is the most serious, leading to a single professional setting and poor employability of graduates<sup>[5]</sup>.

The main reasons for the uneven disciplinary distribution are the low recruitment threshold of liberal arts faculty and the high threshold of applied discipline faculty, as well as the lack of practical teaching conditions in rural universities. Rural public universities cannot bear the high recruitment cost of applied discipline faculty due to insufficient funding, and the lack of laboratories and practice bases makes it difficult to carry out practical teaching of applied disciplines, resulting in few applied discipline faculty willing to work in rural universities<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 2.4. Insufficient Professional Development Support and Low Professional Ability of Faculty

Insufficient professional development support for faculty is an important factor restricting the improvement of teaching quality in South Asia's rural public universities. Due to insufficient government funding and poor school-running benefits, rural public universities have almost no special funding for faculty professional development, and teachers cannot participate in academic conferences, professional training and further study due to financial constraints<sup>[1]</sup>. At the same time, rural universities lack professional development platforms such as disciplinary construction and mentorship systems for young faculty, and the marginalized positioning of rural higher education makes faculty have few opportunities to participate in national and international academic exchanges, resulting in slow update of professional knowledge and teaching methods<sup>[3]</sup>.

The insufficient professional development support directly leads to the low professional ability of the faculty team in rural public universities: a large number of teachers still use traditional lecture-based teaching methods, lack innovative teaching concepts and practical teaching ability, and the curriculum content lags behind the needs of social development. This not only affects the quality of talent cultivation, but also leads to poor employability of graduates of rural public universities, further reducing the social recognition of rural higher education.

## 3. Critical Analysis of the Root Causes of Faculty Resource Allocation Dilemmas

The faculty resource allocation dilemmas of South Asia's rural public universities are not simply caused by resource scarcity, but are the concrete manifestation of social inequality reproduction in the higher education field, rooted in multiple interlocking factors such as historical, political, economic and social factors. These factors interact and jointly construct an unjust faculty resource allocation mechanism, which further exacerbates the marginalization of rural higher education.

### 3.1. Historical Factor: Colonial Education Legacy and Urban-Rural Dual Educational Structure

South Asian countries were all Western colonial countries in modern times, and the colonial government established an elite-oriented urban education system for colonial rule needs, concentrating a large number of educational resources in a few urban elite institutions and ignoring the development of rural education<sup>[6]</sup>. This colonial education legacy has formed a deep-rooted urban-rural dual educational structure in South Asia, which has not been fundamentally changed after the independence of South Asian countries.

After independence, South Asian governments still focused on the development of urban elite higher education, and a large number of educational resources were concentrated in urban universities, while rural higher education was in a marginalized position in the national higher education system<sup>[1]</sup>. At the same time, the colonial education concept of “serving urban elite and international market” has been inherited, making South Asian higher education divorced from rural social and economic development, and rural public universities unable to form a clear positioning of serving rural development, which is difficult to attract and retain excellent faculty resources<sup>[3]</sup>.

### **3.2. Political Factor: Urban-Biased Policy Orientation and Elite-Oriented Development Model**

The urban-biased policy orientation and elite-oriented higher education development model are the direct political causes of the faculty resource allocation dilemmas. In the post-independence development process, South Asian governments adopted an urban-biased economic and social development model, concentrating a large number of political, economic and educational resources in urban areas<sup>[2]</sup>. This model is directly reflected in the higher education field: the government takes the development of urban elite public universities as the core, and a large number of faculty, funding and other resources are tilted to urban elite universities through unified allocation policies, while rural public universities receive very limited policy support<sup>[6]</sup>.

The “unified allocation + market competition” faculty resource allocation mechanism adopted by South Asian countries has formed a “resource siphon effect” of urban elite universities on rural universities: the government allocates excellent faculty to urban elite universities through mandatory policies, and urban elite universities attract more excellent faculty from rural universities through high salaries and good working conditions<sup>[4]</sup>. At the same time, the government has not established a targeted faculty incentive and retention system for rural public universities, which further exacerbates the faculty shortage and brain drain in rural universities.

### **3.3. Economic Factor: Inadequate Public Funding and Widening Urban-Rural Economic Gap**

Inadequate public funding for rural higher education and the widening urban-rural economic development gap are the fundamental economic causes of the faculty resource allocation dilemmas. South Asian countries are all developing countries with limited fiscal revenue, and most of the limited higher education funding is concentrated in urban elite public universities: the government funding for urban elite universities in India accounts for about 80% of the total higher education funding, while the funding for rural public universities only accounts for about 20%<sup>[3]</sup>. The proportion of government funding for rural public universities in Bangladesh and Pakistan is even lower, only about 15%<sup>[4,5]</sup>. Inadequate funding makes rural public universities unable to afford the high salary and recruitment cost of excellent faculty, and can only recruit a large number of low-quality part-time teachers.

The widening urban-rural economic gap further worsens the brain drain problem: the per capita income of urban residents in South Asia is 3-5 times that of rural residents, and urban areas have better living conditions, medical care and public services<sup>[2]</sup>. Under this background, excellent faculty in rural universities are more willing to flow to urban areas for employment, because urban areas have higher salaries, better working conditions and more professional development opportunities. The poor economic development of rural areas also makes rural public universities unable to obtain social funding support, and the school-running conditions are difficult to improve, forming a vicious circle of economic backwardness and resource scarcity.

### **3.4. Social Factor: Social Stratification and Marginalized Social Identity of Rural Higher Education**

Serious social stratification and the marginalized social identity of rural higher education are the important social causes of the faculty resource allocation dilemmas. South Asian countries have a serious caste system and social class differentiation, and rural residents are in the lower layer of the social structure<sup>[6]</sup>. Rural higher education, as the education serving rural residents, is also labeled with the “rural” attribute and is regarded as “second-class higher education” in social cognition, while urban elite higher education is regarded as the “cradle of elite talents” with high social recognition. This social

cognition makes excellent faculty unwilling to work in rural public universities, because it means lower social status and limited professional development space<sup>[3]</sup>.

The marginalized social identity of rural higher education leads to poor employability of graduates, which further affects the resource acquisition capacity of rural public universities. Due to low teaching quality and single disciplinary structure, the graduates of rural public universities can only obtain low-income jobs in rural areas or small and medium-sized cities, resulting in low social reputation and attraction of rural universities<sup>[4]</sup>. It is difficult for rural universities to attract excellent students and faculty resources, and the school-running benefits are poor, which further exacerbates the marginalization of rural higher education.

## **4. Optimization Strategies of Faculty Resource Allocation in Rural Public Universities in South Asia**

Based on the common challenges and root causes of faculty resource allocation in South Asia's rural public universities, combined with the actual development of rural higher education in South Asia and the successful experience of the Global South, this study puts forward four targeted optimization strategies, adhering to the principles of "equity first, local adaptation and systematic reform", aiming to solve the practical predicaments of faculty resource allocation and promote the high-quality development of rural public higher education.

### **4.1. Construct an Equity-Oriented Faculty Resource Allocation Mechanism**

Constructing an equity-oriented faculty resource allocation mechanism is the fundamental way to solve the allocation dilemmas. First, the government should change the urban-biased policy orientation, formulate a unified faculty recruitment and allocation plan for rural public universities, and allocate a certain proportion of excellent faculty resources to rural universities through mandatory policy means to solve the problem of faculty shortage. Second, establish a faculty resource allocation compensation mechanism for rural public universities, increase the quota of faculty recruitment, professional title evaluation and scientific research project application for rural universities, and adopt a "local adaptation" professional title evaluation standard for rural university faculty, appropriately reducing the requirements for scientific research achievements and increasing the weight of teaching performance and local service contributions<sup>[3]</sup>. Third, tilt the faculty resource allocation to applied disciplines, set up special funding for the recruitment of applied discipline faculty in rural public universities, and subsidize the recruitment cost of applied discipline faculty, so as to solve the problem of uneven disciplinary distribution and meet the needs of applied talent cultivation for rural development<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **4.2. Improve the Faculty Incentive and Retention System**

Improving the faculty incentive and retention system is the key to retaining excellent faculty and solving the brain drain problem. First, improve the salary and welfare system of rural university faculty, implement a "rural subsidy" system, and the government should increase fiscal investment and set up a special faculty salary subsidy fund to ensure that the salary level of rural university faculty is not lower than that of urban university faculty<sup>[1]</sup>. Second, improve the working and living conditions of rural university faculty, build faculty dormitories, offices, laboratories and other infrastructure, solve the practical difficulties of faculty in medical care, children's education and other aspects, and enhance the sense of belonging and identity of faculty<sup>[4]</sup>. Third, establish a career development incentive mechanism, give priority to the promotion and further study of faculty who have worked in rural public universities for a long time, set up special scholarships for rural university faculty to study abroad, and provide a clear career development path for rural university faculty<sup>[5]</sup>.

### **4.3. Strengthen Professional Development Support for Rural University Faculty**

Strengthening professional development support is an important guarantee for improving the professional ability of the faculty team in rural public universities. First, the government and rural universities should jointly set up a special faculty

professional development fund, increase investment in faculty training, and allow rural university faculty to participate in academic conferences, professional training and further study for free. Second, build a diversified professional development platform for rural university faculty, establish a mentorship system for young faculty, pair young faculty with excellent senior faculty for one-on-one guidance, and strengthen the construction of disciplinary and professional platforms, establish cooperative research centers with local enterprises and research institutions to provide practical teaching and scientific research opportunities for faculty<sup>[3]</sup>. Third, promote academic exchange and cooperation between urban and rural universities, organize regular academic exchange activities between urban elite university faculty and rural university faculty, speed up the update of professional knowledge and teaching methods of rural university faculty, and introduce foreign advanced teaching concepts through international cooperation in higher education<sup>[2]</sup>.

#### **4.4. Promote Urban-Rural University Collaboration and Realize Faculty Resource Sharing**

Promoting urban-rural university collaboration and resource sharing is an effective way to make up for the shortage of faculty resources in rural public universities with low cost. First, the government should establish a faculty resource sharing mechanism between urban and rural universities, organize urban elite public universities to send excellent faculty to rural public universities for part-time teaching, lectures and scientific research cooperation on a regular basis, and give policy incentives and material rewards to urban university faculty who participate in rural university teaching work, such as adding points in professional title evaluation and giving special subsidies<sup>[1]</sup>. Second, carry out in-depth disciplinary and professional cooperation between urban and rural universities, urban elite universities use their disciplinary advantages to help rural public universities build characteristic disciplines and applied majors, and train applied discipline faculty for rural universities through joint training and on-the-job guidance<sup>[4]</sup>. Third, promote cross-regional faculty resource sharing among rural public universities in South Asia, realize mutual employment and resource complementarity of faculty in different disciplines and majors, and solve the problem of insufficient faculty in individual disciplines of rural universities<sup>[5]</sup>.

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1. Main Research Findings**

This study takes rural public universities in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan as research objects, explores the challenges and root causes of faculty resource allocation in South Asia's rural public higher education, and puts forward targeted optimization strategies. The main research findings are as follows: first, South Asia's rural public universities face four common challenges of faculty resource allocation: severe shortage of qualified faculty, serious brain drain, uneven disciplinary distribution and insufficient professional development support; second, these challenges are rooted in multiple interlocking factors such as colonial education legacies, urban-biased policy orientation, inadequate public funding, and marginalized social identity of rural higher education, and are the concrete manifestation of social inequality reproduction in the higher education field; third, solving the faculty resource allocation dilemmas requires systematic reforms, including constructing an equity-oriented allocation mechanism, improving the incentive and retention system, strengthening professional development support, and promoting urban-rural university collaboration and resource sharing.

### **5.2. Research Limitations and Future Prospects**

This study has certain limitations: first, the research data is mainly secondary empirical data such as policy documents and existing research results, lacking primary empirical data such as field investigation and questionnaire survey of rural public universities in South Asia; second, the research object is limited to three South Asian countries, and does not involve other South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka and Nepal, so the research results cannot fully reflect the overall situation of South Asia's rural public higher education.

In the future, the research can be carried out from the following aspects: first, carry out in-depth primary empirical

research, conduct field investigations on rural public universities in South Asian countries to obtain first-hand data and verify and enrich the research results; second, expand the research scope, include more South Asian countries and other regions of the Global South such as Africa and Latin America in the research object, and carry out cross-regional comparative research; third, deepen the research on the micro implementation paths of optimization strategies, combine the actual situation of different countries and rural universities, and study the specific operation plans of the strategies to make them more targeted and operable.

### 5.3. Practical Enlightenment for the Global South

The faculty resource allocation dilemmas of South Asia's rural public universities are a common problem faced by the Global South's rural higher education development. The research findings of this study have important practical enlightenment for the Global South: first, the equitable allocation of faculty resources is the core of the high-quality development of rural higher education, and the government should take the main responsibility, change the urban-biased policy orientation and increase the investment in rural higher education; second, the faculty resource allocation of rural higher education should be combined with the local social and economic development, and focus on cultivating applied talents for rural revitalization to form a school-running characteristic of rural universities; third, solving the faculty resource allocation dilemmas requires systematic reforms, not only focusing on the improvement of hardware conditions such as salary and welfare, but also paying attention to the construction of software conditions such as professional development and social identity.

The development of rural higher education is an important way to narrow the urban-rural development gap and promote social equity in the Global South. It is hoped that this research can attract more scholars and policymakers to pay attention to the development of rural higher education in the Global South, and provide practical references for the equitable allocation of faculty resources and the high-quality development of rural higher education in the Global South.

### Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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