

The Ecological Challenges of Academic Development for Young Teachers in Minzu Colleges and Universities

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Abstract: Under the background of the "Double First-Class" initiative, local minzu colleges and universities, as an integral part of Chinese education, play a crucial role in talent cultivation, scientific research, community service, and cultural heritage and innovation in the new era. Young teachers have become a key factor constraining the development of these institutions. Based on the theory of human ecological development, this article comprehensively considers aspects such as organizational culture, academic culture, and disciplinary ecological environment that young teachers in local minzu colleges and universities experience during their academic growth process. It aims to understand the real ecological conditions of their development and identifies the challenges faced by young teachers in local minzu colleges and universities. These challenges primarily include the need for improvement in the organizational culture environment within the school's internal governance structure, the urgency to stimulate research and innovation dynamics in the academic ecological environment, and the necessity to optimize the overall organic structure of the disciplinary ecological environment. To create a positive environment for the growth of young teachers, where they can fully utilize their talents and potential, local minzu colleges and universities should analyze the reasons, using the basic principles of human ecological development theory, and engage in systematic thinking while considering their own talent development practices.

Keywords: Local Minzu Colleges and Universities; Young Teachers; Human Development Ecological Theory; Growth

1. Introduction

The quality of the environment has a direct

impact on the aggregation of talents and the prosperity of careers. A favorable environment tends to attract talents and foster growth, while an unfavorable environment may lead to talent dispersal and decline in achievements. The environment for talent development is a critical factor in talent competition. Talents need to be nurtured within a healthy and well-rounded ecosystem to thrive.

The Ministry of Education and other relevant departments issued the "Guiding Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of 'Double First-Class' Universities" in 2018, emphasizing the importance of building a high-quality teacher workforce in higher education institutions [1]. Minzu colleges and universities, as important components of Chinese higher education, often face challenges due to factors such as their regional economic conditions, historical and cultural backgrounds, and geographical locations. Their development has been considered a weak link in higher education, necessitating further strengthening.

Many local minzu colleges and universities are located in border areas, such as Sichuan Minzu College. These regions are often characterized by sparse populations, relatively underdeveloped economies, distinct cultural features, and limited educational resources, which may make it less attractive to talent.

To address these challenges, local minzu colleges and universities have increased their investment in the construction of young teacher teams in recent years and have achieved significant results. In the current context of the "Double First-Class" initiative, young teachers are considered a vital force for university development, carrying significant historical missions and social responsibilities [2]. However, there is no consensus across institutions on how to create a growth environment that aligns with the needs of both the university's development and the teachers' growth patterns. Specific planning requires

further exploration through practical experience and theoretical research.

Optimizing the ecological environment for teacher growth and promoting the healthy development of the teaching workforce to meet the demands of discipline development in local minzu colleges and universities has become one of the key research areas in the current landscape of ethnic higher education.

The definition of young university teachers, especially regarding age, generally refers to full-time teachers in regular higher education institutions who possess a higher education teaching qualification certificate and are engaged in teaching, scientific research, and administrative work, and are under the age of 40 [3]. Some universities may adjust the age criteria for young teachers due to factors such as geographical location. The teaching staff at local minzu colleges and universities are gradually becoming younger. Sichuan Minzu College is a local minzu college located in a remote area. It offers authorized disciplines in 10 categories, excluding military science, philosophy, and medicine. The overall quality of its faculty has significantly improved, and the university shares common characteristics with other local minzu colleges and universities in terms of its faculty structure.

Currently, the college is in a phase of solid transformation from an application-oriented institution to one with enriched content. The college, both in terms of its educational positioning and geographical location, embodies the typical features of local minzu colleges and universities. In recent years, the university has made significant efforts in building its faculty, with young teachers accounting for 65% of the teaching staff. Against the backdrop of the "Double First-Class" initiative, local minzu colleges and universities are expected to establish high-quality teaching teams and develop mechanisms for the growth of young talents. However, the reality is that young teachers at this college are facing various ecological challenges in their academic development, which have become critical factors constraining the college's overall development, the level of discipline construction, and the quality of talent cultivation.

2. The Logical Connection between Human Development Ecological Theory and the

Academic Growth of Young Teachers

The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design discusses the ecological orientation of human development research, providing a new theoretical perspective for the field of human development studies. The ecological perspective offers a fresh interpretation of the concepts of human development and environment, as well as their interrelationships. It posits that 'human development ecology' is a discipline that studies the adaptive processes between continually growing organisms and the changing environments they inhabit. This adaptation of organisms to their immediate environments is influenced by interactions among various environmental factors and the larger context in which these environments exist [4].

The ecological environment, with the development of individuals at its core, is comprised of environmental systems influenced by various factors at different levels, interwoven from the center outward. Bronfenbrenner classifies the ecological environment into four levels based on the closeness of interaction between different environmental levels and individuals: the Macrosystem, Exosystem, Mesosystem, and Microsystem. Additionally, the chronosystem spans across all these systems.

The macrosystem encompasses the lower-level systems (exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem) and emphasizes internal consistency. Analyzing the macrosystem involves examining cultural or subcultural factors, belief systems, and ideologies that influence individual development. In the context of the growth environment for young teachers at local minzu colleges and universities, the macrosystem primarily involves trends in ethnic higher education and advocacy for optimizing the academic environment.

The exosystem refers to one or more environmental elements that do not directly involve individuals but nonetheless have an impact on individual development. The external system in the growth environment of young teachers at minzu colleges and universities mainly relates to the educational philosophy, research atmosphere, and management systems of these institutions.

The mesosystem consists of interactive

relationships between two or more environmental elements in which individuals actively participate, also referred to as microsystem-like systems. It forms and strengthens as developing individuals enter new environments, indicating that in addition to the primary connections in individual development, other formal or informal interactions within social networks also influence individual development. In the growth environment of young teachers at local minzu colleges and universities, the mesosystem primarily involves interactions between young teachers and students, teachers, and school leaders.

The microsystem refers to the activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships that developing individuals experience in environments with specific physical and material characteristics. In the microsystem, developing individuals engage in face-to-face interactions. The microsystem of young teacher growth at local minzu colleges and universities will be discussed in terms of the activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships of young teachers.

The chronosystem indicates that with the passage of time, the way elements in each system affect developing individuals changes. This means that the systems at various levels around the individual will change over time, and different systems will exhibit certain dynamic characteristics at different stages. These changes in the study manifest as external impositions, such as changes in school policies or shifts in management philosophies after leadership changes, as well as internal influences, such as the personal experiences of young teachers affecting their growth.

The ecological theory of multiple systems in human development posits that individuals' development is realized through the interaction between developing individuals and environmental systems at various levels, starting from the relationships between individuals and their environments [5]."

3. Ecological Challenges Present in the Growth Environment of Young Teachers at Local Minzu Colleges and Universities

Through situational analysis, we will systematically review and analyze the elements of each system within the growth environment of young teachers at Sichuan Minzu College. This analysis aims to depict

the ecological landscape of young teacher development at the university, emphasize the significance and value of the ecological environment for the growth of young teachers, and explore the ecological challenges present in the growth environment of young teachers at local minzu colleges and universities.

3.1. Organizational Culture Environment Requiring Improvement in Internal Governance Structure

University organizational culture is the sum of educational philosophies, value systems, behavioral guidelines, and the spiritual ethos collectively formed by university faculty, students, and staff through long-term practice in teaching, research, community service, and recreational activities [6]. Research has revealed that the ecological challenges within the growth environment of young teachers at minzu colleges and universities, particularly at the level of university organizational culture, manifest in several key aspects.

3.1.1 The relationship between administrative power and academic power requires further clarification

Like many other Minzu colleges and universities, local minzu colleges and universities have been influenced to some extent by the inertia of traditional operational modes, which has had varying degrees of impact on the ecological environment for the growth of young teachers. These institutions, due to their association with national ethnic policies, have exhibited a prominent role for administrative directives [7]. Particularly in the past, there were imbalances between administrative power and academic power within the university's internal governance structure. This was evident in three aspects: first, the generalization of administrative power; second, the lack of clarity in the boundaries between academic and administrative power; and third, the limited prominence of academic power and academic organizational roles [8]. With the ongoing comprehensive reforms in universities in recent years and the formulation and implementation of university charters, the relationships between administrative and academic powers will be further clarified. Incentive mechanisms will shift from school-led development to self-realization by teachers and students, maximizing the

enthusiasm and initiative of various grassroots organizations and faculty members. The wisdom and strength of teachers, students, and staff of all ethnic groups will be converged to achieve the goal of realizing the 'Minzu college's dream,' unleashing the vitality of all labor, knowledge, technology, management, and capital, allowing all sources of wealth creation to flow freely.

3.1.2 The relationship between system perfection and institutional identity requires further alignment

In the survey, several interviewees pointed out that the cumbersome management system of the school hinders their research time. Under the cumbersome management system, the non-academic workload of young teachers becomes busier, but this busyness does not contribute to the progress of their research. This is a common issue faced by teachers in universities across the country, and local minzu colleges and universities are no exception. Of course, due to some schools in the past having overly lax and permissive management, such practices have become ingrained. In the new normal, perfecting the system and standardizing management may make some people uncomfortable and unaccustomed. It's essential to have the right balance in the institutional system, which should be conducive to talent development, academic innovation, discipline development, and the advancement of the university's cause. It should adhere to the laws of education and the rules of talent growth, constituting a fundamental set of principles that all faculty, students, and staff must collectively adhere to.

3.2 The Need to Stimulate Research and Innovation in the Academic Environment

The concept of an academic ecosystem is primarily based on principles from social ecology and educational ecology. It refers to the organic whole formed during the interaction and development of academic personnel and the academic environment [9]. The balance or imbalance of the academic environment affects the growth of young teachers, much like the role of brine in pickling. Even if young teachers are excellent, if they are placed in an imbalanced academic environment, their growth cannot reach its optimal state, and they can only go through the process of constant adaptation to the academic

environment. Interviews revealed that conflicts between young teachers at Sichuan Minzu College and the academic ecosystem mainly manifest in the following two aspects:

3.2.1 Conflict between a broad quantitative talent evaluation system and research innovation

During the interviews, when asked about the school's requirements for teachers' work, some academic backbones and leading academics mentioned specific requirements regarding the number and level of published papers and grant applications. This reveals that there is still an incomplete academic evaluation system in local minzu colleges and universities, emphasizing numerical indicators and over-quantifying standards. Evaluation results are also linked to individual title assessments. This evaluation system, to a certain extent, violates the regularities of scientific research, challenges the purity and scientific nature of young teachers in their research, fosters an impetuous and quick success-oriented academic atmosphere, and weakens the spirit of academic innovation. Furthermore, the evaluation system, to some extent, violates the regularities of teacher growth. Some young teachers in natural science fields have research with characteristics of long-term, complexity, and uncertainty. Subjecting them to overly quantitative assessments will inevitably force them to struggle. Lastly, a broadly quantitative evaluation standard can objectively underestimate academic achievements. When a young teacher's academic value is underestimated, their self-efficacy diminishes, which in turn lowers their academic motivation to engage in research.

3.2.2 Conflict between a stable academic atmosphere and pursuit of scientific truth

Minzu colleges and universities, established exclusively to address China's ethnic issues, have long been developing under the support policies of the government. Government policy support can easily lead to the formation of a mindset of "waiting, relying, and demanding" within these institutions [10]. Local minzu colleges and universities are even more prone to developing a "dependence" on higher-level policies. This dependence is evident in the lack of self-sustaining functions within the school. The government still provides certain preferential policies in terms of title assessments and other aspects, which

has had a negative impact on teachers' scientific research. As a result, the academic environment at local minzu colleges and universities lacks vitality, competitiveness, and creativity. A lackluster, uncompetitive, and uncreative academic environment leads to a situation where the school may have the intention but not the capability. From the perspective of social services provided by the school, it results in a situation where there's intent but insufficient capability. From the perspective of the growth of young teachers, it leads to a situation where there's a path but no way forward. From the perspective of the development of the school's cause, it results in a situation where there's a name but no substance. Over time, this can lead to self-defeating efforts, stagnation, regression, falling behind, marginalization, and even the risk of elimination.

3.3 Urgent Need for Optimization of the Overall Organic Structure of the Discipline Environment

The academic discipline environment in a university refers to the organic structure formed by external and internal factors working together in the growth process of a discipline, from its inception to becoming stronger [9]. Young teachers themselves are in an important period of pursuing development and have certain aspirations in their own academic disciplines. Therefore, the academic discipline environment at Sichuan National University will inevitably have an impact on their development. Although the university has increased its investment in research platforms since its transformation from a college in 2009, it lacks corresponding discipline platforms. The development of discipline teams lags behind, and there is a clear phenomenon of individualistic teaching. These internal structures of the academic discipline environment have an impact on the growth of young teachers.

4. Conclusion

Young teachers are essential for the development of discipline and academic growth in local minzu colleges and universities. They are the backbone of building distinctive, high-level ethnic universities that satisfy the people. The growth of young teachers is closely related to social ideology, the influence

of external organizations, organizational culture, and the level of discipline construction. To optimize the growth environment for young teachers in local minzu colleges and universities, principles such as people-oriented, use-oriented, and systematic should be adhered to. The relationship between talent introduction and subsequent management, competitive advantages and comparative advantages should be handled correctly. The optimization should take a systematic approach, addressing the macrosystem, external, mesosystem, and microsystem of the young teachers' growth environment. This will improve and optimize the growth environment for young teachers in local minzu colleges and universities, creating a positive ecosystem where individuals can fully utilize their talents, and talents are fully utilized. This will ultimately promote the overall development of the teaching staff in local minzu colleges and universities.

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