

The Professional Positioning of University Teachers and the Cultivation of Their Professional Competencies

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Abstract: Universities serve as a comprehensive platform integrating educational development, scientific and technological innovation, and talent cultivation. University teachers are vital drivers of the integrated development of education, technology, and talent, creators and disseminators of knowledge, and more importantly, enlighteners of students' minds and guides for their growth. University teachers should fully recognize their roles as disseminators of knowledge, researchers in science, designers of curriculum and instruction, lifelong learners, facilitators of student learning, and counselors for student mental health. Universities should use effective cultivation pathways and strategies to cultivate teachers' professional competencies.

Keywords: University Teachers; Professional Competence; Status and Role

1. Introduction

Teachers are the foundation of establishing and vitalizing education. Building a high-level teaching staff is the prerequisite and guarantee for cultivating innovative talents, laying a solid talent foundation for the development of new forms of productivity, and promoting the construction of an education power and a technological power.[1] In today's context of increasingly widespread and deepening higher education, university teachers, as disseminators of knowledge, drivers of innovation, and guides for student growth, have a professional competence that directly impacts the quality of education and the success of talent cultivation. University teachers not only bear the heavy responsibility of imparting professional knowledge but also play an irreplaceable role in shaping students' personalities and cultivating innovative thinking and practical abilities. Therefore, delving into the connotation, constituent

elements, and improvement paths of university teachers' professional competence is of great significance for promoting the sustained and healthy development of higher education.

As a group of social elites, university teachers' professional competence is reflected not only in the depth and breadth of their professional knowledge but also in their moral character, educational philosophy, research capabilities, and sense of social responsibility. With the rapid development of society and the ever-changing technology, university teachers face unprecedented challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, they need to constantly update their knowledge structure and grasp the latest research findings and educational concepts; on the other hand, they also need to continuously improve their moral qualities and educational teaching abilities to better adapt to the needs of the times. [2]

2. The Important Status and Role of University Teachers

University teachers are the core force in the higher education system. They are not only creators and disseminators of knowledge but also enlighteners of students' minds and guides for their growth. With the diligent efforts of university teachers, batch after batch of outstanding talents have emerged, making significant contributions to the prosperity and strength of the country and the progress and development of society.

2.1 Creators and Disseminators of Knowledge

As a vital force in academic research, university teachers continuously explore new knowledge and innovate theories in their respective research fields. Their research results not only enrich the treasury of human knowledge but also provide powerful intellectual support for social progress and development. At the same time, university teachers also bear the responsibility of

imparting knowledge to students, transforming profound academic knowledge into easily understandable forms through classroom teaching, experimental practices, and other means, helping students master professional knowledge and skills.

2.2 Enlighteners of Students' Minds

University teachers not only pay attention to students' academic performance but also focus on their mental health and personality development. Through teaching by example and setting a good example, they guide students to establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values, cultivating their sense of social responsibility and civic awareness. Under the careful guidance of university teachers, students gradually grow into social pillars with independent thinking abilities, innovative spirits, and good moral qualities.

2.3 Guides for Student Growth

University teachers also undertake the tasks of guiding students in career planning and providing employment counseling. Based on their own experience and knowledge, they help students understand their interests and abilities and formulate career plans that suit their personal characteristics. [3] At the same time, university teachers actively provide students with employment information and recommendation opportunities, helping them smoothly realize their career dreams.

3. The Professional Orientation of University Teachers

3.1 Knowledge Imparter and Ability Cultivator

In traditional education, the primary task of teachers is to ensure that students acquire a certain amount of knowledge. Teachers are responsible for explaining the knowledge clearly, enabling students to understand and master it thoroughly, and pass exams. Teachers occupy a central and authoritative position in the teaching process. In the era of the knowledge economy and the internet, although the role of teachers as knowledge imparters remains unchanged, they are no longer the only source of knowledge for students.[4] The purpose of imparting knowledge is not merely for mastery but also for creative application.

To lay a solid foundation for knowledge impartation, teachers should possess profound expertise in their field as well as a broad knowledge of other disciplines. While imparting knowledge, teachers should also cultivate various abilities in students. In terms of ability cultivation, it is essential to strengthen the cultivation of students' innovative spirit and innovation ability. Cultivating innovative talents is a requirement put forward by the new era for higher education. The "Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China" also explicitly stipulates that the task of higher education is to cultivate advanced specialized talents with innovative spirit and practical abilities, develop science and technology, and promote national construction. To cultivate students' innovation ability, teachers should first possess innovation ability themselves. Only teachers with innovation ability can effectively guide, demonstrate, and inspire students' innovative spirit and innovation ability.

3.2 Scientific Researcher and Educational Researcher

Regarding teachers and research, the renowned educator Jaspers once said in "What is Education" that the best researchers make the best teachers. Only such researchers can lead people to engage in the genuine process of seeking knowledge and embrace the spirit of science. Through scientific research, the dissemination and development of knowledge can be promoted, and knowledge can be transformed into productive forces to serve society. Through educational research, our understanding of the laws governing higher education teaching can be deepened, teaching standards can be improved, and educational quality can be enhanced. In research, it is necessary to learn to use various modern educational technology tools, engage in discussions and exchanges with experts both domestically and internationally, and collaborate on research projects. Teachers should not only be adept at collecting domestic materials to understand the current state of research in China but also gather foreign materials to stay informed about international research hotspots. This requires that university teachers possess a certain level of foreign language proficiency and master advanced modern educational technologies. In

conducting research, teachers must adhere to a scientific attitude and rigorous academic integrity, which are also professional ethics that teachers should possess.

3.3 Curriculum and Instructional Designer and Developer

In the new era, various aspects of education have indeed undergone changes, and curriculum and instruction are no exception. The improvement of curriculum and instructional reform await the active participation of teachers. Currently, there are some drawbacks in the curriculum offered by Chinese universities, such as outdated course content and curriculum systems that do not adapt to the needs of social development and student growth. Therefore, teachers should actively develop new courses or revise old ones. Multimedia teaching can utilize various means such as sound, images, and data to impart knowledge, stimulate students' interest in learning, improve classroom teaching efficiency, and enhance teaching quality. [5] To produce high-quality multimedia courseware, teachers must be proficient in courseware development techniques. In online teaching, it is necessary to conduct in-depth design, research, and development of the network, such as designing online courses. The guiding ideology and overall design goals of the course should be established first, followed by the design of the page layout, style, and related graphics of the online course. The designed course should be scientific, systematic, and advanced, and it should also comply with national standards for online courses and align with the internal logic of the course and students' cognitive laws.

3.4 Lifelong Learner

Lifelong learning has a long history, spanning the entire human society. The ancient Chinese saying "One is never too old to learn" embodies this idea. Lifelong learning is a requirement of the times. A prominent feature of the information age is that learning has become humanity's primary need. The First World Conference on Lifelong Learning in 1994 recognized lifelong learning as a concept for survival in the 21st century. UNESCO stated in "Education – A Wealth of Nations" that today, the world is evolving so rapidly that teachers and most other professionals must

accept the fact that their initial training is insufficient for the rest of their lives. They must update and improve their knowledge and skills throughout their lives. In the educational environment of the 21st century, teachers are faced with the challenges of a constantly evolving educational landscape and advancing educational technologies. The role of the modern teacher has transcended that of a traditional knowledge imparter, transforming into that of a continuous learner and innovator. This ongoing self-learning and professional development involves learning new educational concepts, technological tools, and teaching methods, as well as reflecting on and improving one's own teaching practices. [6] Teachers can enrich their knowledge and enhance their overall competencies through further studies, academic exchanges, participating in practical work, and self-study.

3.5 Guide and Facilitator of Student Learning

Postmodern curriculum theory advocates that the relationship between teachers and students is one of equality, with the teacher serving as the "first among equals" in this relationship. The role of teachers mainly manifests in guidance, organization, facilitation, motivation, coordination, and service. Chinese scholar Luo Yi proposes the role of a "facilitative teacher." [7] "Facilitation" is an advanced participatory leadership technique that involves constructively guiding and serving groups, providing structural assistance, and leading group activities according to specialized procedures and techniques to achieve optimal results. A "facilitator" is a professional who uses facilitation techniques to serve businesses and other organizations. A "facilitative teacher" is not only a teacher but also provides comprehensive learning services to students and manages the entire process of their learning. Through means such as the internet, college students can access a vast amount of information for personalized learning. However, the quality of information varies, and some may be detrimental to students' learning and growth. This requires teachers to have information acquisition and judgment skills, to find the necessary information among the abundance of information, and to guide students in utilizing beneficial information to promote their

learning and the development of a healthy personality. As the ancient saying goes, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." That is, for teachers, it is not about how much knowledge they impart to students but about how many methods for acquiring knowledge they teach. In the knowledge economy and internet era, knowledge is characterized by its vastness and rapid growth, making it impossible for teachers to impart all of it to students. Furthermore, college students often engage in autonomous learning. In this context, teachers should strengthen their guidance on learning methods to assist students in their learning.

3.6 Counselor for Student Mental Health

College students have limited understanding of society and may sometimes fail to handle setbacks such as family misfortunes, exam failures, friendship issues, unpromising job prospects, and life difficulties properly, leading to psychological problems and, in severe cases, mental illnesses. Some students become addicted to the internet and immerse themselves in a virtual world, where adverse online information can also affect their mental health. To promote student mental health, Chinese universities have established psychological counseling centers with dedicated teachers responsible for this work. However, since the enrollment expansion of Chinese universities, the number of students has increased dramatically. Although the number of students with psychological issues is not large, it far exceeds the capacity of dedicated psychological counselors. Therefore, every university teacher should be concerned about student mental health issues, identify problems promptly, and help students overcome their psychological distress. University teachers (except those from education and psychology departments) typically only take general psychology and higher education psychology courses and have limited knowledge of psychological counseling and consultation. To cultivate students' mental health and promote the formation of a healthy personality, it is necessary to strengthen their learning in these areas.

4. Cultivation Pathways and Strategies for

Enhancing Professional Competence of University Teachers

4.1 Strengthening the Construction of Teaching Ethics and Professional Conduct

The construction of teaching ethics and professional conduct is a crucial aspect of enhancing the professional competence of university teachers. [8] Universities should strengthen education and training on teaching ethics and professional conduct for teachers, guiding them to establish correct professional and value outlooks. By organizing teaching ethics and professional conduct seminars, launching teaching ethics and professional conduct evaluation activities, and other means, universities can foster a positive atmosphere and cultural environment for teaching ethics and professional conduct. At the same time, universities should also strengthen the supervision and management of teacher behavior, imposing corresponding penalties and corrective measures on teachers who violate teaching ethics and professional conduct regulations.

4.2 Improving the Teacher Training System

A comprehensive training system is an important guarantee for enhancing the professional competence of university teachers. [9] Universities should establish a sound teacher training system, including various forms and content such as pre-service training, in-service training, and specialized training. By participating in training activities, teachers can stay informed about the latest educational concepts and the application of teaching methods and techniques; at the same time, they can broaden their academic horizons and knowledge base through communication and collaboration with peers. Additionally, universities can invite renowned experts and scholars to give lectures and provide guidance on campus, offering teachers more learning and exchange opportunities and resource support.

4.3 Encouraging Teachers to Participate in Scientific Research and Social Service Activities

Scientific research and social service activities are important pathways for enhancing the professional competence of university teachers. Universities should encourage teachers to

actively participate in scientific research and social service activities, and provide corresponding support and safeguard measures. By engaging in scientific research activities, teachers can gain a deep understanding of the frontiers and development trends of their disciplines; at the same time, they can exercise their innovative thinking and practical abilities. By participating in social service activities, teachers can understand societal needs and issues; at the same time, they can enhance their social influence and reputation. Furthermore, universities can provide guidance and support services for teachers in applying for scientific research projects and engaging in social service activities, helping them better complete their tasks and achieve better results and benefits.

4.4 Establishing a Scientific and Reasonable Teacher Evaluation System

A scientific and reasonable teacher evaluation system is one of the important guarantees for enhancing the professional competence of university teachers.[10] Universities should establish a comprehensive teacher evaluation system and standard system, incorporating aspects such as teachers' professional ethics, knowledge level, educational teaching ability, and scientific research achievements into the evaluation scope. Through a scientific and reasonable evaluation system and standard system, the professional competence and educational teaching level of teachers can be comprehensively and objectively reflected, providing strong support and safeguard measures for teachers' career development. At the same time, universities should also strengthen the application and management of teacher evaluation results, linking evaluation results to teachers' title promotion, salary treatment, and honorary rewards, in order to motivate teachers to continuously improve their professional competence and educational teaching level.

4.5 Fostering a Good Campus Cultural Atmosphere

A good campus cultural atmosphere is one of the important conditions for enhancing the professional competence of university teachers. Universities should pay attention to the construction and development of campus culture, fostering a positive, harmonious, and

inclusive campus cultural atmosphere and environmental conditions. By organizing diverse campus cultural activities and sports events, the enthusiasm and creativity of teachers can be stimulated, enhancing their sense of belonging and honor. At the same time, universities should also strengthen the promotion and dissemination of campus culture, allowing more people to understand and recognize the connotation and value of campus culture, creating better conditions and opportunities for the enhancement of teachers' professional competence.

5. Conclusion

The enhancement of professional competence of university teachers is a long-term and complex process that requires multifaceted efforts and support. Universities should be guided by the spirit of educators and focus on enhancing professional ethics and teaching styles, improving teacher training systems, encouraging teachers to participate in social service activities, establishing a scientific teacher evaluation system, and fostering a positive campus atmosphere, in order to vigorously cultivate teachers' professional competencies.

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