

Research on the Development of First-Class Faculty in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: Educational reform is the fundamental driving force behind the advancement of education, with the development of a high-quality faculty serving as its essential foundation. The construction of a first-class faculty in higher education institutions not only ensures teaching quality but also acts as the core catalyst for educational reform. It is the cornerstone for achieving high-level educational development in the new era and a crucial factor in the sustainable growth of universities. This study investigates the significance of building an elite faculty through data collected via questionnaires and interviews. The results indicate that universities have made continuous progress in enhancing overall faculty quality by implementing diverse training approaches, including pedagogical lectures, teaching competitions, instructional demonstrations, and academic seminars. However, certain challenges remain, such as the lack of targeted training content and an imbalanced faculty structure. To address these issues, this paper proposes a set of strategic recommendations: strengthening the planning and organization of teacher training programs, increasing the relevance and practicality of training content, emphasizing professional development of individual faculty members, and optimizing the composition of the faculty team. These measures are intended to provide valuable guidance for faculty development in higher education institutions, ultimately contributing to the sustained improvement of educational quality and teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: First-Class Faculty; Instructional Development; High-Level; Development; Higher Education Institutions

1. Introduction

In January 2022, the Ministry of Education and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly issued the *Several Opinions on Deepening the Construction of World-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines*, which charted a clear new direction for building a high-quality, first-class faculty. This document marks a significant strategic milestone in China's higher education development. As education forms the foundation of national progress, teachers serve as its indispensable cornerstone, while universities function as critical incubators for cultivating talent. In the context of rapid economic growth, international competition increasingly depends on the strength of human capital. Accordingly, higher education institutions must emphasize the professional development of their faculty to effectively nurture outstanding talent capable of driving national innovation and contributing to social and economic advancement. Education is the primary pathway to enhancing the overall quality and professional skills of the population, allowing China to capitalize on its demographic advantages and transform from a country with a large population into a nation with a powerful, skilled workforce.

As higher education increasingly becomes universalized, the scale of the faculty continues to expand. University teachers, as the main force of higher education, directly determine the quality of talent cultivation through their teaching and educational capabilities. To ensure the quality and sustainable development of higher education, it is essential to re-examine the relationship between teacher development and institutional development, identify problems in faculty development, and refine and optimize teacher management mechanisms and development systems. The enhancement and development of university teachers' capabilities are inseparable from the construction of the faculty, the development of disciplines and specialties depends on the caliber of the faculty,

and the role of faculty development in fostering first-class majors and disciplines is becoming increasingly significant. To adapt to the reform and development of higher education in the new era and period, and to elevate the comprehensive level of faculty development, building a first-class faculty is a crucial measure for fully implementing the educational guidelines of the new era [1]. Each institution should adopt the overarching educational principles of the new era as the fundamental guiding ideology for its educational work, cultivate a high-level faculty with a sense of responsibility, ideals, and convictions, and propel the construction of first-class universities.

2. Significance of Developing a First-Class Faculty

In recent years, China has issued multiple circular documents concerning the construction of first-class universities and disciplines, explicitly stating that faculty development is a key task in the "Double First-Class" initiative. How can institutions operate effectively? How can they retain excellent teachers? How can teachers be guided to continuously break through their limits and ensure the innovativeness of the faculty? What higher demands does discipline development place on teachers? These questions require each university to continuously explore and find management solutions suited to their own contexts through practice, thereby building an outstanding teaching team. To enhance the overall level of higher education in China and enable teachers to better participate in and promote the reform and development of global higher education, it is necessary to analyze the existing problems in university faculty development, study the strengths and weaknesses of various institutions' faculty development plans, and explore strategies and directions for building a first-class faculty. This plays a positive role in promoting the development of China's educational system and is a vital component of educational reform and development.

The progress of a society hinges on talent. The cultivation of talent, in turn, hinges on education. Through the transmission of education, humanity's exploration and understanding of the world can continuously evolve. Higher education, building upon

primary and secondary education, constitutes specialized and professional education aimed at cultivating specialized talents and professionals, supplying society with qualified personnel, and promoting socio-economic development. As the mainstay of higher education, the teaching and educational capabilities of university faculty determine the quality of talent cultivation. The enhancement and development of university teachers' abilities are inseparable from faculty development, universities require a first-class faculty to drive the construction of first-class institutions and achieve their educational objectives. The advancement of disciplines and specialties relies on the level of the faculty, and faculty development plays a supportive role in fostering first-class majors and disciplines.

Therefore, the development of a first-class faculty in higher education institutions can be summarized as having two significant implications. First, theoretical research significance: through the study of faculty development across universities, theories related to higher education management, such as motivation theory and human capital theory, can be enriched, ultimately contributing to the development of national comprehensive quality and realizing the goal of building China into a talent-rich nation [2]. Second, practical guidance significance: based on theoretical research and practice, various institutions have proposed their own distinctive faculty development plans. By combining these with their specific realities and making improvements in areas such as human resource management capabilities and personnel systems, they can identify new issues and continuously refine their approaches to achieve their educational objectives.

3. Current Status of First-Class Faculty Development

With the rapid development of higher education, state management of the higher education sector has become increasingly standardized. China's first-class university faculty has begun to take shape, with significant improvements in both faculty development and academic qualifications, continuous enhancement of teachers' teaching and research capabilities, and a further trend toward a younger teaching demographic. However, at present, some institutions are insufficiently tolerant of teachers' research capabilities, lacking long-term, stable cultivation and support for

young talent. The implementation of an “up-or-out” policy has led many teachers to relentlessly pursue short-term, easily achievable research outcomes, prioritizing academic pursuits over teaching, neglecting the developmental potential of young teachers, and ultimately hindering the “Double First-Class” initiative.

Education is a century-long endeavor of cultivating talent, and the faculty is a critical resource for the long-term development and continuous progress of educational undertakings [3]. It can strongly promote the comprehensive improvement and development of university teachers in China. While the service system requires further enhancement and development, faculty development in universities is a core task guiding educational and teaching work. The level of the faculty not only reflects comprehensive strength but also determines the healthy development of an institution's educational endeavors [4]. In light of the current state of global integrated higher education development and the practical needs of modern faculty development, universities must constantly keep pace with the pulse of development in the new era, skillfully explore and utilize their own resource advantages, to cultivate “first-class faculty, first-class disciplines and majors, and innovative, versatile talents, nurturing successors who can make contributions” [5].

Although the current status of faculty development in China has improved significantly compared to previous years, common problems persist: unreasonable age and educational background structures within the faculty, uneven levels of teaching and research capabilities among teachers, a lack of independent innovation awareness, and a scarcity of high-level outstanding talent, among others. These issues indicate a certain gap from the strategic development goals of first-class universities. In ordinary universities, the faculty-to-student ratio is inadequate, and the quality of teaching and research still fails to meet the demands of institutional development. The faculty lacks new vitality, professional competence is not strong, overall comprehensive quality lags, faculty management levels require improvement, and management mechanisms need innovation.

During the research process on faculty development, some scholars employed content

analysis to examine the work reports of faculty development centers in several ordinary universities in China [6]. Furthermore, research on faculty development in the vast majority of Chinese universities tends to emphasize logical and speculative approaches in methodology, in terms of research fields, it leans more toward academic research, and in research focus, it prioritizes the introduction and interpretation of foreign research conditions [7], with insufficiently thorough investigation into domestic research situations, a problem particularly prominent in ordinary universities. Analysis has been conducted on issues faced by new teachers entering the teaching profession, such as lacking teaching experience, weak instructional abilities, insufficient knowledge reserves to thoroughly explain textbook content, poor university research environments, low research funding, and high work pressure [8]. Additionally, universities' efforts in teacher cultivation are insufficient, teacher development is limited, teacher motivation is low, and there is a lack of sense of belonging and well-being. To some extent, this even stifles excellent teachers, leading to a lag in institutional faculty development. Faculty development requires improvement not only in professional level and the cultivation of teacher ethics but also in the management systems for faculty development. These various problems make it difficult to enhance teaching quality and effectiveness, severely hindering the healthy development of higher education.

4. Strategies for Developing a First-Class Faculty

4.1 Adhering to a People-Oriented Approach and Improving Faculty Training Programs

Under the environment of modernization and reform and opening up, the Ministry of Education has set higher requirements for the conduct of school teaching. First, teachers should define a clear and reasonable role for themselves and fully recognize their own value to the institution's development. Adhering to the “people-oriented” philosophy is a prerequisite for universities to cultivate excellent teachers who are well-rounded. Second, teachers are the primary element for an institution to maintain sustainable development, they are the core of the school. Teacher development is synonymous with institutional development. Given the

current state of faculty in various universities, improving faculty training programs is a key measure to enhance teachers' instructional abilities and professional competence. Institutions can formulate comprehensive faculty training plans based on the characteristics of their respective specialties, determining training content and courses in areas such as teaching methods, teaching skills, and educational theory according to the actual circumstances and needs of teachers. The training plan needs to fully consider instructional practice and emphasize the improvement of teachers' instructional practice capabilities.

1). Introduction of external experts: The institution may invite external experts to deliver instruction to teachers, thereby enabling teachers to acquire richer teaching experience and knowledge. The instruction provided by external experts may cover areas such as innovative teaching methods and educational theories, thereby improving teachers' instructional abilities and professional competence.

2). Establishment of an internal training system: The institution may establish an internal training system by inviting experts or senior faculty members from within the institution to provide instruction. Internal experts, drawing on the institution's specific characteristics and actual circumstances, can offer more targeted guidance and training for teachers.

3). Organization of collective lesson preparation: The institution may organize collective lesson preparation activities to facilitate mutual exchange among teachers, allowing them to share teaching experiences and insights. Through collective lesson preparation, teachers can learn from one another's teaching methods and experiences, thereby enhancing their instructional proficiency.

4). Regular evaluation and feedback: The institution may conduct regular evaluations and provide feedback to teachers, enabling them to identify their instructional strengths and areas for improvement. This process supports the formulation of more effective training plans and facilitates the enhancement of their teaching competencies.

5). Establishment of learning portfolios: The institution may establish a learning portfolio for each teacher to document their training records and outcomes. This approach helps the

institution gain a better understanding of teachers' instructional capabilities and professional development.

In summary, the improvement of the faculty training program requires coordinated efforts from multiple aspects. Institutions may select appropriate training methods and curricula based on their specific circumstances and needs, so as to continuously enhance teachers' instructional proficiency and professional competence.

4.2 Expanding Faculty Resources and Enhancing the Level of Teaching Quality Management

Faculty members constitute the core strength in fulfilling the functions of higher education institutions, and teaching staff represent a vital form of human capital. Adam Smith, one of the founders of human capital theory, pointed out that differences among individuals primarily stem from acquired cultivation and personal endeavor [9]. School education plays a decisive role in the development of human capital. Higher education institutions may draw upon human capital theory to formulate human capital objectives aligned with their distinctive educational characteristics and implement dynamic management of their faculty. Enhancing the level of teaching quality management is an important measure for improving teaching quality and instructional effectiveness. This paper proposes the following recommendations to better implement teaching quality management:

1). Establishing a teaching quality management system: The institution may establish a teaching quality management system that defines the processes and standards for teaching quality management, establishes a clear responsibility framework and operational procedures, and promotes the comprehensive improvement of teaching quality.

2). Establishing a teaching evaluation system: The institution may establish a teaching evaluation system encompassing faculty teaching evaluations, course evaluations, and teaching environment assessments. The evaluation results can serve as important references for improving teaching quality.

3). Implementing curriculum development: The institution may strengthen the management of curriculum development by formulating a comprehensive curriculum framework and

standards, and standardizing curriculum design and implementation. Additionally, it may enhance the quality monitoring and evaluation of curricula to improve instructional effectiveness.

4). Implementing teaching supervision: The institution may establish a teaching supervision system to conduct regular inspections and assessments of teaching quality, enabling the timely identification and correction of existing issues and deficiencies. The supervision results can provide faculty with suggestions and guidance for instructional improvement.

5). Providing teaching resources: The institution may provide various teaching resources, such as teaching equipment and instructional materials, to offer faculty better teaching conditions and support, thereby improving instructional effectiveness and quality.

6). Enhancing faculty teaching competencies: The institution may strengthen faculty training and professional development to improve their teaching proficiency and capabilities, enabling them to better address various challenges and demands in the teaching process.

4.3 Establishing a Sound System and Conducting Comprehensive Teaching Evaluation

The overall plan for coordinating the construction of world-class universities and first-class disciplines states that the development of a first-class faculty is the primary task in the construction of "double first-class" initiatives [10]. The quality of faculty directly reflects the educational standards of an institution. In terms of teaching quality, it is essential to establish sound mechanisms and refine teaching quality standards.

First, the institution may develop a teaching evaluation system tailored to its actual circumstances. The system should clearly define the evaluation subjects, contents, and criteria. At the same time, the frequency and methods of evaluation should be specified—for instance, conducting a teaching evaluation at the end of each semester using a questionnaire survey, or administering a brief quiz after each class to gauge instructional effectiveness. Subsequently, appropriate evaluation tools should be designed based on the teaching content and format. For example, for theoretical courses, questionnaire surveys may be employed to collect student

feedback on teaching effectiveness, for laboratory courses, observation and quizzes may be used to assess students' practical skills and level of understanding. In addition, student oral feedback and peer evaluations among faculty may be conducted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of teaching effectiveness and faculty competence. Finally, a comprehensive, multi-level evaluation system should be established. This system should encompass faculty teaching evaluations, course evaluations, and student evaluations. Faculty teaching evaluations may assess aspects such as teaching proficiency, instructional methods, and teaching attitude. Course evaluations may address areas including textbook selection, teaching arrangements, and practical components. Student evaluations may consider dimensions such as academic performance, engagement, and feedback. Through multi-level evaluations, the teaching process and instructional effectiveness can be comprehensively understood, enabling timely identification and resolution of issues, thereby improving teaching quality.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the cultivation of a first-class faculty in higher education institutions constitutes a strategic imperative for the development of university education in the new era. Proceeding from the "people-oriented" educational philosophy, institutions should enhance faculty training programs, strengthen teachers' ideological and political competence as well as their professional ethics, and focus on both the recruitment and cultivation of talent in the process of expanding faculty resources. It is also essential to improve the level of teaching quality management, formulate faculty development plans, optimize evaluation systems, and implement corresponding development strategies. Through these comprehensive measures, institutions can holistically elevate the overall quality of their faculty, advance the construction of first-class faculty, and meet the expectations of society for higher education in the new era.

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