

# Professional Development for Young Teachers in Higher Education

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**Abstract:** With the implementation of university enrollment expansion policy, many young teachers have joined universities to play their academic value. This group of young teachers gradually as an important role in the university faculty, their professional level directly affects the school's teaching quality and scientific research level. However, their professional development path in schools is constrained by many factors such as low salary, promotion difficulties and no perfect training mechanism. This paper analyzes the current development situation of young teachers in China, describes their difficulties and dissatisfaction, and puts forward suggestions for reforming the development path of young teachers in universities.

**Keywords:** Universities, Young teachers, Professional development.

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## 1. Introduction

In the past decade, universities have expanded their enrollment of new students, and also attracted a large number of excellent young talents to join the university teaching team. According to the data of the Ministry of Education, by the end of 2022, there were 1,977,800 full-time teachers in higher education nationwide, of which young teachers accounted for two-thirds. It can be seen that this high-quality faculty provides a strong fundamental guarantee for promoting the high-quality development of higher education. The State Council, in the "Overall Plan on Coordinating the Construction of World-class Universities and First-class Academic Departments", has made "building a first-class faculty" the primary task of the "double first-class" construction, in particular, it is emphasized that "we should focus on young and middle-aged teachers and innovation teams, optimize the institutional environment for the growth and development of young and middle-aged teachers, and realize the sustainable development capability of the talent team."

However, this profession, which used to be regarded as a stable and high income profession, is now full of complaints and dissatisfaction. As the main force of higher education, these young teachers' professional development have been affected because of the difficulties in promotion, low recognition, low salary and other difficulties. In this paper, I investigate the situation of young teachers' employment in universities and consider how to solve their current professional development problems.

## 2. The Current Situation of Young Teachers' Development

The development of young teachers in universities mainly refers to the growth process of teachers under the age of 40 in universities to improve their professional knowledge, ability and quality through life experience in their career. They are knowledgeable, have strong self-discipline, and have a certain social status. Young teachers have changed from a reserve force to the main force of the university faculty, and most of them are in the front line of teaching, which determines the quality of talent cultivation in universities to a considerable

extent.

Although young teachers cannot compare with old teachers in terms of teaching experience, they also have their own advantages, such as their active thinking, easy to accept new things, and skillful use of online and offline dual-mode teaching. At the same time, because of the age difference between them and students is not big, their teaching have a great impact on students. In addition to teaching, young teachers also occupy a place in scientific research. Young teachers in universities generally have master's and doctoral degrees, and there are even outstanding talents from famous foreign universities. They are full of energy, unlimited potential, in the golden period of vigorous development of scientific research, and will become the future leader of China's scientific research career. So whether it is teaching or scientific research, young teachers in universities have a pivotal role.

At present, relative to the field of building professional development of primary and secondary school teachers, there is little research on the construction of professional development of teachers in colleges and universities. According to the relevant satisfaction survey, many young teachers employed in universities are dissatisfied with the current development situation.

## 3. Difficulties of Young Teachers in Universities

### 3.1. Low salary compensation

If the academic profession cannot maintain a reasonable level of income, the output of the whole academic system will undoubtedly be affected. In the past, the teaching profession in universities, was treated as a respectable and enviable job with good pay and long vacations. However, nowadays, most of the young teachers are employed as contractual laborers, enjoying salaries and benefits that cannot be compared with those of the old teachers in the past. And compared with other professions, the salary level of university teachers, especially the majority of young and middle-aged teachers is on the low side. Many young teachers have very low course pay and heavy life pressure with teaching assistant professor or lecturer title. Most young teachers are busy with their studies in their early years, pursuing postgraduate and doctoral

degrees. They are already around 30 years old when they join universities, and they generally get married, buy a house, raising children and supporting their parents, which is the time when they are in urgent need of money. However, due to the low title, they are often at the bottom of the salary distribution system in universities. Low salary compensation does not only affect the quality of life, but also leads to a chain reaction in education. For young university teachers, especially those living in big cities, they have much pressure to live and doing scientific research with their limited salary. They have to improve their income through various part-time classes, grabbing projects or looking for other jobs. The quality of the whole higher education system will be affected because these young teacher are eager to get income and do not have enough energies to focus on teaching and scientific research.

### **3.2. Difficulties in promotion**

Due to the influence of foreign tenure system "Publish or Perish", more and more universities are implementing the system of "promotion or leave" or "promotion or transfer", whereby one has to leave or transfer to another post if one does not get a title. But the problem is that in recent years, almost all universities have introduced a large number of young doctors and masters. The number of people with a large base, title evaluation naturally leads to title indicator tension.

Also, there is a common problem that emphasizing on scientific research and ignoring teaching in many universities, which has brought considerable pressure on young teachers' scientific research. Most young teachers have reflected that the research environment provided by the school is not satisfactory. It is difficult to apply for provincial level projects or national projects. Even some significant publications in the use of manuscripts and associate professors or more titles linked to the academic community is a well-known fact. Therefore, some scholars have pointed out that, to a certain extent, the thesis publication ecology has appeared "Matthew effect". Schools simply improve the conditions of the assessment, but do not provide enough opportunities and funds to help young teachers to do better research, such a system brings more helplessness to young teachers in universities.

### **3.3. Lack of perfect training mechanism**

The professional level of university teachers is a key factor affecting higher education, and professional development is an important link and necessary initiative to improve the teaching quality of university teachers. Although young teachers currently have high standards in terms of academic qualifications, knowledge reserves and professional skills, academic expansion and professional teaching ability is a need for them to realize their self-worth. As they are at the beginning of their career and lack of accumulated performance, young teachers generally lack the awareness of their own professional development and need more attention, guidance and support. However, some of the original good traditions of promoting the development of young teachers in universities are gradually disappearing. Due to the influence of changes in the structure of the teaching force, school functions, social situation and other factors, the traditional ways of training teachers after joining the profession, such as the teaching assistant system, the old teachers' guidance system, the collective preparation system, etc., have basically disappeared, which has led to some young teachers not being

able to adapt to the realistic requirements of their teaching ability and level.

In terms of policy support, universities tend to subsidize senior teachers who have already made certain achievements, while young teachers at the beginning of their careers are given fewer opportunities. This fact makes them feel aimless and unmotivated about their future professional development path.

## **4. Reform Proposals for The Development Path of Young Teachers**

The professional development of young teachers in universities is not a matter of individual teachers, nor is it the responsibility of a certain department of the school, but requires the coordination and cooperation of the government, society, universities, as well as the young teachers themselves, to collaboratively promote, so as to create a diversified and excellent environment for the growth of young teachers. For the three factors affecting the professional development of young teachers in universities mentioned in this paper, the following three reform directions are proposed:

### **4.1. Reform the remuneration system of university teachers**

The relevant government departments should attach great importance to the living treatment of young teachers, especially the problems that are difficult or impossible to be solved by universities on their own, so as to effectively promote the construction of the teaching force. It is suggested that government expands the basic salary rate of teachers and reduce the income differences within universities and other institutions. At the same time, the government can share the responsibility of funding allocation, for example, the two-tier allocation system of the U.S. federal and state governments, and the provincial and municipal financial departments will also provide funding support in accordance with a certain percentage, which will not only stabilize the source of remuneration universities, but also enable the provinces to assume the responsibility of supporting the local colleges and universities. For school, due to the general implementation of the salary system in accordance with the title and position, as far as young teachers are concerned, the difference between the salaries at all levels is fixed, and there is not much motivation to do more work. For this reason, the implementation of the performance system of "more work, more pay, better work, better pay" for young teachers, and the rewarding of over-achievement of work according to the number, grade and level, is conducive to the formation of the incentive mechanism of "salary stratification". The government and universities are vigorously promoting the reform of the university teachers' salary system, increasing the stability of university teachers' income and scientific research funding for young teacher, so that the salary gap between teachers of different disciplines can be controlled within a reasonable range, and establish a stable and high-level tenure-track faculty to create an environment that allows university teachers to devote themselves to teaching and research.

### **4.2. Establish a promotion system for young teachers**

The key to the development of young talents is to have a

favorable policy environment, cultural atmosphere and guarantee conditions. In China's current teacher promotion system, most of them adopt the "quota system", that is, colleges according to the quota given by the school by the academic committee to assess the candidates for promotion. Under such circumstances, many young teachers, despite their outstanding academic achievements, have difficulty in competing in view of their age, seniority and years of work. In order to solve this problem, it is suggested to establish a promotion system suitable for young teachers, which can be modeled on the title "external review system" of foreign universities. Regardless of age and seniority, as long as they meet the conditions for declaration, they can apply for it, and the school will send the materials to the external experts to conduct anonymous peer review, which not only avoids the relationship factor in the process of title assessment, but also gives young teachers the opportunity to realize their self-worth.

At the same time, the interference of administrative power should be minimized, and experts who are dedicated to teaching and serious about scientific research should be allowed to discuss and decide on the evaluation criteria. When selecting experts to participate in the formulation of standards, the professional differences should be fully taken into account, and as far as possible to ensure that the representatives of experts of different specialties can participate in it.

### 4.3. Implementation of young teacher training mechanism

At present, the training of young teachers in universities of China mainly has the following ways: on-the-job degree study, pre-service training, young teacher mentoring system and so on. Systematic professional training is conducive to accelerating the professional development of young teachers as well as enhancing the level of university teachers, thus improving the quality of higher education. Ferrand Fuller who is a American scholar, according to the teacher's expectations and the focus of attention at different times, puts forward four stages for young teachers to become professional teachers: pre-teaching attention, early survival attention, teaching situation attention and student attention stage. It can be seen that young teachers need to be paid attention to and nurtured at different stages of their development path.

In addition to pre-service professional training for new teachers, the establishment of a team support mechanism of "veteran helps recruit" in subject teams allows young teachers to receive guidance in teaching experience and educational philosophy from experienced teacher, including educational views, professional attitudes, teacher ethics and charisma, etc. On the other hand, the discipline team can also utilize its own academic resources to help young teachers establish contact with famous scholars in China and abroad through the way of "cooperate with new teachers", forming the mechanism of "academic mobility", enhancing the sense of identity of the discipline, and strengthening the international competitiveness and creativity of China's young scholars.

Finally, schools should strengthen the construction of teacher development centers, carry out various activities based on young teachers' needs and promote teachers' professional growth, and take the initiative to develop new and unique activities for young teachers' professional development, such as organizing regular competitions for young teachers and sharing lectures by veteran professors, so as to help young teachers find out the deficiencies of their own teaching, and then improve their teaching level and teaching skills.

## 5. Conclusion

Young teachers in universities are both talents who cultivate high-quality talents and high-end academic talents, playing a key role in the cultivation of high-quality talents and scientific research contribution. They are currently encountering obstacles in the process of professional development and have difficulties in moving forward. In response to these problems exposed, this paper puts forward some reform proposals, including reforming remuneration system of university teachers, establishing a promotion system for young teachers and implementing a mechanism for training young teachers. Through these reform initiatives, we can enhance the professional development of young teachers in colleges and universities and increase their career satisfaction, thus providing strong support for the high-quality development of higher education. Additionally, this is a process that requires the joint efforts of all parties, including universities, government and society, and only through cooperation and reform can we create an environment and mechanism that is more favorable to the professional development of young teachers.

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