



Research on the High-Quality Development of Teachers in the County-level Basic Education Stage

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Abstract. Education is the foundation of national prosperity and the rejuvenation of the nation. Teachers are the basis of education and the source of its development. This article focuses on the team of full-time teachers in the basic education stage. Through data analysis, surveys, and interviews, it explores the factors that affect the high-quality development of the teacher team. By improving the selection, training, management, and utilization of teachers, it stimulates the vitality of the teacher team in a full chain and multi-dimensional manner, promotes the orderly optimization of regional teacher resource allocation, and reshapes a new pattern of balanced distribution of high-quality educational resources.

Keywords: Basic education, Full-time teachers, High-quality, Specialization.

1 Introduction

Teachers are the disseminators of knowledge and serve as the primary human resource in building an educationally powerful nation. They exert a profound influence on students' habit formation, value cultivation, and personality shaping. The construction and high-quality development of the teaching force directly impact the development level of the education industry. Building a high-quality and professional teaching force is a critical issue in current educational reform and development. This paper selects the full-time teachers in the basic education stage of N City, a top-100 county in terms of economic development, as the research subjects. As a major educational city with a large number of teachers and significant differentiation in teacher quality, N City is representative. This paper comprehensively analyzes the current issues in the development of the full-time teaching force in N City and proposes strategies that align with the current stage of teacher force construction, aiming to promote the healthy development of the teaching force. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China puts forward the goal of building an educationally powerful nation by 2035. The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China deploys the integrated reform of the mechanisms for education, science, and technology talents, aiming to achieve the strength of talents

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through the strength of education and empower the strength of science and technology. In 2023, multiple departments jointly issued the "Opinions on Implementing the Action Plan for Expanding and Improving the Quality of Basic Education in the New Era," clearly stating the need to improve the hierarchical and classified, stepped growth and development system for teachers and enhance teacher training; to accelerate the balanced allocation of teachers within counties and promote orderly teacher exchanges and rotations. In 2024, the State Council issued the "Opinions on Promoting the Spirit of Educators and Strengthening the Construction of a High-quality and Professional Teaching Force in the New Era," which points out that strengthening the construction of the teaching force should be the most important foundational work in building an educationally powerful nation, by enhancing teachers' abilities to teach and educate students, improving the long-term mechanism for fostering teacher ethics, strengthening the cultivation and supply of high-quality teachers, and optimizing the allocation of teacher resources.

2 The Main Factors Restricting the Development of the Full-Time Teacher Team

2.1 Insufficient Total Number of Full-Time Teachers

Teacher resource allocation, teacher team stability, and population development are dynamically linked. From 2017 to 2023, the number of full-time teachers in primary and secondary schools in City N increased from 11235 to 14930, a growth of 32.8%. The number of full-time teachers within establishment increased from 11159 to 12196, a growth of 9.29%. The number of enrolled students increased from 183846 to 244350, a growth of 32.91%. By 2023, the total personnel control number for 287 primary schools in City N was 8495, with an approved establishment number of 6921. With the increase in the number of students of school age, in order to match educational needs, many schools have recruited a large number of non-establishment teachers to address structural and phase staffing shortages. However, due to factors such as the identity, career development, and personal family situations of non-establishment teachers, the mobility of this group is relatively high, especially among non-establishment teachers in primary schools. Although the educational authorities have set personnel control numbers for each school based on the student-teacher ratio, there are large differences in the number of teachers and students in different schools. Some schools have fewer students and still need to match teachers in all subjects. Some schools have more students, leading to teachers exceeding their workload. As a result, some schools may hire more teachers than the approved personnel control number, and the salaries of these teachers are not covered by local government expenditures, but are paid through organizations such as townships, village committees, and elderly associations. The salary stability of these teachers is also difficult to guarantee.

2.2 The Salary Level of Full-Time Teachers Varies Greatly

The issue of different pay for the same work in the same region and school is particularly evident among full-time teachers. The formal teacher positions are paid by the government based on the economic situation of the county, with salary and benefits not lower than the local civil servants. The annual total salary of formal teachers is 3-4 times that of substitute teachers, and the salary and benefits of formal teachers are stable and guaranteed. Substitute teachers are non-formal teachers hired by schools, who undertake the same teaching workload as formal teachers and work equally hard. Although the salaries of substitute teachers in control numbers are paid by local finances, due to different salary standards and policies, the average annual salary of substitute teachers is around 30,000 RMB. Substitute teachers are restricted in their professional development and cannot participate in the evaluation and promotion of teacher titles, resulting in limited growth in their salary levels. The issue of different pay for the same work affects the enthusiasm of teachers and the stability of the teaching staff.

2.3 The Professional Qualities of Full-Time Teachers Vary

The professionalism of teachers is reflected in their professional philosophy, professional knowledge, professional skills, and other indicators, which are related to education and training, teaching experience, personal qualities, and so on. Since 2021, the city of N has recruited and introduced 1864 outstanding teachers, and recruited 3858 teachers at the basic education stage, with nearly 10% of them being normal school graduates; 16.84% are fresh graduates. It can be seen that the majority of newly recruited teachers do not have a normal school background, their teaching experience is not rich, and there is bound to be a certain difference in teaching professionalism among these new teachers. By 2023, the percentage of teachers with bachelor's degree or above in primary and secondary schools nationwide has reached 78% and 93% respectively, while in the city of N, the percentage of teachers with bachelor's degree or above in primary and secondary schools is 64.86% and 91.02% respectively. Although N is an economically strong county, the educational background level of full-time teachers is still relatively low compared to the national average, especially in primary schools, which is nearly 14 percentage points lower than the national average. Due to the low threshold for the admission of substitute teachers, the educational background of substitute teachers varies, leading to significant differences in the educational and teaching abilities of some full-time teachers. With the continuous upgrading of educational reforms, some individual teachers do not pay attention to their own learning, fail to timely change their teaching philosophy, learn new information technology, update knowledge, resulting in their low professional quality and comprehensive abilities.

2.4 Imbalanced Distribution of Faculty Resources

The demand for school places in the central urban area and towns is extremely high. Apart from the disparity in educational resources between urban and rural areas and between different schools, the more critical issue lies in the uneven distribution of teachers. Due to geographical differences, some remote areas suffer from an oversupply of teaching resources in certain subjects due to school scale and subject differences. Some schools have not recruited new teachers for years, resulting in a serious gap in the teacher echelon and a lack of vitality in the teaching staff. The structure of subject teaching is unreasonable in some schools, where the allocation of specialist teachers for non-core subjects like music, physical education, and art is insufficient due to school scale and student numbers, leading to teachers of language and mathematics subjects doubling up on responsibilities. The gender balance in teaching staff has been significantly skewed for a long time due to differences in the gender structure of teaching specialties, traditional biases, and inadequate teacher selection mechanisms. In 2023, the proportion of female specialist teachers in the junior high school stage of basic education in City N was 43.11%, while in the primary school stage, it was 80.75%. It is evident that the gender imbalance in the proportion of male and female teachers in basic education in City N is particularly pronounced at the primary school stage.

2.5 Full-Time Teachers Undertake more non-Teaching Tasks

According to the requirements of the supervisory department, secondary school full-time teachers should undertake at least 10 to 12 teaching hours per week on average, while primary school full-time teachers should undertake at least 12 to 14 teaching hours. However, in practice, due to factors such as structural shortage of teachers and regional differences between schools, some full-time teachers may undertake up to 16 to 18 teaching hours. In addition to normal teaching duties, teachers are responsible for various social affairs such as welcoming inspections, special inspections, etc. The tasks include campus fire safety inspections, school food safety rectification, warm campus inspections, standardized campus construction evaluation, inspections, evaluations, and assessments. Teachers need to regularly attend meetings specifically for the campus organized by the supervisory department and relevant departments, some of which are tedious and lengthy. Some schools also require teachers to participate in various non-teaching related competitions, clock in, data reporting and statistics, file organization, and other trivial tasks, which are time-consuming, labor-intensive, and of no substantial significance for improving teaching quality.

2.6 The Issue of Fairness in Professional Title Evaluation

Title evaluation plays an important role in the professional development of teachers, with the title level closely related to the teacher's salary level. The higher the title, the higher the corresponding position salary. Therefore, the fairness of the title evaluation directly affects the professional development of teachers. Currently, the evaluation of

professional titles for full-time teachers is carried out in a hierarchical management and appointment combined manner. However, in the quantitative competition for teacher title evaluation, problems such as unreasonable distribution of title indicators, lack of fairness in the quantitative assessment scheme, and cumbersome evaluation procedures still exist. Non-standard, unfair, and non-transparent title evaluations often breed opportunities for corruption and rent-seeking. School administrators, as mid-level cadres in schools, have certain advantages in the quantitative evaluation of title, while ordinary full-time teachers lack advantages in county-level and above honors or city-level public classes. At the same time, the personnel and title of teachers in grassroots primary schools are subordinate to the central primary school in their respective townships, and each primary school operates relatively independently. Although quantitative competitions have been conducted, the evaluation of teaching abilities, work performance, and other aspects of teachers in grassroots primary schools is determined by the title evaluation team of the central primary school, making it more subjective.

2.7 The Issue of Teachers' Ethics and Professional Conduct is not Uncommon

The primary criterion for evaluating the quality of the teacher team is the moral integrity and professional ethics of the teachers. Although the Ministry of Education has issued multiple documents such as the "Code of Professional Ethics for Elementary and Middle School Teachers" and the "Ten Guidelines for Professional Behavior of Elementary and Middle School Teachers in the New Era" to regulate the professional ethics of teachers, there are still individual teachers who relax their self-requirements and fail to fulfill their job responsibilities correctly, leading to incidents of engaging in paid tutoring, driving under the influence, fraud, gambling, and accepting gifts in violation of teacher professional ethics. These behaviors go against the professional standards expected of teachers and damage the image of the teaching profession. The issue of moral integrity and professional ethics among the teacher team is persistent. Apart from teachers lowering the bottom line of professional ethics and weakening their professional qualities, the lack of effective management over the teacher team, especially outside of the regular working hours, is even more crucial. With the summer and winter vacations lasting up to 3 months, most teachers engage in short-term subject-specific training to enhance themselves during the break. However, there are some teachers who take advantage of the holidays to conduct paid tutoring, which goes against the strict prohibition by the Ministry of Education on teachers in primary and secondary schools engaging in paid tutoring while still in service.

3 Suggestions for Enhancing the High-Quality Development of the Team of Full-Time Teachers

With the development of the economy and the emphasis of the public on education, facing new situations and new requirements, there is still ample room for the construction and development of the teaching staff. In addition to continuously increasing

investment in financial funds, it is more important to make efforts in system mechanisms and top-level design, actively constructing a good ecology for the development of teachers.

3.1 Broadening the Channels for Talent Introduction

To meet the needs of educational development, promote the structural reform of the supply side of the teacher team, further optimize the existing selection mechanism, implement differentiated staffing standards, and improve the healthy circulation mechanism of the teacher team entering and leaving. Reform the teacher selection mechanism, select and expand talent reserves according to the principles of setting positions according to needs, openly recruiting, and selecting the best[1]. Tilt and allocate teacher positions, optimize the structure and ratio of teacher positions, recruit and enroll male and female candidates separately, appropriately increase the number of male recruitment positions at the basic education stage, and implement non-major subject teachers according to subject requirements. To alleviate the temporary shortage of teachers, the government can uniformly hire teachers outside the establishment, requiring all teachers to carry out educational and teaching activities under the conditions of teacher qualification.

3.2 Activate and Make Good use of Teacher Resources

Increase the overall planning and allocation efforts^[2], adjust the structure of basic education stage teacher positions dynamically according to population development trends and school-age population, dynamically adjust the allocation of full-time teachers according to the student-teacher ratio and class-teacher ratio, and streamline non-teaching staff^[3]. Scientifically optimize the structure of the teacher team, especially the proportion of middle-aged and young teachers, forming a scientifically reasonable teacher echelon. Establish a cross-regional normal rotation selection system^[4], optimize the management mechanism of "county management, school appointment" for teachers in the basic education stage, establish a system of city and town teachers, excellent teachers, and key teachers serving in rural or remote areas for a period of time through various forms such as policy benefits and economic treatment, and guide teachers to flow in both directions^[5]. Break the constraints of fixed geographical positions for teachers, regularly select outstanding teachers to support teaching in rural areas, walk-in teaching, and timely supplement the teaching of shortage subjects. Establish a community of schools in the same area^[6], promote the inter-school flow sharing mechanism of teachers in shortage subject areas, and promote the construction and sharing of high-quality educational resources in the region.

3.3 Promoting the Reduction of Teachers' Workload and Improvement of Quality

The teacher's duty is to educate and reduce the non-teaching tasks burden for teachers is a consensus in the whole society. Continuously strengthen the human care for

teachers, alleviate teachers' teaching pressure, encourage schools to explore flexible working hours system, timely reduce the frequency of school-wide meetings, and ensure sufficient rest for teachers. Respect the laws of education and teaching, give schools more autonomy in running the school, strictly limit and standardize the behavior of drawing on borrowed teachers, regulate all kinds of training activities, change formalism such as excessive workload and improve the ecology of grassroots schools. Strictly regulate social affairs entering campus, streamline non-teaching matters such as inspections, supervision, assessments, and evaluations, establish a "white list" for social affairs entering campus, and implement approval and reporting system. Standardize daily data collection, utilization, classification and disposal, simplify related report filling, strengthen electronic approval and application of data materials, promote sharing and utilization of data resources. Scientifically determine the workload of teachers, for work outside of normal teaching, it should be implemented in a way of 'more work, more pay' through optimizing performance allocation schemes, to avoid increasing teachers' non-educational tasks due to different work division.

3.4 Strengthening the Cultivation of High-Quality Teachers

Develop a sound teacher talent planning system, scientifically divide the levels of hierarchical training, clarify the training objects, training goals, training methods, and expected training outcomes. Emphasize the professional development of teachers, establish a full-cycle training system for teachers by subject and position^[7], and enhance teachers' teaching abilities and subject literacy through various teaching seminars, skills competitions, etc. Implement the subject-leading teacher training plan, train the heads of basic education subjects by subject and hierarchical levels. Give full play to the role of key teachers in "passing on knowledge", assist the rapid growth of young teachers through mentorship pairing plans. Improve the quality of educational supply, establish a platform for sharing teaching resources and communication for teachers using information technology and digital platforms. For example, using 5G technology to develop new educational models such as cloud classrooms, remote training, lesson observation and discussion, and reshape the new form of smart education, helping to promote the balanced development of quality education.

3.5 Optimizing the Environment for Talent Recruitment and Cultivation System

Broaden the career development channels for teachers and enhance the new attractiveness of teacher employment. Deepen the reform of the teacher title system, optimize the assessment and evaluation of teacher professional titles^[8], improve the teacher post setting and employment management methods. On the basis of the existing system, appropriately increase the proportion of senior positions for primary and secondary school teachers, and implement the title "targeted use" for teachers in remote areas and rural schools. Break the evaluation mechanism of teachers based solely on papers, topics, or scores, pay more attention to the evaluation of teachers' professional abilities and teaching practices, involve multiple representatives in the as-

assessment and appraisal of teachers' business level. Continuously strengthen the guarantee of teachers' benefits, improve the linkage adjustment mechanism of teachers' salaries with the local civil servant salary level, optimize the performance-based pay distribution system, use teaching workload and actual teaching as core performance evaluation indicators, and continuously promote salary fairness. The cultivation of talents needs to be improved through the improvement of material conditions and the innovation of institutional mechanisms, actively create a social atmosphere of respecting teachers and valuing education, continuously introduce and implement methods to attract and reward outstanding education talents, explore a package of measures such as teacher-friendly policies in housing, children's education, and rural life subsidies, enhance teachers' professional identity, and make teachers stay, teach well, and have room for development.

3.6 Strengthen the Long-Term Mechanism of Teachers' Ethics and Professional Conduct

Cultivating the "great teachers" in the new era, the first criterion is to adhere to teachers' ethics and moral standards, and shaping ideology is the key to promoting the construction of teachers' ethics and moral standards. Regularly carry out ethics education for teachers, integrate the spirit of educators and the cultivation of teachers' ethics into the training of teachers' qualities, and run through the entire professional career of teachers. Regulate the teaching behaviors of teachers, strictly control the political aspects and ethical aspects of teachers' entry assessment, and reject those who behave improperly from the teaching staff. By selecting exemplary teachers with good moral standards, inspire teachers' intrinsic motivation and consciously maintain the image of teachers. Improve rigid institutional constraints, strengthen team supervision and management, establish a warning and control mechanism for teachers' ethics and moral standards, incorporate teachers' ethics and moral standards into the annual assessment, evaluation, and promotion system for teachers, improve dynamic evaluations, strictly implement the veto system for those who behave improperly or violate discipline and laws, and investigate and expose behaviors that undermine the educational environment.

4 Conclusion

To achieve a leap from an educationally large country to an educationally powerful nation requires long-term planning, scientific advancement, and a multi-faceted approach to enhance the quality and efficiency of practices. Currently, county-level regions still have significant potential to contribute to the answer sheet of building an educationally powerful nation and strengthening the teaching profession. Firstly, ideological and political guidance must be strengthened. This involves integrating the spirit of educators and the cultivation of teacher ethics throughout the career of teachers, guiding them to uphold morality in their personal lives and teaching practices, and stimulating their internal drive for professional development. Secondly, efforts

should be focused on optimizing the allocation of teaching resources. This includes facilitating diverse supply channels, strengthening the staffing of weaker disciplines through scientific selection and merit-based admissions, optimizing job resources in a comprehensive manner, promoting two-way exchanges of teachers between urban and rural areas, and realizing the sharing of teacher resources within the region. Thirdly, emphasis should be placed on enhancing teachers' literacy and abilities. This necessitates improving the teacher training system, with a focus on teachers' professional ethics and abilities. Digitalization should be leveraged to empower teachers' professional development, and tiered and categorized training should be provided accordingly.

Lastly, the protection of teachers' rights and interests must be strengthened. This involves regulating social activities in schools, establishing a dynamic and categorized evaluation system, deepening the reform of the teacher title system, improving teachers' salaries and benefits, implementing measures to benefit and strengthen teachers, and striving to enhance teachers' sense of professional fulfillment and happiness.

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