

## Persistence and Breakthrough: Reexamining the Transformation and Development Path of Local Normal Universities

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**Keywords:** Colleges and Universities, Transformation, Path.

**Abstract.** Faced with opportunities and challenges, local normal universities need to find out the target orientation of the transformation and development, to develop teacher education major and applied major in a coordinate manner and optimize the teaching team of “double-qualified teachers”. In the process of transformation, universities and colleges should actively meet the needs of social development, optimize the discipline and specialty structure, and improve the training quality of applied talents.

### Introduction

In recent years, comprehensive reform has been comprehensively deepened in the field of education, promoting the structural adjustment of higher education and accelerating the development of modern vocational education. The “transformation” and “upgrade” have brought greater challenges to local normal universities that have already faced many development difficulties. The Ministry of Education has made it clear that during the 13th Five-Year Plan, the existing 181 normal universities cannot change their names and should focus on the main work to train teachers. How to reexamine the transformation and development path of local normal universities under the new situation has become an unavoidable practical problem.

### The Situation Faced by the Transformation and Development of Local Normal Universities

#### Transforming to An Applied University is A New Development Option

With the economic development entering a new normal, the relationship between talent demand and supply has undergone profound changes. The quality of personnel training cannot meet the requirements of economic restructuring and industrial upgrading, and the structural contradiction of higher education is more prominent. In order to further optimize the structure of higher education and improve the supporting role of education in the development of the national economy, the state has put emphasis on the development of modern vocational education. The state has issued *The Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Modern Vocational Education* and *The Guiding Opinions on Guiding Transformation of Some Local Colleges and Universities to Applied Ones*, which put forward clearly to promote the transformation of qualified ordinary colleges and universities to application-oriented ones. These social needs and policy orientations also provide new directions and goals for the development of local normal universities.

The quality of teacher training is directly related to the quality of education at all levels and kinds. The State Council has clearly put forward in “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of Teaching Staff” that the system of teacher qualification examination and regular registration in primary and secondary schools should be fully implemented, which should be formally implemented nationwide in 2016. On the one hand, the entrance of being a teacher is strictly controlled through the qualification *access* system. On the other hand, it fully guarantees the healthy and orderly development of the teaching profession as a whole. *The “Thirteenth Five-Year Plan” for the Development of National Education* first proposed to do a good job in the “Pilot Program for Professional Certification of Teachers’ Majors”. Its purpose is to further strengthen the connotation

construction of teacher education major in the normal colleges and universities, and to grasp the bottom line for the training teachers, which ensure the quality of teacher personnel training to the greatest extent.

### **The social Demand for Teachers is Still Strong**

At present, there is a one-sided understanding in the society, that is, “a large number of local normal colleges and universities resulting a serious surplus of teachers”. However, in reality, many schools have the problem of “teacher shortage”. The main reasons are as follows: first, the structural contradiction of teachers is prominent. From the perspective of the region, the eastern region has gathered more education talents due to its advantages in working environment, living conditions, and remuneration packages. However, the education talents in the western region cannot fully meet the actual needs of the regional social economic development and a strong expectation for quality education. From the perspective of urban and rural areas, education talents are mainly concentrated in the cities; and some villages, especially in those remote and difficult areas, the loss of education talents is large, which seriously restricts the development of local education. Second, the teachers’ professional counterparts rate is low. There are a large number of local normal universities and a large number of students enrolled in teacher education. However, in the face of the current severe employment situation and the implementation of the teacher industry access system, students’ career choices and methods are becoming more diversified. According to *Report on Employment of Chinese College Students in 2017* released by MyCOS Research Institute, the corresponding employment rate of normal universities graduates is less than 50%, which shows that the actual supply of education talents is generally insufficient. Third, the population policy adjustment brings about growth point. “The universal two-child policy” was officially implemented in 2016. The policy has been on the ground for more than a year, with nearly 1 million newborns were added from the same period. *The National Population Development Plan (2016-2030)* issued by the State Council clearly states that China’s population will reach 1.42 billion people by 2020 and will reach 1.45 billion people by 2030. It can be expected that with the gradual appearance of demographic dividend, the demand for teachers at all levels of education institutions will increase.

## **Analysis on the Problems of Transformation and Development of Local Normal Universities**

### **Transformation Direction**

At present, the development of local normal universities has indeed come to a crossroad. One road is persistence, continuing to do a good job in teacher education and transforming into a detailed education. The other way is breakthrough, to actively connect with the needs of the society and the industry, focus on the development of applied majors, so as to achieve the transformation to applied universities. For persistence, facing the real needs of the talent market and the development trend of the education industry, cultivating single-qualified teachers can no longer support the sustainable development of local normal universities. For breakthrough, compared with other local colleges, local normal universities have weak foundation of applied disciplines and high cost of transformation. Therefore, the transformation of local normal universities must take the traditions and characteristics into account, highlight the urgency of social economic development and talent demand. Some majors with strong technical application and high social demand should be turned to applied ones. At the same time, the school should strengthen teacher education major and enhance its accuracy to be served as the foundation for developing applied majors.

### **Relationship between Teacher Education Majors and Applied Majors**

In recent years, many local normal colleges and universities actively adapt to the needs of social and economic development, and increase the construction of applied majors in the professional development, which makes the education majors neglected in varying degrees. In the face of the Ministry of Education’s requirements for focusing on the main business of teachers, normal universities and colleges must deal with the relationship between the education majors and applied

majors. First, we must fully understand the application of education major. For a long time, inertial thinking believes that the teacher education major does not have utility. In fact, from the perspective of career characteristics, the teacher itself is a highly skilled profession. From the perspective of talent training objectives, the utility and skill knowledge of students in education majors are no less than the students in applied majors. It can even be said that because teachers are faced with people, their language expression ability, interpersonal communication ability and practical operation ability and other abilities require a higher level. In this sense, the education major itself is an applied major. Second, it is necessary to develop teacher education major and applied major as a whole. From the history of running a local normal university, the advantage and characteristic are the teacher education major. Even with the emphasis on the construction of applied majors, teacher education major is still the foundation of local normal universities. However, the development of applied majors in local normal universities is not balanced, and there are many gaps in the allocation of teachers and resources guarantee. Therefore, we should not blindly develop applied majors, but should combine the actual and regional economic and social development needs of their own school, co-ordinate the school resources, and set up applied majors with strong pertinence. Third, it is necessary to innovate the mode of training applied talents. The transformation of local normal colleges and universities should not follow or imitate the model of other local colleges and universities, but should be based on the tradition of teacher education and train applied talents with the train of thought of cultivating teacher education talents. It makes the applied talents trained in normal colleges and universities not only have applied skills, but also have the comprehensive quality ability emphasized in the training of teacher education, which can make the characteristics of talents training in the transformation process of local normal universities.

### **Construction of “double-qualified teachers”**

Teachers are the main force driving the transformation of schools. At present, local normal colleges and universities are facing many different situations. For teachers in teacher education, they do not have a thorough research on basic education theory research and know less about the basic education present situation, the development trend, the national standard request as well as the development and the construction of teaching materials. In actual teaching, the content is old and the means are single, and there is a lack of direct connection with the teaching and research of basic education. For the teachers teaching applied majors, they lack experience in industry and enterprise, without enough means to train applied talents. They also pay less attention to guiding practice and training, as well as reforming practical teaching. Therefore, the construction of double-qualified teachers should aim at the characteristics of the transformed school-running. They should guide and encourage teachers to go deep into the industry, which makes them be familiar with the development trend and actual needs of the industry. They should transform the existing teaching content and methods, and increase practice training and teaching links, in order to adapt to the needs of training applied talents.

## **Reflections on the Transformation and Development Path of Local Normal Universities**

### **The Direction of Transformation and Development is to Meet the Needs of Social Development**

One function of colleges and universities is to serve the society. The development of local normal universities cannot be separated from the support of social development. Therefore, the transformation goal of local normal universities is to promote the development of regional economy and society. Taking the author's school as an example, it clearly regards modern service industry as the direction of transformation and development, which is mainly based on the realistic needs of social development. Combining with the state's proposal to “accelerate the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries and promote the development of the service industry, especially the modern service industry”, the province propose to “building a service industry development system adapted to the multiple productivity and diverse consumption demand in the whole

province”; focusing on cultural tourism and supporting by modern finance, modern logistics and commercial services, the local form a modern service system with outstanding advantages, perfect functions, large employment capacity and good economic benefits. All these need a large number of high-quality talents to meet the development needs of modern service industry, which provides a reference and choice for the scientific development and rational orientation of the school construction.

### **The Key to Transformation and Development Lies in Optimizing the Discipline and Specialty Structure**

Discipline and specialty construction is the foundation of the construction and development of colleges and universities. It is an effective carrier for higher education to develop talents, do scientific research, and serve the development of economy society, and cultural inheritance and innovation. It is also the basis to measure the level and characteristics of running a school and the quality of personnel training. The key to the transformation of local normal universities lies in the optimization and adjustment of discipline and specialty to meet the training requirements of applied talents. Specifically, it should be based on the local, make the discipline and specialty structure of the school adapt to service basic public education system and the local industry upgrade and economic transformation; focusing on utility, to make the discipline and specialty structure adapt to the students’ profession development ability and employment quality structure; focusing on characteristics, to make the discipline and specialty structure adapt to teaching features and school-running advantages, and promote the construction and development of related disciplines with its characteristics.

### **The Goal of Transformation and Development is to Cultivate High-quality Applied Talents**

To cultivate high-quality applied talents, we must closely focus on the needs of local economic and social construction, and seek support and development through service and contribution. First of all, the goal of talent training should be adapted to the transformation and upgrading of social economy. In addition to traditional knowledge and skill training, this also requires us to pay more attention to the professional core abilities, such as students’ innovation, practice ability, teamwork and professionalism. Secondly, in order to fully guarantee the forward-looking and relative stability of the personnel training objectives, it is necessary to take the teaching and major as the main body, combining the needs of the industry (enterprise), scientifically select and rationally position the talent training objectives, and reflect the talent cultivation characteristics of the school and various professions. Finally, strengthen the application and practice, explore the establishment of a synergistic and integrated education mechanism that combines classroom teaching with social practice, maximize the use of resources within the school, and fully utilize the industry resources in order to effectively improve the training quality of applied talents.

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