

# Exploration of High-quality and Characteristic Development of Application-oriented Private Colleges and Universities

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**Abstract:** *Under the backdrop of continuous evolution in educational reform and social demands, the development path of application-oriented private colleges has emerged as a significant issue in the of education. Through investigation and in-depth analysis of the current development status of application-oriented private colleges, this paper explores the challenges and opportunities they face in the process of high-quality and distinctive development. By analyzing key elements such as professional characteristics, faculty team building, research capabilities, management mechanisms, and talent cultivation models, a high-quality and distinctive development model suitable for application-oriented private colleges is constructed, and detailed solutions are proposed. The aim is to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for these colleges to achieve high-quality development.*

**Keywords:** *application-oriented, private colleges, distinctive development*

## 1. Introduction

As China's higher education advances from massification to universalization, private colleges and universities are playing an increasingly important role in expanding educational resources and promoting the diversified development of education. From the perspective of their development history, private education initially emerged to make up for the insufficiency of higher education resources in China, mainly developing through training and degree enhancement programs. However, with the rapid social development and intensifying competition, countries are seeking effective ways to diversify and enhance their core competitiveness, which undoubtedly poses new development requirements for education[1]. Currently, private higher education has become an important component of China's higher education system, and many newly established private colleges and universities have been under the spotlight of all sectors of society since their establishment. However, various problems have emerged during their development, and there is still a considerable gap compared to public institutions. Nevertheless, private colleges and universities, with their flexible mechanisms and high market sensitivity, can respond more quickly to social demands and build differentiated competitiveness. There are many factors influencing the development of higher education institutions, and throughout the evolution of higher education, policy-driven and social demand have always been the engines of higher education development in each era [2]. High-quality development is the guiding principle and main goal for China's economic and social development during the "14th Five-Year Plan" period. Building a high-quality education system is the core task of education development in the new era, and improving the quality of higher education is the overall requirement for higher education development in the new era [3]. Professor Bie Dunrong, the director of the Institute of Education at Xiamen University, particularly pointed out that the next ten years will be the "last strategic opportunity window period" for private colleges and universities to achieve leapfrog development and form a new educational pattern. It is necessary to grasp the core of the characteristic development of private colleges and universities, explore detailed implementation paths and guarantee measures, aiming to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the sustainable and high-quality development of private colleges and universities in the new educational landscape.

## 2. Current Problems of Applied Private Colleges and Universities

### 2.1 Inadequate Professional Construction

"Professional" runs through the education system, career development, and social division of labor.

Its core is “forming systematic knowledge, skills, and professional ethics in a specific field and being able to solve complex problems”, which is a multi-dimensional concept. At the same time, professional construction is the core element of the basic teaching construction of private colleges and universities and the key to improving the efficiency of running schools. Currently, in order to meet the demands of the market and the preferences of college entrance examination candidates, the number of majors offered by various colleges and universities is adjusted year by year, with some increasing and some decreasing. However, whether blindly adding or reducing a major is beneficial to a college still needs to be observed. Although the number of majors has increased, the corresponding resources have not been adequately prepared, such as teaching conditions not meeting requirements, equipment and classrooms not up to standard, a shortage of professional teachers, unreasonable course settings, and unclear goals in talent cultivation plans, etc. This results in a low match between subsequent student training and employment.

### ***2.2 Unstable Construction of the Teaching Staff***

Compared with public colleges and universities, private colleges and universities face many instabilities in their teaching staff. This mainly stems from the fact that private colleges and universities are self-financed social force-run institutions without state financial support. To save costs, teachers are often required to take on multiple roles, with relatively low salaries and insufficient care. For instance, a professional teacher may need to teach multiple courses, serve as an academic advisor for freshmen, and a graduation advisor for seniors, while also completing other tasks assigned by the school. Moreover, some teachers live far from the school, spending a considerable amount of time commuting each day. By the end of the day, they are already exhausted. It is well known that a person’s energy is limited. Expecting teachers to teach each course well and handle other tasks without providing sufficient time and attractive compensation is unsustainable. Over time, some teachers cannot endure and leave their positions. In fact, every teacher who enters a university is filled with dreams and wants to teach every student well. However, the high pressure of reality often wears down a person’s will. Over time, even if they don’t leave, they will feel powerless and lose enthusiasm when teaching, and they will also carry a negative mood, which will spread quietly. Gradually, colleagues around them will become the same, which is very unfavorable for the construction of the teaching staff. Moreover, the allocation of teaching staff is unreasonable. The structure ratio of teachers’ academic qualifications, professional titles, work experience, age, and subject specialties is not reasonable. The proportion of doctoral degrees is very small, and there are even some “watered-down” doctoral degrees, which reduces the value of academic qualifications and also leads to unfair treatment.

### ***2.3 Weak research capabilities***

Research, or “scientific research”, reflects a university’s research capabilities. When teachers conduct research, they can solve problems in the process of imparting knowledge. Some private universities either do not have strict requirements for research, or they have strict requirements but do not pay attention to research quality. The so-called strict research requirements are used as indicators for the annual assessment of teachers. For teachers who have been deeply engaged in research, they will continue to do so even without assessment. However, for many novice teachers, they are not familiar with the process and have not been exposed to good projects. Coupled with heavy teaching loads, they have no time for research. To complete the assessment, they choose topics and work in isolation, publishing papers blindly. Although it seems that they have completed the assessment on the surface, it has little significance for real teaching, as the form outweighs the content. There are also some teachers who manage to find a project that can be approved, but due to lack of funds and other reasons, there is no progress. The help provided by the school is limited. All these factors result in no breakthroughs in research achievements. A university’s weak research capabilities will have a certain impact on its future application for master’s degree programs.

### ***2.4 Incomplete management mechanisms***

In terms of teachers, private universities have some “unscientific” problems in management, which essentially reflect the incompatibility between their educational positioning, resource constraints, educational laws, and teachers’ development needs. These issues can be analyzed from core aspects such as recruitment, assessment, incentives, development, and rights protection. At the same time, systematic optimization directions should be proposed in combination with the characteristics of private universities. During the recruitment period, many private universities are overly pragmatic. To

save costs, they tend to hire teachers with “low salaries and high academic qualifications” or some retired teachers who do not need to pay social security. This is not beneficial to teachers’ protection and leads to an increase in teacher turnover. Some teachers choose to leave at the end of the term, without affecting the school’s end-of-term tasks or its interests. However, the contract adds additional terms, requiring them to pay a penalty for leaving. This has a certain impact on teachers’ physical and mental health. The contract is signed based on mutual consent. Why add non-compliant terms? Is this really an effective way to prevent teachers from leaving? This clearly infringes upon teachers’ basic rights and should not be included in the management regulations for teachers. During the teaching period, the human resources department randomly checks teachers’ office status, which is commendable. However, not allowing teachers to leave their desks to do other things is somewhat extreme. Can’t teachers feel the campus? It’s not like they are “slacking off” during working hours. Teachers should have multiple choices after class, such as the library. If they are always in the office, it will limit their development. During the assessment period, many management regulations are presented in a parent-child structure. Only the parent regulations are visible, but the child regulations are actually implemented. Where are the child regulations? They are not even in the employee handbook. Everything is decided on a case-by-case basis. Such management will not make teachers feel fair. Instead, it increases their confusion. Regarding students, many of them long for freedom after entering university. However, excessive freedom can lead to laziness. To help students develop good habits, the school requires that dormitories be kept clean at all times, such as no garbage in the trash can and no items on the desk. This makes students reluctant to sit anywhere in their living space, which is an example of over-management. This affects students’ physical and mental health and naturally leads to dissatisfaction with the school. Such management is not satisfactory.

### ***2.5 The talent cultivation model is not prominent***

The first problem faced by private universities in their talent cultivation model is the ambiguity of their educational positioning and lack of distinctive features. Many private universities imitate the educational model of public universities blindly during their development, lacking a precise understanding of their own advantages and the economic demands of the region. This results in a disconnect between talent cultivation and market needs. For instance, some private universities overly pursue a comprehensive range of disciplines, closely following popular fields in setting up majors, but neglect their own teaching staff and resource conditions. As a result, students from some majors lack both solid theoretical foundations and practical skills, failing to meet the demands of enterprises for applied talents. Although most private universities have established cooperative relationships with enterprises, such cooperation often remains superficial, such as providing simple internship positions for students without participating in the talent cultivation plan or providing systematic guidance on students’ practical abilities. At the same time, the construction of practical teaching facilities in private universities lags behind, with insufficient hardware resources such as laboratories and training bases, which fails to provide students with sufficient practical opportunities and hinders the improvement of their hands-on and innovative abilities.

## **3. Solutions**

### ***3.1 Highlight professional characteristics***

The majors of applied private universities should focus on “application” and carry out professional construction rationally. Majors should be set up based on the school’s own characteristics. For example, in a media university, traditional majors include broadcasting, hosting, and animation. On this basis, the professional configuration should be adjusted in line with market demands. In the current era of digital economy, the school can appropriately add some micro-majors. The construction of micro-majors in local universities is not only a key to optimizing the professional structure and innovating the talent cultivation model but also a key to serving the upgrading of the regional industry. By aligning with the demands of the local industrial chain, it can quickly respond to the talent gap in the development of the digital economy and achieve a dynamic match between educational supply and industrial economy[4]. Compared with public universities, the professional characteristics of private universities are a highlight that attracts many students to apply. Based on the existing majors, it is necessary to conduct investigations and analyses of surrounding universities and their characteristics to find a suitable development path for the school’s majors.

### ***3.2 Improve the construction of the teaching staff***

Before formulating strategies, it is necessary to focus on the differentiation of the teaching staff in private universities and not blindly copy the model of public universities. The proportion of teachers should be rationalized based on their professional structure, title structure, educational background, and age structure. For part-time teachers, flexible employment should be adopted, especially addressing the issue of the middle-aged gap, which cannot meet the “double high” development needs of private universities. There is a lack of academic leaders, research backbone, academicians, doctors, professors, and industry skill masters[5]. For young teachers, they can be cultivated as reserve cadres, and there is no need to overly pursue high educational qualifications. The primary task of a teacher is to be able to teach and be passionate about the classroom. Those with enterprise internship experience can be given priority. For middle-aged teachers, they can be cultivated as key teaching talents and assigned to positions such as subject leaders and dual-shoulder positions. Their opinions should be listened to more, which is very beneficial to the overall development of the school. For core talents with distinctive features, such as those who have made achievements in the field of research, they should be given special treatment and employed to drive the development of the school’s research and advantageous disciplines. Occasionally organize “teacher team-building activities” to avoid “only discussing work without touching on emotions”. There are many forms of team-building activities, such as organizing basketball games on campus, which can enhance mutual feelings and make teachers feel the care from the school, which is beneficial for future work. The school should also establish a suggestion box where teachers can propose suggestions on the school’s construction, management, and other aspects based on their own feelings. This way, the school can understand what teachers care about and help them solve problems, eliminating their worries and facilitating the school’s future management. Therefore, to improve the construction of the teaching staff in private colleges and universities, it is not advisable to blindly follow public institutions. Instead, it is necessary to find breakthroughs based on the school’s own positioning, solve the problem of “mismatch between personnel and positions” through “scientific use of talents”, address the issue of “poor stability” through “caring for talents”, and resolve the problem of “deviation in orientation” through “multi-dimensional evaluation of talents”. Only in this way can an excellent teaching staff in private colleges and universities be built, supporting the improvement of the quality of applied talent cultivation and achieving the sustainable development of private colleges and universities.

### ***3.3 Encourage Research Investment***

Teachers in private colleges and universities should understand the meaning of research. Research is for personal improvement rather than merely completing tasks perfunctorily. For young teachers, certain training and encouragement should be provided, and the “experienced guiding the new” approach should be adopted to involve young teachers in research projects. At the same time, teaching tasks for teachers should be reasonably arranged to ensure they have sufficient time for research instead of squeezing time for it while being exhausted. Research goals should not be set too high; instead, they should be based on summarizing and analyzing actual teaching, reading past literature and data, and using innovative methods. As research deepens, teachers will become increasingly engaged. Project selection should also focus on establishing more school-enterprise cooperation. Through such cooperation, teachers can understand the needs of enterprises and improve their teaching accordingly, which is both meaningful and practical. As the saying goes, “True knowledge comes from practice.” It is also recommended that private colleges and universities establish more platforms to facilitate better cooperation and communication between teachers and enterprises in terms of industry-university-research collaboration, sowing seeds for their research projects and allowing them to grow. Teachers should actively join regular research work reports and learning exchanges organized by research cooperation groups to overcome their own procrastination and laziness through the group’s constraints[6]. Moreover, the research assessment system in private colleges and universities should encourage teachers rather than make them feel forced or resistant. The assessment system should be adjusted to be more motivating, allowing teachers to feel the benefits of research. Gradually, teachers will shift from passivity to proactivity and fully engage in research. Many innovation and entrepreneurship competitions are excellent research topics. Teachers can lead students to participate in these competitions, from project initiation to conclusion, which also counts as research.

### ***3.4 Improve Management Mechanism***

The core of management lies in managing people’s hearts. Once people’s hearts are lost,

management loses its meaning. For teachers, effective training should be provided to new employees from the moment they join, and employee handbooks should be distributed to help new teachers understand the school's rules. For any unclear points, the HR department should offer explanations instead of evading them. When signing contracts, both parties should be willing, and the terms and salary benefits should be clearly stated. There should be only one contract, and no additional ones, as these would go against the will of both parties. After signing, each party should have a copy of the contract as the basis for cooperation. If one party breaches the contract, it should be handled according to the contract, rather than negotiated on a case-by-case basis. Teachers with outstanding performance should be rewarded, and those who have made mistakes should be given appropriate warnings or penalties. Rewards and punishments should be transparent and fair. For teachers who express the intention to leave, the leaders of each secondary college should have a talk with them to understand the reasons. If it is due to school issues, they can be promptly reported to the school to improve its construction. If it is for other reasons, it should be handled differently. In summary, management is not about coercion but about winning people's hearts. When people's hearts are warmed, teachers' sense of responsibility will increase, and the turnover rate will naturally decrease. For students, the school should widely listen to their suggestions, improve the concentrated problems, and respond to their voices. When students are happy, management will be smoother, and the school's reputation will increase.

### ***3.5 Innovate Talent Cultivation Models***

In terms of school positioning, application-oriented private colleges should accurately position themselves. Through in-depth research on regional economic development needs and industry trends, combined with their own resources and advantages, they should clearly define the goals for cultivating application-oriented talents and focus on developing characteristic majors. Improve the talent introduction and cultivation mechanism. On one hand, we should raise teachers' salaries and improve their welfare benefits, optimize career development pathways, and attract more high-caliber educators and "dual-qualified" teachers with extensive industry experience. On the other hand, we need to strengthen the training and professional development of in-service teachers, encourage them to take on temporary roles in enterprises for hands-on practice, and participate in enterprise project research and development to enhance their practical teaching capabilities. At the same time, establish a scientific and reasonable teacher evaluation system, incorporating practical teaching achievements and participation in school-enterprise cooperation projects into the evaluation indicators to stimulate teachers' enthusiasm and initiative in teaching. Private colleges should deepen school-enterprise cooperation and strengthen practical teaching. Actively engage in in-depth cooperation with enterprises, invite enterprises to participate in the formulation of talent cultivation plans, course settings, and teaching evaluations, and adjust teaching content based on the actual needs of enterprises. Additionally, we should increase investment in practical teaching infrastructure, develop a batch of high-standard laboratories and training bases, and create more hands-on practice opportunities for students. Meanwhile, we will implement customized "order-based" training programs and on-the-job internships, enabling students to enhance their practical skills and professional competencies in real workplace settings, thus achieving seamless alignment between academic education and enterprise needs. The optimization of talent cultivation models in private colleges is a systematic project that requires the joint efforts of the school, enterprises, and the government. Only by facing the existing problems squarely, taking effective solutions, and constantly innovating talent cultivation models can the quality of talent cultivation in private colleges be improved, and more high-quality application-oriented talents be cultivated for China's economic and social development.

## **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the core value of high-quality and distinctive development for application-oriented private universities lies in leveraging their institutional characteristics and positioning needs. By breaking away from the conventional mindset of replicating public university models, these institutions can forge a unique development path through three key strategies: highlighting specialized disciplines, strengthening faculty development, and enhancing management mechanisms. This approach enables them to cultivate more high-caliber applied professionals for regional economic growth, thereby demonstrating the unique value of private higher education.

### Acknowledgments

This is supported by the Education Science “14th Five-Year Plan” of the Liaoning Private Education Association in 2025, the research project “Research on the Construction and Implementation Strategies of High-Quality and Characteristic Development Models in Private Colleges and Universities”(Number: LMJX2025184), presided by Peng Wu. Yang Gao is a member of the project, who was born in 1985, female, from Shenyang, Liaoning Province, is an associate professor and senior engineer at Liaoning Communication University. Her research interests include higher education and landscape design.

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