

# Causes and Solution Strategies of Teacher Career Involution in Local Ethnic Undergraduate Colleges and Universities

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**Abstract:** Taking teachers of local ethnic undergraduate colleges as the research object, this study explores the reasons for the phenomenon of university teachers' career involution and how to deal with it effectively. In the course of the study, it was found that the main reasons for the professional involution of university teachers are due to a variety of influencing factors such as society, school and family. This study proposes a series of countermeasures, including strengthening the quality management of education and teaching and improving the level of teachers' own quality; establishing a sound evaluation system and improving the appraisal mechanism; and carrying out a variety of forms of professional development activities to enhance teachers' professional creativity. These measures can effectively help university teachers alleviate the phenomenon of career involution and promote the healthy development of the university teaching profession.

**Keywords:** Local ethnic undergraduate colleges, Teachers, Internalisation

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, as the focus of China's higher education reform has shifted from scaled growth to gathering high-quality development, and the awareness of undergraduate colleges and universities to adhere to student-centred, output-oriented, and continuous improvement in the work of educating people has been gradually increasing, the pressure of teaching and scientific research tasks on college teachers has also been increasing, and they not only need to focus on the quantity of the tasks they complete, but also the quality of the tasks, and thus their The degree of burnout is also increasing. The contemporary conceptual interpretation of involution first originated from American anthropologist Clifford Geertz's book *Agricultural Involution: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia*. As defined by Clifford Geertz, involution is the phenomenon whereby a social or cultural pattern reaches a defined form at a certain stage of development and then stagnates or fails to transform into another advanced pattern. Then later on, endoconvolution evolved into an online term for the phenomenon of peers competing with each other and thus exerting more effort to compete for limited resources, which leads to a decline in individual returns. Current academic explanations of involution describe it more as an important cause of burnout. The phenomenon of career involution of Chinese higher education teachers first began during China's reform and opening-up period. During this period, studying abroad became a craze, and in many well-known universities, both teachers and students made studying abroad a more fervent pursuit. As China's higher education reform shifted from pursuing crude scale expansion to focusing on the connotative construction of high-quality development, this involutorial craze of studying abroad gradually regained its calm. However, with the implementation of the national double first-class strategy, most of China's leading universities have begun to regard the number of academic publications and the quality of teaching as double standards and double pressure for the promotion of teachers' professional and technical positions. Against this background, teachers in low academic positions have to make greater breakthroughs in the number and quality of academic publications and in the construction of teaching if they want to be promoted to higher academic positions. When incentive competition is formed among teachers, the phenomenon of involution of academic position promotion begins to appear. A survey shows that in recent years, because of the pressure of academic position promotion, many teachers of well-known universities choose to move to work in local universities. The joining of teachers from well-known colleges and universities, in turn, makes the teachers of local colleges and universities begin to produce incentives for competition in academic and teaching work, and thus begin to internal attrition and involution. This is because the addition of well-known university faculty forces local university faculty to work harder than ever before to take their place in academic job promotions. Over time, the

degree of career involution of teachers in local non-well-known colleges and universities is more serious than that in well-known colleges and universities, and has become an important influence on teacher burnout, which affects the stability of the teaching force and the healthy development of the profession in local colleges and universities. Therefore, this study aims to explore the causes of teacher career involution in local ethnic undergraduate colleges and countermeasures to crack this phenomenon, with a view to providing benefits for the sustainable healthy and high-quality development of local ethnic undergraduate colleges.

## 2. Manifestations of the involution of the teaching profession in local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities

The "involution of the teaching profession" is an important part of the "involution of education". "Educational involution" refers to the fact that within the education system, achievement growth is achieved by constantly increasing the labour input of education and teaching, but there is no significant improvement in the efficiency and results of education and teaching<sup>[1]</sup>. In short, the teacher career involution in higher education is a disorderly, meaningless, worthless and chaotic professional competition. "Teaching career involution" and teachers' utilitarian work motivation are one and the same, and are mutually causal. On the one hand, the "educational career involution" is the product of the extreme utilitarianism of teachers' professional development, its "outbreak" in colleges and universities, deeply reflecting the tendency of utilitarian motivation of teachers' professional development in colleges and universities; on the other hand, the utilitarian motivation of the work of the teachers' group as a whole, the inevitable career development trend, the involution of the teachers' group as a whole, the inevitable career development trend. On the other hand, if the utilitarian motivation becomes the overall professional development trend of the teachers' group, the phenomenon of involution will cause instability of the teachers' team and involve every member of the teachers' group in disorderly competition. Teachers, as an important part of the higher education system, naturally cannot stay out of it. The involution of the university teaching profession is the result of university teachers' over-involvement in work and academic activities at the expense of their health and quality of life in order to compete for titles, research projects and other resources in an environment of intense professional competition and scarce resources. Therefore, it is necessary for us to analyse the manifestations of utilitarianism in teachers' work motivation from the phenomenon of "involution".

### 2.1. Excessive pressure on academic research

One of the main manifestations of the internalisation of teachers' careers in local ethnic undergraduate colleges is the excessive pressure of academic research. Compared with well-known colleges and universities, local colleges and universities have limited educational resources, such as limited quotas for scientific research projects and teaching programmes. In order to compete for scientific research projects, teaching projects and publication of relevant academic papers, many teachers constantly increase their research workload, even disregarding the reasonable distribution of work time and rest time, so that they are in a state of long-term work fatigue and psychological pressure. A survey on the workload of university teachers in College F of local ethnic undergraduate colleges found that more than 60 per cent of teachers work more than 10 hours a day, and nearly 30 per cent of them work more than 60 hours a week (see Figure 1).

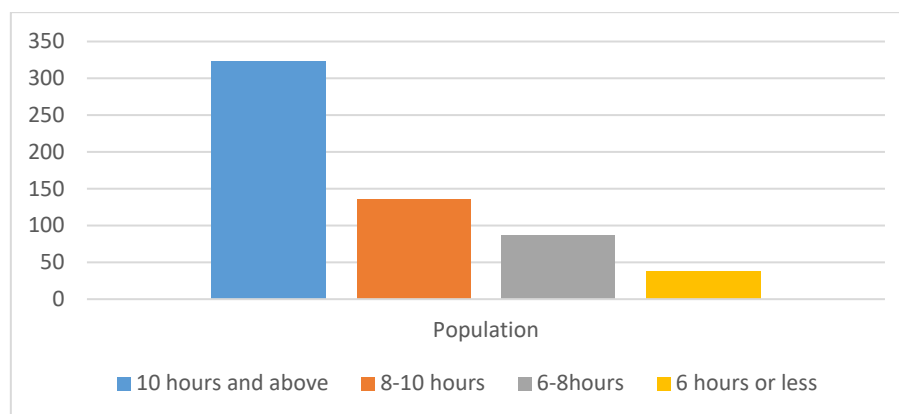


Figure 1: Daily workload statistics of teachers in F College

## 2.2. Overburdened with teaching tasks

Another manifestation of the involution of the teaching profession in local ethnic undergraduate colleges is the overload of teaching tasks. As local colleges and universities, the number of full-time teachers is obviously insufficient with the expansion of the scale of operation and the influence of the total number of teachers. While the size of the enrolled students is closely related to the salary and welfare of teachers, many teachers are burdened with heavy workload. In particular, young teachers and teachers with low academic titles have a heavy teaching load. A survey of teachers' class assignments in College F found that more than 70% of teachers maintain a weekly class load of more than 16 class hours (see Figure 2). Teachers who are responsible for more than three courses per semester reach more than 60%. Some teachers are even required to teach five courses per semester (see Figure 3). This has led to many teachers facing a choice between teaching quality and personal development, with some teachers sacrificing their academic research time and personal professional growth space to meet their teaching duties.

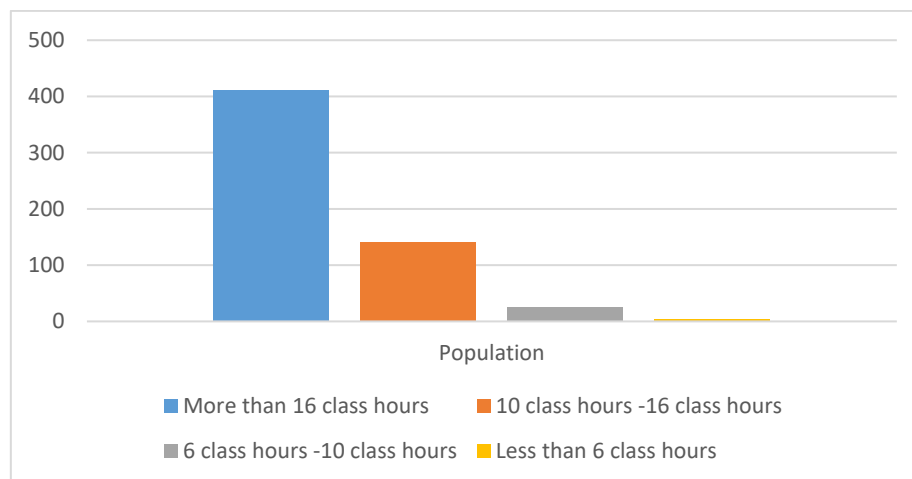


Figure 2: Statistics of the weekly class hours of teachers in F College

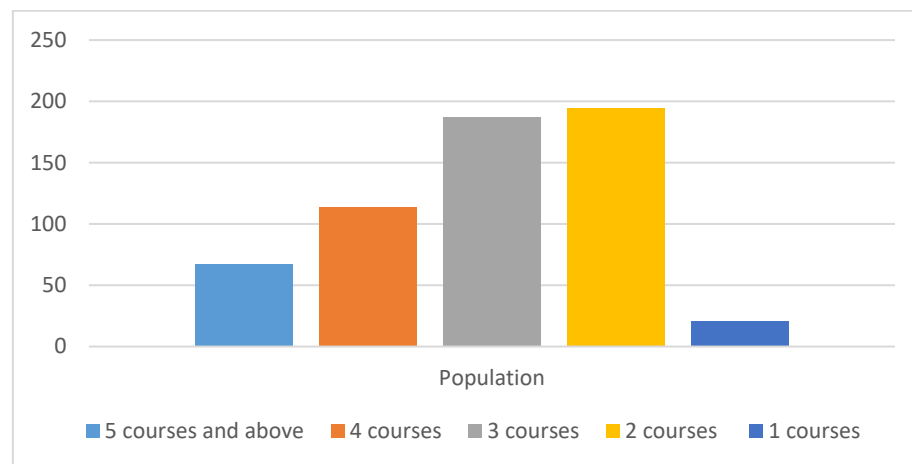


Figure 3: Statistics on the number of courses taken by teachers in College F

## 2.3. Excessive pressure for academic position promotion

Under the current higher education system, academic job evaluation is extremely important for university teachers. Academic job evaluation is not only related to the promotion of university teachers and the improvement of salary and welfare, but also closely related to the allocation of resources such as scientific research projects, teaching projects and academic reputation. As local national undergraduate colleges and universities, affected by limited educational resources, the academic influence and salary and welfare of teachers are weaker than those of other well-known universities. Therefore, in order to strive for promotion in academic positions and to prepare for promotion, many teachers will over-invest in preparatory work, such as increasing research output and over-attending academic activities, thus

sacrificing their own rest time and time to accompany their families. Individual teachers are not only over-involved in preparation work, but also motivational competition or even malicious competition among teachers for academic promotion.

#### ***2.4. Excessive tendency of thesis-onlyism***

Currently, in terms of enhancing their academic influence, universities are influenced by university rankings, and many colleges and universities have put forward the mainstream value orientation of thesis-onlyism, where the more thesis output is, the greater the school's academic influence will be. Under this influence, one of the manifestations of the involution of the teaching profession in local ethnic undergraduate colleges is the intensification of thesis-only tendency. Under the current academic evaluation system, publishing high-quality papers is an important way to obtain research resources and position promotion. Therefore, in order to improve their academic reputation and competitiveness, many teachers put a lot of time and energy into writing papers, thus neglecting the importance of teaching and other academic activities. Even thesis competitions have been formed among teachers, thus leading to involution, while the university also tends to favour the quality and number of papers in the annual academic assessment and evaluation system, and the assessment of teachers' other work is relatively weak, thus leading to incomplete development of teachers' careers.

#### ***2.5. Knowledge anxiety and innovation pressure***

At present, local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities are affected by the limitations of uneven distribution of educational resources and their own weak strength, many teachers are facing the pressure of knowledge anxiety and academic innovation. They feel that they must constantly pursue new knowledge and teaching methods in order to meet the needs of educating students and adapting to society. This leads teachers in local colleges and universities to keep learning and improving their teaching methods, even sacrificing their spare time, just to cater for the requirements of the school, the needs of the students, and the expectations of the society. Of course, in addition to the above major manifestations, the professional involution of teachers' careers in local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities may also be manifested in the form of working overtime for a long period of time, competing for resources, and lack of job satisfaction. These manifestations reflect, to some extent, the distress and pressure that career involution brings to university teachers.

### **3. Analysis of the causes of teachers' career involution in local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities**

The causes of university teachers' professional involution are related to the imbalance of academic system evaluation, unequal distribution of educational resources, unsound incentive mechanism, and overly competitive research environment. Career involution has a negative impact on teachers' physical and mental health, as well as the sustainable and healthy development of the university teaching profession.

#### ***3.1. Imbalance of academic evaluation system***

With the popularisation of higher education in China and the intensification of competition among universities, the academic evaluation system has become more and more oriented to scientific research outputs, and at the same time, under the influence of university rankings and other factors, the tendency of universities to focus on scientific research and papers only has become more and more obvious. The academic evaluation system, especially the evaluation system for academic position promotion, has become more obvious in its orientation of focusing on scientific research and academic paper output, neglecting teachers' efforts and contributions to teaching construction. Teachers have to put more time and energy into scientific research in order to get more scientific research funds and fast promotion of academic positions, relaxing the requirements for teaching work, which ultimately leads to a decline in the quality of teaching and fundamentally affects the quality of university education. In people's common sense, competition and evaluation are part of education, and they all serve to improve the quality of education and promote the healthy development of education. However, when they completely replace education, or when education is not for education but for competition and evaluation, they instead become the biggest obstacle to the development and quality improvement of education, and become the fundamental motive for the involution of education, because these two activities have completely

different value orientations and development logics<sup>[2]</sup>.

### ***3.2. Uneven distribution of educational resources***

The uneven distribution of higher education resources is another reason for the involution of the university teaching profession. At present, the development of higher education in China is in a period of transition and quality improvement in which pluralism coexists. The "value disorder" or relativism of multiculturalism during the period of social transition causes teachers' educational values to form habits of thought in a relatively closed educational field, which cannot be greatly transformed in a short period of time, showing a contradiction between deconstruction and construction<sup>[3]</sup>. Not only teachers, the contradiction between deconstruction and construction of educational resources is also relatively prominent. Currently, some key disciplines and high-level universities have more resources and financial support, while other disciplines and schools face a lack of resources. Local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities, due to their small scale, short history of development and weak social influence, rely entirely on the government's financial supply for their sources of financial funding. In order to strive for more resources, teachers in these schools have to work harder than those in some key disciplines and high-level universities. In a way, the involution of the teaching profession in local ethnic undergraduate colleges has arisen out of necessity. Because as teachers in local colleges and universities, they do not engage in excessive competition, they will not get the appropriate resources, not to mention the appropriate benefits.

### ***3.3. Inadequate incentive mechanism***

At present, the local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities have insufficient financial transfusion and blood-creation function of their own, mainly relying on the government's financial supply, and the teachers mainly rely on scientific research funds and title promotion to get the corresponding incentives. From the perspective of management science, material incentives are often linked to money or material, and the purpose of incentives is to encourage employees to put more effort into their work in order to obtain remuneration proportional to their own efforts. Local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities, whether from the institutional or practical level, incentive-related mechanisms have not been established soundly, the current situation of incentives does not inspire teachers to obtain rewards that are proportional to their own efforts, and in order for teachers to obtain more research funds, they have to be forced to get involved in the career involution of disorderly competition.

### ***3.4. Excessively competitive research environment***

In order to fight for research funds and title promotion, teachers in local ethnic undergraduate colleges often need to publish high-quality papers in domestic and international journals, and look for all kinds of opportunities to participate in all kinds of academic conferences and declare projects. Due to the fierce competition, teachers have to devote more time and energy to research. Many teachers often face overtime work, they need to prepare courses, correct assignments, attend classes and give lectures. Many teachers have to sacrifice their rest and socialising time due to excessive work pressure, and even the time to spend with their families is compressed. The overly competitive research environment is not only detrimental to the improvement of the quality of parenting, but also limits to a certain extent the independent development and happiness of teachers, which needs to attract the attention and concern of local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities and teachers themselves. Excessive competition among teachers also causes deterioration of interpersonal relationships among colleagues. Research has shown that the fitness of individuals with their colleagues has a significant negative impact on job burnout. Relationships with colleagues that are poorly handled have a multifaceted impact on teachers' burnout, affecting both the motivation of teachers to work and intensifying their dehumanisation<sup>[4]</sup>.

### ***3.5. Irrationality of work tasks***

Teachers in local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities are affected by the shortage of the total number of teachers, and they bear heavy research and teaching tasks, and teachers often need to work overtime to complete the relevant tasks, and whether the relevant tasks can be completed on time is directly linked to the end-of-year performance appraisal of the teachers. As a result, long overtime work has become the norm for teachers, leading to unstable working hours. Teachers face work pressure from the school and their own pursuit of higher goals. Excessive competition and the pursuit of high goals can lead to a blurring of teachers' professional identity, which can lead to a loss of professional

orientation and direction for future career development.

#### **4. Solution Strategies for Teachers' Career Involution in Local Ethnic Undergraduate Colleges and Universities**

The phenomenon of professional involution of teachers in local ethnic undergraduate colleges has brought many negative effects on the work and life of university teachers. In order to solve the problem of career involution, it is necessary to adopt corresponding strategies in terms of improving the working environment, upgrading teachers' professionalism, promoting teachers' development and strengthening institutional construction.

##### ***4.1. Actively Improving Teachers' Work Environment***

Research shows that teachers' job satisfaction is negatively correlated with career involution. Therefore, local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities should focus on improving teachers' working environment to enhance teachers' job satisfaction. Specific practices include providing reasonable working conditions and facilities, reducing teachers' teaching and research burdens, appropriately raising teachers' salaries and providing good career development opportunities. At the same time, schools should actively strengthen the work support for teachers and provide appropriate support and assistance in teaching, scientific research and education management. Establish good communication channels with teachers, strengthen communication and exchange between school administrators and teachers, timely understand teachers' work needs and problems, and actively solve them.

##### ***4.2. Invest in improving teachers' professionalism***

Enhancing teachers' educational and teaching abilities is the key to solving the problem of professional involution. Schools should carry out relevant teacher training and seminar activities to improve teachers' education and teaching standards and abilities. It should also focus on teachers' lifelong learning and encourage them to participate in academic conferences and seminars to exchange and co-operate with their peers. Schools should provide a sound professional development support system to provide teachers with appropriate resources and opportunities to promote their professional development. Specific practices include setting up a professional development fund to subsidise teachers' participation in training and academic research projects, establishing an evaluation system and encouraging teachers to conduct educational and teaching research.

##### ***4.3. Improve the Teacher Evaluation System***

The teacher evaluation system includes academic, teaching and other evaluation systems, and a reasonable evaluation system is the standard for objective and fair evaluation of teachers. The internalisation of academic evaluation is particularly serious, the phenomenon of academic "internalisation" certainly needs to be managed, but only some local elements need to be managed, academic "internalisation" is not just a reflection of the academic system within the various regulations, systems and the lack of improvement, but also the social level of the security system. Academic "involution" is not only a reflection of the lack and improvement of various regulations and systems within the academic system, but also a result of the synergy of various security systems, recruitment systems and employment environments at the social level<sup>[5]</sup>. Local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities should establish a scientific, fair and reasonable teacher evaluation system, which is an important means of solving the problem of involution of the teaching profession. The evaluation system should include multiple indicators and evaluation methods, which can objectively evaluate teachers' teaching and research performance, and also fully consider the actual situation and needs of teachers.

##### ***4.4. Sound Incentive Mechanism***

Incentive mechanism is an effective way to improve teachers' motivation and reduce the phenomenon of professional involution. Local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities should take into account the actual situation of the school, formulate clear incentives, and give corresponding rewards and opportunities for academic promotion according to the teachers' work performance and contribution. By improving the incentive mechanism, the teachers' motivation to participate in teaching and scientific research can be fully mobilised, so as to inject innovation and creativity into the long-term development

of the school. Work motivation is closely related to work attitude. Work attitude has a certain influence on the use of individual emotional labour strategy, which consists of three parts: cognition, emotion and behaviour<sup>[6]</sup>. A sound incentive mechanism needs to fully mobilise teachers' professional cognition, professional emotion and professional behaviour, only in this way can teachers avoid putting in repetitive labour and efforts and effectively promote the healthy development of their own profession.

## 5. Conclusion

The internalisation of the teaching profession is a systemic problem, and the phenomenon involves the education system, salary system, social evaluation and other aspects. To solve the problem of teachers' career involution in local ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities, it is necessary to adopt comprehensive measures, including reforming the teacher evaluation system, optimising the mechanism of teachers' remuneration and academic promotion, and improving the social status of teachers. Only through the development of reasonable strategies and measures tailored to local conditions can we effectively reduce teachers' work pressure, avoid them from consuming their work enthusiasm in excessive competition, and effectively improve their satisfaction and the quality of their professional development. In the pursuit of high-quality development today, the involution of the university teaching profession is an undesirable phenomenon of excessive competition in the times. Teachers' over-investment of time and energy in pursuit of better career development and treatment is not only detrimental to the benign development of the teaching profession, but also, to a certain extent, contrary to the original intention of the university to educate people, and contrary to the expectations of society for universities to cultivate high-quality talents, a phenomenon that must be changed.

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