

The Dilemma and Optimization Path of Promoting First Class Undergraduate Education in Local Ethnic Colleges and Universities

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Abstract: Under the background of "double first-class" and "application transformation and development", the promotion of first-class undergraduate education is the trend of establishing a classification system for Chinese universities, the implementation of classified management, and the inevitable requirement of strengthening the reform of undergraduate education in the field of higher education. Only when the local ethnic colleges and universities have a clear understanding of their own dilemmas and deficiencies in promoting undergraduate education, and thoroughly solved the bottlenecks restricting the development of undergraduate education, can they better cultivate high-quality undergraduates and better serve the political, economic and social development of ethnic regions, so as to create a win-win situation that meets the needs of the ethnic regions for talents and their own long-term development.

Keywords: Local ethnic institutions, First-class undergraduate education, Dilemma, Optimisation pathway

1. Introduction

Due to its special geographical and ethnic nature and the influence of economic, social, environmental, traffic, faculty and other factors that restrict the development of school running, local ethnic colleges and universities are walking on thin ice and facing many difficulties in improving the quality of their undergraduate education. The current promotion of first-class undergraduate education needs to clarify the logic of undergraduate education, which should follow the logic of goals, but also deal with the relationship between nurturing and talents^[2]. First-class undergraduate education belongs to a kind of educational concept, mode and practical activity that pursues quality excellence and aims to cultivate first-class undergraduate talents, which is an endogenous building block of popularised higher education, and it should become the universal aspiration, consistent action and practical direction of all undergraduate institutions^[1]. This paper intends to analyse the dilemmas faced by undergraduate colleges and universities in ethnic areas in promoting first-class undergraduate education from the actual development of higher education in ethnic areas, and put forward the optimization path to promote first-class undergraduate education, with a view to proposing a paradigm that can be used as a reference for the development of higher education in ethnic areas in the transformation of application and be beneficial to the development of higher education in ethnic areas.

2. Current status of undergraduate education development in China in the new era

2.1. Status of Undergraduate Education Development in the New Era from Big Data

In 2016, the Ministry of Education released a series of quality reports, including the Quality Report of China's Undergraduate Education and the Quality Report of China's Newly Built Undergraduate Colleges and Universities. The reports show that China's undergraduate education is the largest in the world in terms of volume, and its quality has been steadily improving, playing an increasingly active role in serving ethnic strategies, leading economic and social development, and cultivating diversified talents at different levels and classifications. The report shows that the conditions of undergraduate education have improved significantly, which has laid a good foundation for improving the quality of education and teaching and creating first-class undergraduate education. However, the report also points out that there is still a gap between undergraduate education and the people's demand for better and better quality undergraduate education, and there is still an imbalance in the distribution of educational resources in

different regions, levels and types of colleges and universities, and the construction of first-class undergraduate education has a long way to go and needs to continue to make efforts. As of 2022, there are a total of 3,013 colleges and universities nationwide. Among them, there are 1,239 ordinary undergraduate schools (including 164 independent colleges), an increase of 1 from 2021; 32 vocational schools at the undergraduate level; 1,489 higher vocational (specialised) schools, an increase of 3 from 2021; and 253 adult higher education institutions, a decrease of 3 from the previous year. There are also 234 scientific research institutions that train postgraduate students. The total number of students enrolled in all forms of higher education was 46.55 million, an increase of 2.25 million over the previous year. The gross enrolment rate in higher education was 59.6 per cent, an increase of 1.8 percentage points over the previous year. The average size of ordinary undergraduate schools was 16,793 students. Judging from the big data, undergraduate education is the mainstay of China's higher education, and undergraduate talent training is the mainstream of higher education talent training.

2.2. An examination of the changes in undergraduate education in the new era

At present, China's undergraduate education reform is at a new historical inflection point. Although the levels and forms of modern higher education are becoming more and more diversified, the top priority of higher education is still undergraduate education. With the expansion of the functions of higher education, the central position of talent cultivation in universities has been challenged, and undergraduate education is more likely to be neglected. For example, the phenomena of focusing on scientific research rather than teaching, disciplines rather than majors, number of theses rather than curriculum construction, and postgraduates rather than undergraduates are still relatively common. At present, the development of undergraduate education in local Chinese ethnic colleges and universities shows three obvious directions: first, undergraduate education has shifted from quantitative growth and scale expansion to emphasis on quality and connotation improvement. Secondly, undergraduate education has shifted from the pursuit of academic excellence and the importance of research to the return to the basis of human education and the way of university. Thirdly, undergraduate education has shifted from focusing on teachers' "teaching" to focusing on students' "learning". Therefore, undergraduate colleges and universities in ethnic areas must deeply examine the weaknesses and shortcomings of undergraduate education, move forward in reflection, reshape the basic status of undergraduate education, build a high-level undergraduate personnel training system, and accelerate the pace of first-class undergraduate construction.

3. Difficulties in promoting first-class undergraduate education in local ethnic colleges and universities

3.1. Unclear positioning constrains the development of undergraduate education

The positioning of local ethnic colleges and universities is not a simple division of the school's high and low levels, nor is it a simple division of disciplinary categories, but rather, it is necessary to accurately plan the development of the school according to its function of running the school. The unclear positioning of new ethnic undergraduate colleges and universities is mainly manifested in the following aspects: firstly, the positioning is not based on the actual needs of the economic and social development of the ethnic areas; secondly, there is no detailed classification and in-depth thinking on the level of talent cultivation, and there is no full consideration of the factor of keeping the quantity of income as the output, which is specifically manifested as "emphasis on management and quality", and the central position of undergraduate is not prominent enough; thirdly, the central position of undergraduate is not prominent enough. "Thirdly, they have not fully explored the characteristics of running schools, and have homogeneous tendency, and have not formed their own unique advantages in the same kind of schools at the same level, that is to say, as the saying goes, "No one has what I have, and no one has what I have, and I have the best" characteristics of running schools. The unclear positioning of local ethnic colleges and universities is also manifested in the inability to clearly identify the position of the school in the training of talents and the main service orientation, the positioning of the school is not grounded enough. In addition to the positioning of talent training objectives, the unscientific positioning of schooling types, schooling levels and disciplines is also a specific manifestation of the unclear positioning of local ethnic colleges and universities.

3.2. Unbalanced development of connotation and extension constrains the development of undergraduate education

Local ethnic colleges and universities are located in ethnic areas with distinctive ethnic and regional characteristics, and although they pay attention to the excavation of ethnic characteristics in their development, the development of ethnic connotation has not been systematic, the internal governance structure of the schools has not been better optimised, and their internal quality, whether it is the quality of undergraduate teaching or the quality of undergraduate teaching management, has not formed an effective guarantee system. The imbalance between the connotation development and extension development of local ethnic colleges and universities is manifested in the fact that the scale and quantity of extension development cannot fully meet the standards of undergraduate colleges and universities, such as the overall quantity and quality of the faculty, the campus scale, the disciplines and majors, etc. The gap between them and the qualified undergraduate colleges and universities stipulated by the Ministry of Education is obvious. On the whole, the characteristics of connotation development are not distinctive enough, and the vitality of extension development is insufficient. Connotative development is the key, and extensible development is the prerequisite, and the imbalance between the two will fundamentally constrain the quality of local ethnic colleges and universities in promoting first-class undergraduate education.

3.3. Unreasonable allocation of running resources constrains the development of undergraduate education

Due to their short history and lack of experience, local ethnic colleges and universities have not yet formed stable brand resources, campus culture resources, knowledge resources and institutional resources in the process of creation and development^[4]. Firstly, due to the short history of undergraduate education, local ethnic colleges and universities need to form their brand resources after a long period of schooling practice, and thus their brand resources can not give full play to their due benefits in a short period of time. Secondly, local ethnic colleges and universities are also unable to give full play to the advantages of campus cultural resources in a short time due to insufficient in-depth and systematic research on ethnicity and insufficient excavation of regional characteristics. Meanwhile, the interaction between higher education and the economic base is widely recognised, i.e. higher education can promote the development of productive forces and the adjustment of production relations, and also has the negative function of hindering the development of productive forces and adjusting production relations^[3]. The relationship between the role of higher education on the development of productive forces needs to be considered in the excavation of ethnicity in local ethnic institutions. Thirdly, the core competitiveness of knowledge resources has not really been formed in local ethnic colleges and universities due to the relatively single scientific research results, narrow research surface and low transformation rate. Finally, due to the imperfect internal organisation and inadequate system construction, local ethnic colleges and universities have a direct impact on the improvement of their management level and service level, and thus the actual role of institutional resources in the management and service of people is relatively small, which restricts the development of undergraduate education.

3.4. Insufficient reform and innovation drive restricts the development of undergraduate education

Insufficient reform and innovation drive of local ethnic colleges and universities is mainly manifested in the following aspects: first, the construction of disciplines and majors cannot adapt to the actual needs of the economic and social development of ethnic regions, such as the advantageous disciplines are not prominent, the construction of basic disciplines is not solid, and the construction of characteristic undergraduate majors is not distinctive enough. Thirdly, the quality of undergraduate education is not enough to improve, in the increasingly prosperous market economy, the essence of the competition between colleges and universities is the competition for the quality of talent cultivation, and the quality of undergraduate education is the key to improve the quality of talent cultivation, and the quality of undergraduate education is not enough to improve, which will have a direct impact on the improvement of the comprehensive strength of the local ethnic colleges and universities. The time for upgrading is not long, the concept is backward, and the management system is rigid, the mechanism of educating people in local ethnic colleges and universities has not been able to realize the situation of synergistic differentiation and diversification, especially after the change of undergraduate enrolment policy, which affects the stability of the scale of undergraduate school running to a certain extent.

4. Optimising the Path of Local Ethnic Colleges and Universities to Promote First-class Undergraduate Education

4.1. Scientific positioning highlights four important aspects

To promote the first-class undergraduate education in local ethnic colleges and universities, it is necessary to scientifically position the development of the school and straighten out the relationship between the four levels, one is the level of education, the second is the function of education, the third is the service oriented, and the fourth is the use of resources. As for the level of education, local ethnic institutions, due to their own conditions, must highlight the central position of undergraduate training, must give due consideration to and formulate the long-term goal of the level of education, give full play to the ethnic characteristics and local advantages, and adhere to undergraduate education as the main focus, and explore the multi-level talent training system in line with the local ethnic colleges and universities. Local ethnic colleges and universities should get rid of the single function of specialised education which mainly focuses on talent cultivation in the past, and insist on the synergistic development of the three major functions of undergraduate talent cultivation, scientific research and social service, so as to continuously improve their comprehensive strength. Most of the local ethnic colleges and universities are located in prefecture-level cities, and their roots are in the local area, which determines that the social services of local ethnic colleges and universities are oriented to the local and ethnic areas^[5]. Resource utilisation is particularly crucial for local ethnic institutions, which should effectively utilise external resources such as human resources, material resources and financial resources, human resources to improve the quality of undergraduate education.

4.2. Management Reform to Bite Mechanism Innovation

Premier Wen Jiabao proposed in the government work report of the National People's Congress during the two sessions of the National People's Congress in March 2010 that "we should promote the reform of the management system of colleges and universities, motivate teachers to focus on education, and encourage teachers to teach for life." From this, it is easy to see that the reform of management system is imperative to promote first-class undergraduate education. As the reform of higher education in China continues to advance, de-administration has become the consensus of internal management reform in universities, and has begun to be promoted at the level of university system^[6]. The implementation of first-class undergraduate education in local ethnic colleges should not relax the innovation mechanism, but focus on four aspects. Firstly, we should innovate the system, establish a sound institutional guarantee system, make the daily work of the school systematic, and thus improve work efficiency; The second is to innovate management, reduce administrative intervention in teaching, gradually achieve teaching separation, and ensure that school administrative work is implemented in all aspects of educational and teaching services; The third is to innovate management channels and encourage administrative personnel with higher education to actively teach in frontline teaching positions, thereby reducing the waste of academic talents; The fourth is to innovate management concepts, which are the precursor to management reform. We should actively attract experts and scholars to participate in school management, encourage frontline teachers to participate in comprehensive school management, create an atmosphere of management opinions, gradually transform management concepts and models, and form a scientific and reasonable undergraduate education management mode to optimize the development of the school.

4.3. Connotative development to further condense the characteristics of running a university

Connotative development is the quality development realised through the reconstruction of the governance relationship between university stakeholders, in short, it is the development with the pursuit of governance quality as the core demand^[7]. In order to truly realise the connotative development of local ethnic colleges and universities, the first step is to convert the top-level design, clarify the development goal, clarify the development path, clarify the development theme, clarify the development mechanism, and form the development synergy. Secondly, to achieve the connotation development, it is necessary to strengthen the research and study of itself, and a special research organisation can be set up to regularly assess the current situation of school development, identify the problems and strengthen the rectification. There is also the need to make deep efforts to condense the schooling characteristics from the ethnicity. Characteristics of schooling is the vitality and vigour on which modern universities depend. To consolidate the characteristics of education, it is necessary to reshape the concept of undergraduate education, adhere to undergraduate education as the guide, strengthen the construction of university

culture and motto, pay attention to the cultivation of excellent work styles in ethnic colleges, and form the spiritual cornerstone for promoting the development of universities. Good internal governance relationship is the core goal of the connotation development of the university, and is the primary premise for condensing the characteristics of school running. Only on the premise of forming a good institutional guarantee can local ethnic colleges and universities effectively integrate and condense ethnic culture, ethnic spirit, ethnic tradition and other ethnic characteristics, so as to achieve the improvement of the quality of undergraduate education.

4.4. Discipline construction to further optimise the professional structure

The characteristics of colleges and universities should start from the characteristics of disciplines. Characteristic disciplines are the advantageous disciplines of the university, which are formed through long-term historical accumulation on the basis of adapting to the needs of the society and the environment of the university^[8]. To promote first-class undergraduate education in local ethnic colleges and universities, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of disciplines and majors, and adjust and optimise the structure of undergraduate majors. Firstly, they should give full play to their own faculty advantages and schooling experience, and actively transform traditional disciplines so that their advantages can be maximised. Secondly, we should make the best use of the situation and gradually eliminate and integrate the old and obsolete undergraduate majors that are not suitable for the needs of local development. Thirdly, we should give full play to the advantages of teaching resources and modern information technology to build a batch of new undergraduate majors with foresight. Fourthly, we should increase the strength of discipline construction and integration, pay attention to the exchange between disciplines, and strive to gradually form the characteristics and diversified levels of discipline development in the intersection of disciplines, so as to build the "support point" of the quality of undergraduate training, and improve the quality and characteristics of undergraduate talent training. Fifthly, the structure of disciplines should be optimised continuously to make it match with the demand of talents in ethnic geo-regions. Sixthly, the structure of undergraduate majors should be optimised with the support of disciplines, innovative undergraduate majors should be set up, special undergraduate majors should be cultivated, similar undergraduate majors should be merged, and outdated undergraduate majors should be eliminated, so as to make them compatible with the needs of economic and social development of the ethnic regions, and to make the undergraduate majors balanced with the demands of the market, so as to improve the quality of the training of talents and enhance the competitiveness of the graduates for employment effectively.

4.5. Undergraduate teaching change should focus on practical application

With the arrival of the "Internet +" era, the old and rigid traditional undergraduate teaching mode can no longer adapt to the cultivation of undergraduate talents under the new situation. Local ethnic colleges and universities should carry out undergraduate teaching changes in the following aspects. Firstly, the traditional teaching mode of lecture-based classroom teaching should be changed, and the interactivity of classroom teaching should be increased to fully cultivate students' independent problem-solving ability. Secondly, we should change the mode of "focusing on theory, light on practice", change the single form of "class lectures", set up as much as possible a platform for teaching practice and application, and pay attention to cultivating students' hands-on ability and application ability in practice. Thirdly, we should make full use of the "Internet+" environment, improve the application of modern information technology and Internet technology, enhance the selectivity of students' independent learning, and meet the diversified knowledge needs of students. Fourthly, we should develop joint training modes between schools and universities and between schools and enterprises, so that students can have more opportunities for exchanges and practice in high-level universities and industries, thus making the training of talents more flexible and diversified.

5. Conclusion

The promotion of first-class undergraduate education in local ethnic colleges and universities is of great significance to the economic and social development of ethnic regions, and it is related to the quality and effectiveness of the training of ethnic talents, which should be highly valued by the schools themselves. Due to the constraints of their own and external factors, the road to first-class undergraduate education is difficult, and the dilemmas they face are complex and diversified. Thus, to improve the quality of undergraduate education, they need to have the determination to break their wrists and carry

out comprehensive reforms, to improve the conditions of schooling, to accumulate experience in schooling, to enhance the strength of schooling, and to truly serve the ethnic to cultivate application-oriented talents. Only by adhering to the concept of development as the forerunner, maintaining a clear idea of development, insisting on reform, innovating, and focusing on practical application, can local ethnic colleges and universities make gains in first-class undergraduate education and thus make new contributions to the development of ethnic regions.

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