

# A Case Study of Factors Influencing Default of Provincial Publicly-Funded Normal Students——Taking the Case of Default of the First Publicly-Funded Normal Students in Shandong Province as an Example

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**Abstract:** The directional training of publicly-funded normal students is an important aspect of the program to strengthen teachers in the new era, and the problem of default by provincial publicly-funded normal students still exists, making the relevant policies and implementation under continuous improvement. Therefore, using a qualitative research-oriented case study method, this paper made a semi-structured interview with the graduates who had defaulted among the first publicly-funded normal students in Shandong Province, traced their real experiences and changes in thinking before and after the default, and used the rational choice theory to explore the influencing factors behind the default of provincial publicly-funded normal students. The study found that under the action scenarios of incomplete access to policy information, passive policy participation and increasing incentive factors, the default behavior of provincial publicly-funded normal students is mainly affected by personal preference and social relationships; Accordingly, the free education of provincial normal students needs to be improved in three aspects: expanding the depth and breadth of policy publicity, establishing communication and feedback channels and increasing incentive factors.

**Keywords:** publicly-funded normal students, default, case study

## 1. Introduction

To implement the rural revitalization strategy of China and develop rural education with high quality, teachers are the key. <sup>[1]</sup> Whether it is the "New Era Basic Education Strong Teacher Plan" promulgated in April 2022, <sup>[2]</sup> or the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Promoting Rural Revitalization" promulgated in April 2021, <sup>[3]</sup> relevant policies have emphasized the importance of publicly funded teacher education for rural education. Historically, the full-scale development of publicly funded teacher education in local institutions began with the Rural Teacher Support Program (2015-2020) issued by the General Office of the State Council in 2015,<sup>[4]</sup> and with the encouragement of the policy, local governments and local institutions successively carried out "rural teacher orientation training" as a local provincial publicly funded teacher education policy. The policy is a positive one. While the positive effects of the publicly funded teacher training policy are undeniable, the proposal of the NPC deputies in May 2020 that "publicly funded teacher trainees' failure to engage in the teaching profession should be recorded in their integrity files" reflects the persistence of the problem of non-compliance and the continued concern of the community. Studies have been conducted to interpret the causes and solutions of default from different perspectives. However, studies exploring provincial publicly funded teacher-training policies from the perspective of individual defaulting teacher-training students are still lacking, making provincial publicly funded teacher-training policies lack theoretical research references while drawing on the policies of deployed publicly funded teacher-training students. Based on this, we use rational choice theory to explore the factors influencing the default of the first public-funded teacher-training students in Shandong Province, and give policy adjustment suggestions.<sup>[5]</sup>

**2. Study Design**

The study aimed to investigate the following three questions: (1) Why did the college entrance examination volunteers choose the provincial publicly funded teacher training students ; (2) What are the factors influencing the default; and (3) What is the intention to pursue teaching after graduation. Therefore, the case study method with qualitative research orientation is more suitable compared to other methods. [6]

In the selection of research subjects, the intensity sampling of purposive sampling was used to extract cases with high information density and intensity. [7] Generally speaking, the employment direction of publicly funded teacher training students who are not admitted to the first volunteer and are transferred will be far from their personal plan after graduation, and the possibility of default is greater, which can provide relatively more information. After screening, the research subject selected teacher A, whose family lives in Y city and the city of directed employment is L city, as the one who chose to default after entering in 2016 and graduating from internship in 2020.

In terms of research data collection, the sources of information were mainly interviews and documentary sources. In terms of the analysis of the research findings, conclusions were drawn using rational choice theory and Ostrom's analytical framework. Rational choice theory is based on the assumption of a rational person who seeks to maximize utility, and explains social phenomena based on established personal preferences, intentions, and choices, with the main purpose of analyzing the two-way relationship between actors and policies. [8] The basic analytical framework constructed according to the purpose of the study is shown in Figure 1: actors in the action arena and the action scenario are in an interactive relationship that produces action outcomes in an interaction mode, while actors in the action arena provide feedback on policies in the interaction, which leads to institutional improvement. [9]

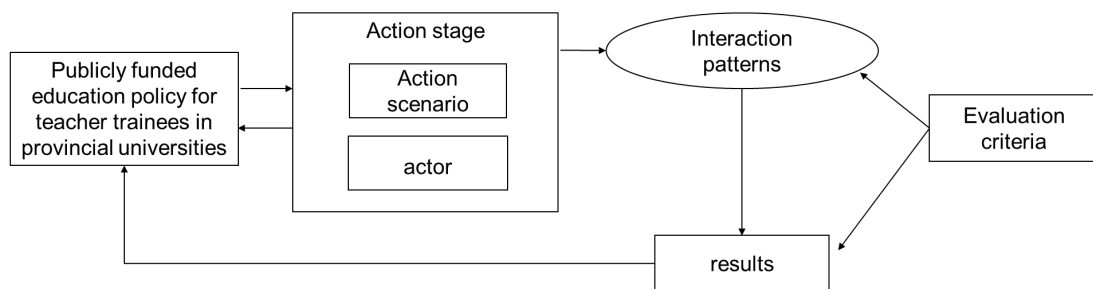


Figure 1: Rational Choice Institutionalism Analytical Framework.

**3. Research results and analysis**

Table 1: Summary of Factors Influencing Default of Study Subjects.

Personal Preference	1. Career expectations (+)
	2. Personal preference for policy (+)
	3. Catering housing (-)
Social Relations	4. Parental social support (+)
	5. Role of children (-)
	6. Marital relations (-)
	7. Colleague interaction (-)
	8. University reception (-)

Rational choice theory is premised on the assumption of rational persons, which holds that actors have limited rationality and seek to maximize their own interests. In this case, due to limitations such as the amount of information, the result of maximizing individual interests is not necessarily maximizing collective interests, but instead leads to opportunistic behavioral motives and the tragedy of the commons. [10] Among the actors in the default problem of provincial publicly funded teacher trainees, both the Department of Education and the Bureau of Education of the city of employment were supportive of the policy, in line with the preference of both actors to serve the public interest and local development, while the attitude of the research subject, teacher A, toward the policy and "compliance" changed from positive to negative. The interview data were organized around the factors

influencing non-compliance, categorized in terms of personal preferences and social relationships, and benchmarked against compliance, with items promoting compliance marked as "+" and items inhibiting compliance marked as "-". , summarized as table 1 As shown.

### ***3.1 Multiple action preferences are the main reason for choosing provincial publicly funded teacher training students for the college entrance examination volunteer application***

There are several actors in the action arena of publicly funded teacher training in provincial colleges and universities, and the study focuses on three closely related parties, the Department of Education (representing the government), the municipal education bureau of orientation employment (including orientation employment schools), and defaulting publicly funded teacher trainees.

First, the Department of Education preference. In order to alleviate the problem of lack of talents in the rural primary and secondary school teaching force, Shandong Province issued the "Implementation Measures of Free Education for Teacher Training Students in Shandong Province", combined with the "Notice on the Enrollment of Free Education Teacher Training Students Examination in 2016" , the policy takes "early batch volunteer", "directed professional + directed The policy adopts special measures such as "early batch volunteer" and "targeted major + targeted employment city" to train "elementary school teachers with expertise in multiple subjects and junior high school teachers with multi-disciplinary skills" <sup>[11]</sup>. As the promulgator of the policy, the provincial department of education is the spokesperson of the government, and its preference is to train "elementary school teachers with expertise in multiple subjects and junior high school teachers with multi-disciplinary skills" through publicly funded teacher education,<sup>[12]</sup> in order to alleviate the shortage of teachers in rural primary and secondary schools.

Secondly, the municipal education bureau for orientation employment. The recruitment process for graduating publicly funded teacher trainees is organized by local municipal education bureaus, and "two-way selection" and special recruitment are conducted according to the principles of "openness, equality, competition, and merit" and two-way selection. <sup>[13]</sup> The preference of local employment municipal education bureaus is to optimize the allocation of talents, but there is no system in each municipality for the livelihood of publicly funded teacher trainees during their internship and entry period.

*"We are carrying out in accordance with the implementation of the provincial policy. The conditions of teacher trainees in terms of accommodation and other aspects are decided and provided by the internship schools themselves according to their own conditions."*

Third, the preference of the defaulting public teacher trainee. The policy of "free" and "prepared" constitute the basis for individual rational choice. The policy of publicly funded education for teacher-training students in Shandong Province stipulates that after voluntary admission, the standard of living allowance is 4,000 yuan per student per year. The preferential and guaranteed conditions given by the first two actors in terms of their preferences are the main reasons for individuals to choose provincial publicly funded teacher training students for their college entrance exams.

First, free education with living allowance funding for undergraduates is consistent with individual preferences for reducing family financial burdens. teacher A's parents are ordinary farmers, and publicly funded college can reduce family burdens.

Secondly, the public education policy for teacher training students guarantees job security after graduation - prepared teaching positions, which is in line with individuals' preference for a stable teaching career. When she applied for the college entrance examination, Ms. A did not have much desire for a big city, and only planned to live a normal life in a small city from 9 to 5, comfortable and stable, and a career like teaching could ensure that she could balance family and career. Based on this idea, the free education policy for teacher training students is in line with Ms. A's expectations. In addition, her parents' attitude toward the policy also gave Ms. A some support.

### ***3.2 Default as a rational choice under the influence of multiple factors***

#### ***3.2.1 Marriage and family are the main influencing factors of default***

The factor that made Ms. A think of breaking the contract first appeared during her undergraduate years, when Ms. A had a boyfriend whose family was in Y, and the relationship was approved by her family.

*"Although I'm not the only child in the family, I don't have to stay on this side of the family, but my boyfriend is from Y city, and he's always treated me quite well, and my family approves of it. When I was in undergraduate school, I felt that I couldn't be separated too far (meaning A teacher went to L city by agreement and my boyfriend was in Y city), and it became a bit unrealistic to go to L city."*

The outbreak of the default factor occurred during Teacher A's internship. The impact of the role of children on default can be summed up by Confucius' saying, "When parents are here, they do not travel far, and they must have a way to travel."<sup>[14]</sup> For young female teachers like Ms. A, "family" is a factor that cannot be avoided in career choices.<sup>[15]</sup> Young people who choose to become publicly funded teacher trainees also tend to take into account family factors and aspire to stability. For example, 14.2% of the students in the survey on the motivation of applying for primary education in Qingdao University wanted to "reduce the financial burden of their families", and 35.0% of the students chose to study at public expense because they had a job and job security after graduation.<sup>[16]</sup> Therefore, it is easy to understand that the two issues of "parents' retirement" and "own family" became the key factors for teacher A's breach of contract.

Although the policy provides that after 6 years can be transferred to work, but A teacher some disappointment that the transfer can only be transferred in the city, if you leave there is no preparation, the same after 6 years to test back.

### ***3.2.2 The social interaction factor of the internship school is an important influencing factor of default***

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, human needs are divided into five levels: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, respect, and self-actualization needs.<sup>[17]</sup> However, factors such as housing and food conditions at the internship, as well as school reception and colleagues getting along with each other frustrated Teacher A's motivation to work.

*"The dormitory had nothing but light bulbs and sockets, no heating equipment in winter and no cooling equipment in summer, and meals were also mostly made up. "*

In terms of the interpersonal environment, the internship school did not have an established collaborative teacher culture, which not only affected the way Teacher A acted in teaching, but also left Teacher A's work practice lacking some meaningful support.<sup>[18]</sup>

In Ms. A's school, the proximity of local middle-aged and older teachers and temporary teachers in terms of time, geography, and hobbies made it easy to form two informal groups. In contrast, it took some time for foreign publicly funded teacher trainees such as Teacher A to integrate as new, young blood. On the other hand, professional identity is the result of the interplay between individual agency and social context, and one must be actively engaged in one's professional activities in order to obtain or pursue some sense of belonging.<sup>[19]</sup> However, Teacher A reported that the school leaders continued to treat the internship paraprofessionals like students during the internship and were slow to respond to the legitimate life needs of the intern teachers.

### ***3.3 Career choice of teachers on staff as a result of personal factors***

Teacher A continued to choose a teaching career after defaulting on his contract under the influence of personal factors. Judgment of personal ability and career expectations were two important influencing factors.

First, Ms. A mentioned that she had won a departmental speech contest and a classroom demonstration, which made her confident and self-efficacious in using her professional knowledge and skills to be a middle school teacher. She has also found that she is able to adapt to teaching and enjoys working with students during her internship and part-time teaching activities. Secondly, in the professional courses, Ms. A felt the charm of teaching career and had a high degree of professional identification. From the life planning when filling out the college entrance examination to the career planning after the default, the teaching career is the choice of Teacher A from the beginning to the end.

From the interviews and Ms. A's post-default career choices, it is clear that Ms. A did not default because the teaching profession was inappropriate; she identified herself more with the teaching profession and believed that she was capable of teaching, so the impression factors for defaulting were focused on the internship period, and the influencing factors in terms of social relationships were more obvious, such as Ms. A's role as a child, marital relationships, colleague interactions, and school reception. What issues of policy are reflected in the action scenarios constituted by these factors?

#### **4. Discussion and suggestions**

Rational choice theory assumes that relevant actors have fixed preferences and that actors behave in a highly strategic manner in the process of satisfying them, while generating the possibility that "when individuals act to maximize preference satisfaction, it leads to suboptimal outcomes at the collective level." [20] This suboptimal outcome means that publicly funded teacher trainees experience non-compliance, when institutional adjustments as rules are needed to better achieve the goal.

##### ***4.1 Expand the breadth and depth of policy advocacy, flexible adjustments to promote active choice***

The provincial colleges and universities need to expand the breadth and depth of policy publicity for teacher training students, not only to expand the number of publicity targets, but also to expand the depth and improve the quality of publicity. The target of publicity should be mainly students, and the process of publicity should pay attention to the interaction of students' questions and answers, so that students can have a comprehensive understanding of the policy before applying for the training schools and enrollment plans, admission conditions, enrollment and admission, signing training agreements and subsequent graduation and entry into the workforce. In addition, there may be room for more choice to promote student-initiated selection. One of the major advantages of Australia's policy compared to the free education policy for teacher training students in Shandong Province is that the decision to "join education in difficult areas" is made after the students graduate from university. In an empirical study of publicly funded teacher trainees in primary education at Qingdao University, a comparison of the differences in the perceptions of different classes of publicly funded teacher trainees showed that more than 90% of the publicly funded students had a better understanding of the policy the higher their grade level was, and their agreement with it improved slightly. [21] Not only Australia, but also the UK has incentives that only teacher trainees are eligible for scholarships, making bursary grants a good incentive in the face of expensive tuition fees in UK universities, [22] and many countries have similar measures, and compared to this type of measure, student loan remission seems to allow students to be relatively active. In contrast to this type of measure, student loan remission seems to allow students to teach in difficult areas and to expand the scope of recruitment of publicly funded teacher trainees, a measure that can be adapted to produce good teachers who can "go down" to rural schools.

##### ***4.2 To establish communication and feedback channels to improve the policy participation of targeted employment city and publicly funded teacher training students***

As one of the actors with the smallest level of control over decision-making, publicly funded teacher candidates have little involvement in decision-making in various aspects such as curriculum, training programs, and job selection, and have only a small amount of information feedback rights. Moreover, as the target of the provincial public teacher training policy, the feedback of relevant information comes mostly from empirical studies of scholars. Therefore, the establishment of common feedback channels for the city of directed employment and publicly funded teacher candidates is the vitality of continuous improvement and refinement of the policy at all stages of the implementation of the public education policy for teacher candidates in provincial universities.

It is necessary to further increase the participation of the municipalities in the policy to form a joint effort among policy makers, teacher education institutions, and orientation schools to promote the development of publicly funded teacher education students. For example, we should minimize the random assignment of publicly funded teacher-training students in the cities where they are oriented to employment, and local cities should take measures to motivate their publicly funded teacher-training students to apply according to their needs, which can greatly reduce the influence of parents, marriage and other factors on their performance; local cities should take the initiative to develop measures to guarantee the life and professional development of publicly funded teacher-training students according to their local conditions, so that the life and professional development of publicly funded teacher-training students can be guaranteed after they are assigned to their posts. The government has also taken the initiative to develop measures for the life and professional development of publicly funded teacher trainees according to local conditions, so that the life and professional development of publicly funded teacher trainees can be guaranteed after their assignment.

##### ***4.3 Increase the incentive factor, provide conditions to ensure and development platform***

During the conversation, Mr. A also revealed his concerns about his future life, such as the difficulty

of integrating into the informal group of teachers at the internship school, his lack of clarity about the direction of his future efforts, and his "feeling that there is little prospect for development as a teacher in the town" Teacher A is not an isolated case, in September 2018 China Youth Daily Social Survey Center and questionnaire.com jointly conducted a survey on the reasons for default of publicly funded teacher trainees, the results showed that 41.6% believed that the school salary treatment affected their choice, and 23.8% chose to default due to restrictions on their development prospects. [23]

Supporting the living environment of publicly funded teacher trainees in difficult areas can be a "plus", satisfying the lower level needs of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and thus publicly funded teacher trainees pursue higher levels of educational achievement. It is still possible to find life value and realize life aspirations by engaging in education in rural areas, not only with Yan Yangchu, Liang Shuming, and Tao Xingchi, who all became a colorful part of modern Chinese education, but also with the support of policies such as the National Rural Teacher Support Program (2015-2020). However, the feedback from Teacher A in this case study should not be ignored, implying that there are issues behind the effectiveness of the publicly funded teacher education policy that need to be discussed and improved. In order to train excellent teachers who can "teach well" for rural teachers, it is important to gradually improve the economic treatment and social status of grassroots teachers, and to give due consideration to personal life issues such as marriage of teacher-training students.

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