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Investigating the Education Policy Implementation of Excellent Teacher Plan for Teacher Education Sustainability in China: Challenges and Strategies

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Abstract: This study explores the challenges and strategies of education policy implementation of the Excellent Teacher Plan for teacher education sustainability in China. We conduct 36 interviews at one key national, normal university within two campuses, including deans, administrators and teachers. It is found that it is difficult to accurately select students who are truly happy and suitable for teaching. The synergy of academy education needs to be further improved. The low comprehensive quality of students leads to the prominent difficulty of training. The guidance and strength of post-employment security policy are still unclear. It is suggested that we should strengthen public publicity and call for greater autonomy in enrollment; establish a collaborative training system and standardize the operation mechanism of the academy system; promote the quality and increment of teaching and balance the cultivation of various types of students; and clarify the post-employment development policy and improve the graduate security system. In addition, the conclusion is offered last.



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Keywords: excellent teacher plan; normal students; teacher education; teacher education sustainability; teacher education reform; teacher development

1. Introduction

Excellent Teacher Plan (ETP) for teacher education sustainability in China is imbedded in the teacher cultivation and career development [1]. On 30 April 2021, the Ministry of Education and four other departments issued the opinions on consolidated expanding education poverty's opinions on crucial achievements effective connection with country revitalization, specifically launched the Midwest excellent teacher orientation training plan in less developed areas, provincial normal universities through subordinates' normal university and the directional cultivating of a batch of excellent teachers [2]. "Excellent Teacher Plan" is a great adjustment and reform of the teacher education policy under the background of overall poverty alleviation to rural revitalization [3]. Many current studies on examining the Excellent Teacher Plan (ETP) concentrate on explaining the policy documents, describing the current teacher cultivation contextual background, and analyzing the existing problems and challenges regarding implementing the education policy of the "Excellent Teacher Plan" [4,5].

However, there are limited studies on exploring both the challenges and strategies of implementing the Excellent Teacher Plan for teacher education sustainability in China. In this paper, we select B University, one of the six normal universities affiliated with the ministry, as the research object, to investigate and analyze the problems existing in the implementation of the Excellent Teacher Plan and put forward corresponding improvement strategies to provide intellectual support for the perfection and further implementation of the policy.

2. The Current Literature Review on Teacher Education and Excellent Teacher Plan

At present, the pre-service training on normal students can be divided into the following types: The first is the analysis and reflection of the current system and mechanism of pre-service training for normal university students. Most scholars believe that there are internal and external problems in the system and mechanism of pre-service training for normal university students, among which the external problem is more prominent, that is, the connection between pre-service training and post-service development of normal university students. The traditional, normal education, after more than half a century of development, formed two complete and independent systems of teacher pre-service training and post-service training [6]. For a long time, normal colleges and universities are responsible for organizing and implementing the pre-service training of teachers. Under such a system, teachers' pre-service training and post-service training (development) are completed by two independent operating systems. Scholars are most concerned about the weak practice and training links in the pre-service training process of normal university students. Many current studies explore the teacher education development in China from various dimensions [7]. *The Targeted Training Plan for Outstanding Teachers in the Underdeveloped Regions of Central and Western China* (hereinafter referred to as the Excellent Teacher Plan) issued by the Ministry of Education, the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee and other nine departments proposes to improve the quality of primary and secondary school teachers in the underdeveloped regions of central and western China from the source, and the normal universities affiliated with the Ministry undertake the special task of training outstanding teachers to play an exemplary and leading role. How to carry out process tracking and effect evaluation for the implementation of the Excellent Teachers plan and policy in the Ministry of Normal University has become the primary problem for training and training many excellent teachers [8].

2.1. Studies on the Value and Significance of Excellent Teacher Plan

The Excellent Teacher plan is an effective way to help the rural revitalization strategy and an important guarantee to implement the construction of a high-quality education system [6]. Its characteristics are mainly reflected in more accurate delivery, more targeted training, and more synergy in construction. The cultivation of normal university students is the initial link of teacher education and plays a fundamental and leading role. There are some problems in universities, such as weakening of teacher education, declining quality of students, insufficient practical courses, and an imperfect practical teaching system. The quality of teacher education should be comprehensively upgraded from the aspects of management system, curriculum setting, teaching team and teaching mode [9].

2.2. Studies on Teacher Training in Underdeveloped Areas

In less developed areas, there are problems such as insufficient number of teachers, poor quality, unreasonable structure, and serious brain drain. As the main force of teacher education, normal colleges and universities should innovate the collaborative mechanism to establish a teacher education community. To construct the training mechanism of "double-qualified" teachers and cultivate educational applied talents, the policy implementation model, classification tools and techniques are used to analyze the implementation of teacher exchange rotation, county management school employment, and other policies to provide theoretical support for teachers' policy decisions. Many previous studies mainly focus on the field of college practice, discipline model, knowledge literacy, process mechanism, educational method, student emotion, etc. [10]. However, the research on the application of policy implementation theories, tools, and methods to analyze teacher policy implementation is still in its infancy, and the relevance of relevant theoretical tools needs to be improved. The number and depth of research on refining scientific problems and carrying out evidence-based education policies based on teacher training practice need to be enriched and improved [11].

3. The New Institutionalism as a Theoretical Framework of “Excellent Teacher Plan”

The new institutionalism has become an important paradigm in many fields of politics, sociology and education policy [12–14]. It is the sublation and transcendence of traditional politics and behaviorism politics based on the combination [15]. From the perspective of new institutionalism, we can find out the institutional logics of implementing the “Excellent Teacher Plan”. The new institutionalism concentrates on exploring the pathway dependence on the original system formed by cultural and historical factors and the institutions fail to reflect the spirit and characteristics of teacher cultivation, resulting in the lack of legitimacy of the teacher development in the current institutional environment. Generally, we divide new institutionalism into three parts, namely, rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism, each of which has theoretical assumptions and analytical tools [16]. Sociological institutionalism tends to understand institutions in a broad sense, including not only various formal rules, norms, and procedures, but also various symbolic systems, cognitive models and moral templates that have guiding significance for people’s actions [17]. In other words, culture itself is also regarded as a kind of system. Individuals internalize institutional norms associated with roles in each institutional context. In this sense, institutions are considered to influence behavior [18]. It adapts to a certain cultural environment and organizational field and can improve the social legitimacy of participants. However, historical institutionalists believe that the path-dependence phenomenon in the new institutional economics also exists in the political field, and they believe that “the influence exerted by a certain operational force will be regulated by the established environmental factors inherited from the past” [19].

In the process of higher education institutional change, “Excellent Teacher Plan” is considered as the new element of the old teacher cultivation system, and the old teacher cultivation system will not disappear suddenly, but it will provide the foundation for the new system and affect its establishment process. This is because the old teacher cultivation system is an integral part of, and provides a coordinating function for, the environment in which the new system emerges. So, the longer an institution has been on one particular path, the harder it is to switch to another. Thus, there would be tremendous tensions during implementing new teacher cultivation policy, institutionally [20]. In addition, rational choice institutionalism takes “rational economic man” as its basic behavioral theory hypothesis. It is assumed that the relevant actors have a fixed set of preferences. To satisfy their preferences, the actors will predict the actions of others and calculate the optimal strategy. The implementation of the “Excellent Teacher Plan” is not only a structural and holistic implementation, but also a historical and dynamic implementation [21,22].

4. Method

4.1. Research Background and Objectives

On 7 May 2021, B University announced the “2021 Excellent Teacher Program Enrollment Guidelines”, the “Excellent Teacher program” officially entered the promotion stage. Now the “Excellent Teacher Plan” has been implemented for one semester and it is necessary to investigate its operation and understand the feelings and demands of relevant teachers, to improve the content and implementation of the policy in the future and achieve better policy effects.

4.2. Research Objectives

This project by B University related teachers as the research object, with the method of in-depth interviews, from the education management, education policy, teacher education, such as different point of view, study its working condition, policy, cognition, and practice. On this basis, from the aspects of enrollment selection, education management, teaching training and post-service development, this paper tackles the problems existing in the operation mechanism of the “Excellent Teacher Plan” and puts forward suggestions for improvement. This research group is mainly committed to the following three research objectives:

Objective 1: To understand the overall status of the operation mechanism of the “Excellent Teacher Plan” of B University.

Objective 2: To find out the main challenges in the operation mechanism of the “Excellent Teacher Plan” of B University.

Objective 3: To point out the future strategies of the operation mechanism of the “Excellent Teacher Plan” in B University.

These three types of teachers are educational administrators, first classroom teachers and student work teachers, which basically cover all types of teachers participating in related programs. In each category of teachers, the departments, specific positions, professional background and relevant experience of each candidate were considered comprehensively to select interviewees in line with the overall research objectives while retaining differences. For example, in the teaching management personnel, there are not only campus leaders, but also department heads, as well as educational administration personnel; additionally, in the first classroom teachers, we also consider the teachers of various disciplines.

4.3. Research Methods: Semi-Structural in-Depth Interview

According to the interview structure, in-depth interviews are generally divided into unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews. In general, semi-structured interviews are common in research [22]. It is a kind of interview form between unstructured and fully structured, and it is an informal interview form conducted according to a broad outline. In this kind of interview, the interviewer can flexibly make necessary adjustments according to the actual situation of the interview. To know something in depth is to gain more detailed knowledge about it; it refers to the understanding of how things get complicated on the surface and how superficial facts can mislead people. The use of qualitative research does not necessarily imply attributing all explanations to self-directed individuals, but people’s self-definition of the situation is an important factor in all social processes, even if it does not provide a complete statement or explanation. Since interview materials come from the narrations of interviewees, such materials must also be endowed with meaning by interviewees. Generally speaking, the understanding and interpretation of interview materials can be roughly equivalent to the understanding and interpretation of the meanings given by interviewees. The process of in-depth interview is also the process of respondents’ social actions, and all interviewees’ performances in the interview process, such as actions, expressions and the most important narrative actions, also need to be observed, understood and explained [23].

We have received the Research Ethic Committee approval to conduct the semi-structural interview. This study mainly adopts the research method of an in-depth interview. From 25 January to 10 February 2022, the researchers conducted one-on-one or group interviews with 36 selected interviewees, and then summarized the interview content and summarized the main points. The interview tool used was the interview outline drawn up by the research group based on policy documents, academic papers, and relevant case studies in the early stage. The interview process was conducted on the conference line of Tencent. To ensure the interview effect, the research group guided and trained each interviewer in advance. While fully learning the interview techniques, they also had an in-depth understanding of each interview object. On this basis, the interviewers conducted personalized interview processing based on their own relevant research experience and the background information of the interviewees, which improved the interview experience, gained the satisfaction and support of the interviewees, and achieved good interview results (See Table 1). In this study, we also applied content analysis to explore different key words and key themes in the interview transcripts. Based on different sub-topics, we have divided the transcripts into several sub-sections for a better and more scientific analysis.

Table 1. Participants.

Type	Affiliation	No.
Education management personnel	Z campus	A-0125-A
		A-0125-B
		A-0125-C
		A-0125-D
	Z campus	A-0127-X
		A-0127-Y
		A-0127-Z
		A-0127-E
	Z campus	A-0208-H
		A-0208-Y
	B campus	A-0208-Z
		A-0210-H
	B campus	A-0128-L
		A-0128-A
Z campus	A-0128-O	
	A-0128-Z	
The first classroom teacher	Z campus	B-0127-H
		B-0208-H
	Z campus	B-0208-Z
		B-0208-Y
	Z campus	B-0210-S
		B-0210-A
	Z campus	B-0210-Y
		B-0209-G
	Z campus	B-0211-M
		C-0125-Q
Teachers in different departments	B campus	C-0125-M
		C-0125-Z
		C-0125-K
		C-0125-A
	Z campus	C-0127-Y
		C-0127-E
	Z campus	C-0127-Y
		C-0126-Y
	Z campus	C-0126-W
		C-0127-W

5. Results

5.1. The Existing Problems in the Implementation of the “Excellent Teacher Plan”

5.1.1. It Is Difficult to Accurately Select Students Who Are Truly Happy and Suitable for Teaching

In the whole training process of the “Excellent Teacher Plan”, the first task is to select the students who are truly happy and suitable for teaching in the enrollment stage. Several interviewees argue that the evaluation dimension of the current college entrance examination and enrollment system is too singular to evaluate students’ motivation and mental state, and other conditions besides learning ability. A teacher interviewed said that students’ goals often deviate from the original intention of the policy:

“The original intention of the Excellent Teacher program is to train excellent teachers in less developed regions in central and western China. In the process of enrollment, we will try our best to guide the students who are happy and fit for education and are interested in contributing to the education in less developed areas. But maybe in this process, there will be some students, he will consider their own score, first into this school, and then wait for graduation to see. So, it’s not very clear how many of these students will actually go back to the countryside, because it’s just starting now”. In this regard, the enrollment aspect at present can only try to guide the propaganda and encourage students with educational feelings to actively apply for an examination. However, there is no doubt

that it is difficult to select students who are truly happy and fit for education with the efforts of the admissions department and relevant teachers alone. More importantly, it is necessary to make corresponding adjustments and changes in the system, "In terms of enrollment, we don't want to just look at the Gaokao scores, but more comprehensively consider the Gaokao scores and students' personal strengths, as well as their understanding of the priority of education development in the central and western regions, and how to select a group of people who are happy to teach and suitable for education in a way. But we haven't made much breakthrough in this area because of the current Gaokao system".

From the perspective of students' psychological problems, some teachers point out the necessity of reforming the recruitment and selection methods and call for adding a psychological assessment, as shown below:

"During the recruitment process, we have found many people who are not suitable for teaching, such as severe depression, bipolar disorder or mania. If the students appear in such a situation, in fact, it is not suitable to engage in the teaching profession. But under an agreement we have now, he must fulfill that obligation. If he doesn't fulfill it, he is in breach of contract". From this perspective, it is not difficult to see that if the current college entrance examination system is completely relied upon, there will be some loopholes in the recruitment process of the "Excellent Teacher Program", which is not conducive to the selection of students who are truly happy and suitable for education.

The policy implementation of "Excellent Teacher Plan" is still a short time, and the recruitment propaganda work is not deep enough.

"This policy has just started. Our class is the first class of students. To be honest, few students really know what the Excellent Teacher Program is. In fact, many students, including their parents, did not know much about this policy when they chose to apply". However, the propaganda work cannot be completed by the school enrollment department alone. Some interviewed teachers pointed out the necessity of forming public opinion: "I think the responsibilities, rights and benefits should be made clear to students, parents and society in a positive way at the early stage. In fact, we should say that there are not too many publicity reports from this media. In 2021, when the program began to be implemented, it should be in May or June. In fact, there were some related reports, but it did not form a big social concern, so some examinees and parents may not be completely clear about this".

So, at present, public normal students can be exempted from the examination to study for Master of Education after employment, you can apply for free to read the Master of Education. In the process of enrollment consultation, parents of examinees pay more attention to this aspect. In fact, if the school can get some relevant concessions from the higher authorities, then it may be beneficial to attract quality students".

5.1.2. The Synergy of Academy Education Needs to Be Further Improved

At present, University B adopts the college system to educate all kinds of normal students, including students of the "Excellent Teacher Program", which is also widely implemented in the six normal universities affiliated to the ministry. The academy system is a new student education model, which is established based on inheriting the tradition of "coexistence between teachers and students and mutual help between students" of ancient Chinese academies and drawing on the system of residential colleges abroad. It provides students with general education and undertakes the education of students' ideology, morality, and behavior formation. This mode broke traditional professional departments for the skeleton of the university organization form, with centralized management adapt to strip the university organizational structure, change in transverse and longitudinal matrix structure, reform the original based on the class of student management system, set up by the academy as a unit of learning and living communities, and construct the new educational platform coexistence between teachers and students.

As for the academy system, some interviewed teachers used the example of “going to restaurants” to illustrate the advantages and problems of this model, namely the advantages of collaborative education and communication and cooperation.

“Because the academy is only a platform for educating people, it is responsible for the second classroom, and the teachers of the first classroom come from all the colleges of the university . . . Now the academy is facing the problem of whether to communicate with each college, that is, each chef serving food. These guests in the private rooms, what kind of food do they want to eat, or what kind of nutrition do they need now, and then what kind of food can we provide them? This involves the connection between the college and the college”.

In conclusion, some interviewees indicate that the biggest problem of the academy system at present is the lack of coordination between academies and colleges, which is manifested in unclear powers and responsibilities, insufficient communication, and poor feedback. The second problem is the communication and collaboration between the college and the academies. Some teachers from the college said that due to the lack of communication between the two, they have few opportunities to participate in the relevant work of the college:

“Without communication between colleges and academies, communication and collaboration will naturally become difficult, which is undoubtedly detrimental to the improvement of the quality of student training. Due to the large number of departments, departments and personnel involved in the college system, and the different positions and responsibilities of each party, the channels of feedback on the problem become very complicated and the unobstructed, especially for colleges working exclusively for students. One of the problems we have now is that we don’t know which department to report to, and we don’t know how long it will take to solve the problem, but all the pressure from students is on us. Because if a student has a problem, they go straight to the college and don’t think about which department it is . . . ”.

5.1.3. The Low Comprehensive Quality of Students Leads to the Prominent Difficulty of Training

Compared with other types of normal university students, students in the “Excellent Teacher Program” enjoy certain preferential policies in the college entrance examination, so it is true that there is a relatively weak foundation of objective problems, which should not be denied in line with the principle of seeking truth from facts. First of all, in terms of basic knowledge and learning ability, the interviewed teachers generally admitted.

“Many students of the “Excellent Teacher Program” come from relatively poor areas and enjoy limited educational resources, so their comprehensive quality in addition to learning also lags that of ordinary normal students. The program is mainly for students from poor areas, and their family conditions and personal comprehensive quality are obviously different from those of ordinary normal students. Because they are mainly in backward areas, all the way to study, social contact is not wide, and then the comprehensive quality, including sound, physical, aesthetic aspects may be poor. Of course, the economic security is no problem now, but in fact, they need to strengthen the comprehensive quality, as teachers in the future, all aspects of training”.

The lack of learning motivation in the Excellent Teacher Program is also a concern of the respondents. Although it can be described as a common problem of government-funded normal students and students in related programs, the future trend of this situation is particularly noteworthy because the future of the Excellent Teacher Program is not clear. One interviewed teacher said:

“In addition, students of the program are also not interested in various scientific research and practical activities when they are not studying, which has caused

some teachers' concern. At that time, there was an activity to ask students to apply for the Big Innovation project, and the non-normal students were very active in applying for the research project, but only a few students from the Excellent Teacher Program applied for the research project. They are not as motivated as non-normal students, including participating in some forums and academic paper competitions".

Therefore, we should not only strengthen the knowledge base and comprehensive quality of the "Excellent Teacher Plan" students, but also enhance their learning motivation and participation in activities to ensure the quality of students' training.

5.1.4. The Guidance and Strength of Post-Employment Security Policy Are Still Unclear

Regarding the post-service policy of "Excellent Teacher Program", the issue of students' post-service education improvement, whether they can go to graduate school after taking office and whether they can go to graduate school without examination, is the primary concern of teachers. Some interviewed teachers expressed their concerns:

"The concept of the Excellent Teacher Program is very good, but what are the follow-up guarantees when it is implemented? I know that government-sponsored normal students are eligible to return to their Alma mater for a part-time master's degree in education, but the Superior Teacher Program seems to have no preferential conditions. How much energy does one devote to teaching if one does not see a future in his career? So, the question of follow-up, the question of career development and career direction, is what worries me".

Many teachers also stressed that such uncertainty would bring anxiety and confusion to students and affect their learning motivation and enthusiasm. Therefore, the post-service policy should be clarified as soon as possible.

"If the national policy is not clear, students do not know what to do after coming in, whether they can go to graduate school or not, whether this will affect their enthusiasm to study ... So put yourself in your shoes. If you were a Superior Teacher student, what would you think?"

In addition, according to the current policy requirements, normal students of the "Excellent Teacher Program" must serve in relatively backward areas for 6 years after graduation, which is undoubtedly more serious than other types of normal students. Therefore, many interviewed teachers are also worried about the strength of post-service support.

"Even though there are so many students, there may be only one teacher who goes back to a certain school, right? It is possible that one teacher can change the local education situation, but it is also challenging for the students ... Because now, the more remote the place is, the more entrenched it is, and the more difficult it is to change". For this reason, it is imperative to strengthen post-employment support for students and be accountable to them. "Now that such a door has been opened, and the students have been admitted, will it be possible, on the way out, to do what we promised ... This is also a problem for government-funded normal students, but the overall conditions of government-funded normal students are relatively better than those of the places where they teach".

5.2. The Strategies for the Existing Problems of "Excellent Teacher Plan"

5.2.1. Strengthen Public Publicity and Call for Greater Autonomy in Enrollment

At present, the policy promotion and public opinion publicity of the "Excellent Teacher Plan" mostly stay at the level of the normal university affiliated with the ministry, and there is no strong social topic, and many of the information is even negative. In this case, it is necessary to joint ministries, education examination organizations, schools, social media and the media aspects of strength, that we strengthen policy promotion and positive public opinion propaganda, guide more and more outstanding students to enter oneself for an examination

plan, and, at the same time, let them know in advance the advantage and problem of power and responsibility. This is also the ardent expectation of the interviewed teachers.

“From the perspective of the school, maybe in the process of introduction, whether it is an open presentation to the group, or point-to-point telephone, face-to-face communication and consultation, we will make it clear, which is what we do . . . Perhaps more from the macro side, such as the national, ministries or provincial examination bodies, also need to more positive publicity, reporting, guide this matter, so that students and parents understand clearly, rather than just to get a score, or through this way to enter the school first, and then after graduation”.

In addition to the recruitment propaganda, the real restriction of talent selection is the current college entrance examination system. However, as the college entrance examination system is a unified and important system, involving the vital interests of hundreds of millions of people, it is extremely difficult to reform. It is not easy to increase the interview and other links, at least not a single school can complete, which needs the support of policies and the coordination of higher authorities. One interviewed teacher clearly pointed out this point:

“This is not a decision that can be made at the school level, because enrollment needs the support of relevant policies from higher authorities. At present this kind of enrollment model, it is admitted by the college entrance examination results. Then, according to the college entrance examination results, there is indeed this problem, is that we can only let the student to judge, he really wants to be a teacher, can be suitable to be a teacher, but he is suitable. There’s no way to tell right now. According to the current enrollment policy, this aspect is not up to the school to decide, and this matter was discussed in the early communication with the higher authorities”.

If the university has an independent admission with power, can add in the admissions selection interview and psychological test, focuses on the potential for teaching, the physical and mental health of students, merit-based selection to teach fitness, and the firm faith of high-quality students to join the teacher’s team, then this is teachers’ consensus questioned. At the same time, one administers points out the necessity of the interview and psychological tests:

“We should pay more attention to their psychological problems after that, on the one hand, considering the students’ excellent teacher plan ‘family financial situation, native family actually will greatly affect the students’ psychological condition. So, this is also a point we want to raise, is in the future in the process of enrollment . . . We hope that whether it is the Plan or ordinary normal students, there will be one more psychological assessment or one more interview”.

In addition, in the enrollment selection system that is not perfect today, the reasonable elimination and exit mechanism construction for the “Excellent Teacher Program” will also be a key focus of attention in the future. Many of the interviewed teachers suggested that the program should introduce a drop-out and elimination mechanism like that of publicly funded normal students. Those who are severely underqualified academically or do not have the basic qualities to become teachers should be eliminated and properly arranged. “I wonder if there should also be a certain elimination mechanism for the Excellent Teacher Program. It cannot be said that after entering the program, whether it is good or bad, it must be carried out according to relevant policies, and the bad ones can be eliminated”.

5.2.2. Establish a Collaborative Training System and Standardize the Operation Mechanism of the Academy System

Most of the teachers interviewed said that there is currently no specific school of normative documents to clear the whole operation mechanism and the power and responsibility division, so all sorts of complex and chaotic situations will appear; however, this

cannot be solved from the bottom to the top, but rather a series of regulatory documents need school level, top-down design and policy guidance to be carried out. In the survey, some front-line teachers expressed their feelings, pointing out that, "I always think that this issue should not be promoted from the bottom, for example, the academy has been coordinating various colleges and departments. I think it should be a process from the top down . . ." It is not difficult to see that although the teachers who implement the project work very hard, if there is no normative support from the top-level design, then many things cannot be accomplished, or at least accomplished with a low efficiency.

Some respondents also made it clear that in the college system, the operation of institutions depends on institutions rather than on relationships and human relations. Otherwise, it will not be sustainable.

"In terms of the establishment of the whole college team, the definition of the functional boundaries of the college, and the establishment of the secondary departments of the college, I think there should be a clear requirement, and even a basic requirement, so that the development of the college can be good. A lot of things cannot rely on human relations, nor simply on relationships. I think we should rely on mechanisms and institutions to do it".

If there is no clear and feasible system design, in the absence of human relations, many work will be faced with difficulties. Therefore, it is particularly important to formulate normative documents to clarify the rights and responsibilities of all parties and the operating mechanism, which is also the common appeal of front-line teachers.

In the survey, some teachers clearly pointed out the necessity of establishing a regular contact mechanism and gave their own reasonable contact frequency. "Every semester, for example, you're supposed to have one conversation a month, even one online. Then, offline at least once a semester and offline at least twice a year. That's probably six to eight times a year, after vacation time. In this way, we can know the students in the training process, whether there are any difficulties and problems, both sides are how to cultivate . . ." Some interviewed teachers mentioned that colleges and colleges should always keep in touch so that the advantages of the college system can be brought into full play.

"At the beginning, middle and end of each academic year or term, there should be a discussion between the relevant college and the college. There will be a meeting in the middle and a summary at the end of the semester or the end of the year. There is also the establishment of a communication mechanism at any time, this mechanism is very important. If the mechanism can be made very mature, or reach the ideal state, the advantages of academies can be well played".

In a word, it is necessary to build two kinds of communication mechanisms between colleges and colleges, which are regular and immediate, and take this as the starting point to promote the construction of a collaborative training system.

5.2.3. Promote the Quality and Increment of Teaching, and Balance the Cultivation of Various Types of Students

In view of the lack of confidence and motivation of the students in the "Excellent Teacher Program", the interviewed teachers gave suggestions for improvement from two aspects of quality improvement and increment, respectively, which pointed out the direction for future teaching. On the one hand, Excellent Teacher Program students should be trained according to the same or even higher standards as ordinary students and should never be sloppy in quality. "Our requirements are the same as those of other students. We must have high requirements, and we must be strong in the aspect of discipline foundation. We cannot lower our requirements just because we are students under the 'Excellent Teacher Program' or under public tuition. Because as a professional, must achieve what degree, this is certainly to ensure; The other aspect of teacher education is more than other students, one is theoretical courses, the other is practical".

On the other hand, some interviewed teachers put forward incremental suggestions, believing that normal students should learn more than ordinary students, so the teaching content should be greatly enriched and expanded, so that students are too busy to think about their own motivation, but immersed in learning.

“They’re supposed to learn a lot more than a regular class, so to keep them busy and open to new things during college. The credits of government-funded normal students and Outstanding Teacher Program students should be raised to make their four years of college busier and fulfilling; Second, their curriculum should be more diversified, and they should receive more training in education, professionalism, teachers’ feelings, and skills, so that they can learn more and enrich themselves. And then in college they don’t feel like they have a goal, so they’re not motivated for anything. Even if you’re not motivated anymore, you have so much to learn, and it’s still relatively fulfilling, it’s better than having fewer credits and no motivation”.

As for the problems of weak foundation and low comprehensive quality of students in the “Excellent Teacher Program”, most of the interviewed teachers believe that the right medicine should be given to the case and precise help should be provided. However, overall, the balanced training strategy should be adopted, that is, the differences between different groups of normal university students should not be deliberately highlighted. “The Merit Program students may have low grades, so it’s more of a student base problem. How to make their adaptation and the students with high scores than they learn together, let them learn to be, in the same platform for talents cultivation, teaching, teaching and examination, may have more need to focus on this aspect, and is not to say that the “master plan” the cultivation of the students and business students are completely different mode, different the talent training scheme, different teachers. At the same time, balanced education means refusing to label all types of students but uniting them under the banner of normal students and sharing a common sense of honor and purpose. Except in some special times, we will emphasize the ‘Excellent Teacher Program’ students, maybe more often is the concept of normal students to express, and will not indoctrinate people with such differences . . . For example, in the process of teaching, can be freely key mention “master plan” group, and what might be going to service our country just pick the cap of a poverty counties, give them more of a sense of honor, there are honor to do the things, let they feel proud of, right, but not to say simple stick a label on them”.

5.2.4. Clarify the Post-Employment Development Policy and Improve the Graduate Security System

Although there are no graduates from the Excellent Teacher Program, the interviewed teachers all believe that the policy should be promoted to clarify the specific support measures for the Excellent Teacher Program’s post-service development, especially concerning the issue of continuing to study for Masters in Education. In the long run, it is reasonable to support students to continue their studies after six years of service, and this should be defined in the policy document.

“Because the students have some discounts in terms of grades and tuition fees when they enter the program, they are required to serve for six years after graduation, with the same rights and obligations . . . They work for six years after graduation, and then they will have the opportunity to study for a master’s degree in education after six years. I think it is in line with our original intention to set up the “Excellent Teacher Plan”.

In addition to clarifying the national policy, the teachers also said that the post-career security system for students of the program should be improved at the school level. On the one hand, the school should set up a special fund to strengthen the security of students’ life after work. On the other hand, if the policy makes it clear that students from the “Excellent Teacher Program” can go to graduate school, the school level should also come up with

various plans to actively cooperate with the work, including the implementation of the model of integrating undergraduate and postgraduate education.

At the same time, schools should always pay attention to the original intention of “Excellent Teacher Program” to train excellent teachers for backward areas, carry out targeted design in graduate education, and pay attention to application. “The postgraduate aspect is mainly a problem of the overall top-level design, because from the perspective of the school, the first problem is the length of schooling, and the second is what problems can be solved after the postgraduate study. This matter to think clearly, besides solving the problem of their personal education promotion, what other problems can be solved? Therefore, it is still necessary to consider its applicability in the cultivation of graduate students of the “Excellent Teacher Program”. Of course, practical work also needs some theoretical improvement, but the application is still more important, so the postgraduate training stage should also add some application design”.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

In recent years, promoting the quality of teacher education has been considered an important task for Chinese education and system reform. The Chinese government implemented a couple of educational policies to accelerate the development of teachers’ cultivation continually [1,23,24]. The “Excellent teacher Program” has opened a new channel and a new system for training future excellent teachers for the underdeveloped areas of the Midwest. It is a concrete embodiment of the advantages of our system in the new historical development period and in the field of teacher education. On the first anniversary of the official implementation of the “Excellent Teacher Plan”, the research group in this paper revealed the existing problems in the implementation of the “Excellent Teacher Plan” from the four dimensions of enrollment selection, education management, teaching training and post-service development through interviews with teachers who participated in the project in University B and pointed out corresponding solutions [2–6]. However, since this study mainly summarizes the relevant experience of the implementation of the policy from the perspective of teachers participating in the “Excellent Teacher Program”, it is inevitable that there is a tendency to ignore students’ feelings and detangle from social reality to some extent, which needs to be paid attention to and improved in future research [7,8,25–28].

To ensure the smooth implementation of this policy and achieve good results, it is necessary to carry out long-term continuous tracking and evaluation of its implementation, and gradually solve problems in the process of constantly discovering problems [29–32]. In view of this, this topic can be further explored from the following perspectives in the future: first, to enrich the research object and broaden the horizon to the teachers and students participating in the “Excellent Teacher Plan” of six ministry, normal universities and local, normal universities; second, to expand the research topics, especially how to implement the policy as the first “Excellent Teacher Program” students will graduate in three years. The third is to update research methods. Through the adoption of quantitative research, action research, theoretical research and other methodological approaches, more diverse research results can be generated to better serve policy formulation and practice [33–35]. In addition, there are also some limitations to this study: a larger sample size is expected to be added to explore more stakeholders’ perspectives on implementing “Excellent Teacher Plan”; more comparative perspectives could be added to enrich the contextually analysis. For future studies on this topic, more conceptual and practical models are expected to investigate the influencing factors of implementing the “Excellent Teacher Plan”.

The original academic and practical value of this study is reflected in in-depth analyses of the interaction between teacher training and policy norms, mining the internal mechanism, influencing factors, and institutional requirements of high-quality teacher training, enriching the implementation theory of teacher education policy, and supporting the theoretical innovation of higher normal education [7,36,37]. The original practical value is embodied in the following aspects: carrying out empirical analysis on teacher education in normal universities, which is the primary link for the implementation of the Excellent Teacher Plan policy, and

putting forward suggestions to promote the scientific implementation of the policy based on appropriate theoretical tools and methods, so as to improve the quality of teacher training and help the high-quality development of education in the central and western regions [38–40]. There are many studies on the application of theoretical tools, but few studies on the construction of appropriate theoretical tools and their application to teachers' policies. This project integrates relevant theoretical tools comprehensively, improves their applicability, and applies them to the policy implementation research of the Excellent Teacher Plan, which is not only the expansion and deepening of the established project, but also the urgent need for academic innovation and policy implementation [41–43].

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