



## Current Situation, Problems and Countermeasures of Admittance Policy for Chinese Teacher Educators

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### Abstract

Teacher education greatly safeguards the teacher resources and quality of elementary education. Teacher educators directly undertake teacher education. The level of their recruitment standards usually determines the level of teacher education. This paper describes and comments on China's current policies on the recruitment of teacher educators, analyzes main problems and then put forward corresponding suggestions on these policies.

**Key words:** Teacher educator; Admittance policy; Basic quality requirements

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### 1. WHO ARE TEACHER EDUCATORS?

There is no clear definition of teacher educator in China's official documents. Institute-based educator generally refers to "teacher in higher normal institutions". Who can be called teacher educators in China? In the *Teacher Education Curriculum Standards (Trial Version)* (Ministry of Education, 2011) issued by Chinese Ministry of Education in October 2011, it has mentioned that, "broadly speaking, teacher education curriculum includes general courses, specialized disciplinary courses and educational courses offered by teacher education institutions for cultivating and training teachers for kindergartens, primary and middle schools." According to training

objects, institute-based educators mainly include those who teach disciplinary knowledge and who support the professional and practical development of students through methodology courses, practical teaching and teaching methodology. School-based teacher educators undertake special responsibilities and support the supervisors of perspective teachers in primary and middle schools. They cooperate with institute-based teacher educators and assist other colleagues in guiding perspective teachers. However, for subject teachers, as normal institutions in China embark on a path of subject integration one after another, some disciplinary experts have involved in every aspect of teacher education. They don't regard the teacher education activities within their own disciplinary field as professional tasks that have special requirements. They merely finish the work in their area of expertise (Li, 2008). These subject teachers think that the primary and main occupation for them is a researcher in their own disciplinary domain. And their professional identity is an ordinary university teacher. They don't take it as their professional task to train perspective teachers, and they have few concerns about the connections in teacher education of their discipline. Furthermore, they lack a sense of mission in conducting teacher education. As for internship supervisors of perspective teachers in primary and middle schools, many of them are appointed temporarily only for a short period of time and they don't regard it as their professional responsibility to train perspective teachers. If teacher education is considered as one's professional responsibility, then judging from the current situation, only some of the teacher educators in higher institutions can be referred to as professional teacher educators.

Teacher educators neither equal to traditional pedagogy teachers, nor subject teachers. They are such kind of professionals: they are expected to be equipped with sound qualities, comprehensive knowledge as well as profound disciplinary qualities. They are also expected to be researchers who have special qualities for being professional teachers and are devoted to teacher education. This is the basic definition of professional teacher educators

under the context of universitization of teacher education. (Zhu & Li, 2009)

Thus, the research object of this paper is institute-based educators. Teacher education has dual features: academic nature and pedagogical nature. Teacher educators need to learn both disciplinary knowledge and educational knowledge. They not only need to teach perspective teachers disciplinary knowledge, but also teach them how to organize teaching activities, namely the difference between “teaching” and “learning to teach”. Different from primary and middle school teachers and ordinary university teachers, teacher educators have specific quality structure as well as education and teaching competence. This is where the particularity of their admittance policy lies.

## 2. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE ADMITTANCE POLICY FOR CHINESE TEACHER EDUCATORS

The admittance policy for teacher educators refers to the code of conduct made by the state on teacher educators' basic qualities, recruitment requirements and procedures, aiming at guaranteeing the quality of teacher education. Chinese Ministry of Education has not yet issued any policy document for the recruitment of teacher educators. The existing *Teachers Law* and *Regulations on the Qualifications of Teachers* haven't clarified concrete basic quality requirements, recruitment requirements and procedures for teacher educators. Yet some documents about teachers in higher normal institutions also apply to teacher educators. Based on these policy documents and recruitment requirements for teacher educators and other actual situations, here are the analyses of the basic quality requirements, recruitment requirements and recruitment procedures for teacher educators.

### 2.1 Basic Quality Requirements for Teacher Educators

*Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China* issued in 1993 states (Ministry of Education, 2012), “to obtain qualifications for a teacher in an institution of higher learning, one shall be a postgraduate or university graduate”. *National Outline for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)* (Ministry of Education, 2010) indicates the need to strengthen construction of the teachers' contingent, “the teachers' permit system shall be revamped and strictly carried out. The state shall set credential standards for the recruitment of teachers, update requirements for formal schooling records and moral conduct”. In 2012, *State Council Suggestion on Strengthening Building of Teachers' Contingent* (the State Council, 2012) stipulates to tighten up teacher qualification and permit system, update requirements for formal schooling records, moral conduct, education and teaching competence. A teacher

educator shall be a postgraduate or university graduate. Basic qualities generally include: (a) moral quality. University education itself is a career in shape noble personality, which is the best embodiment of the ideological morality and humanistic quality of people. Teacher's personality image is intangible, while the most convincing education for students. A sense of vocational identity of the teacher and the conscious practice helps in shaping good psychological quality. (b) Professional theories and scientific research capability. The basic qualities for teachers to conduct teaching include basic knowledge of discipline, professional theory level and the capability of scientific research. These qualities are essential guarantees for improving teaching quality and cultivating outstanding talents. Committed to scientific research, teachers can offer the latest research achievements for teaching and improve the theoretical depth of the content of their courses. Meanwhile, teachers' deep study on their own major is more helpful for students to develop and strengthen their scientific research capacity and enhance their capability of independent and creative thinking. (c) Pedagogical quality. It is essential to have thorough understanding of elementary education theories, such as pedagogy, psychology and theoretical knowledge about instructional methods of discipline. Applying teaching theories to guide teaching practice and exploring and grasping teaching laws gradually, thus one can elevate teaching level continuously. The basic competences of teachers include abilities of designing and operation, organization and management, and the ability of teaching and language, writing, using modern education tools, exploration and innovation etc. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to teacher educators' teaching experiences in primary and middle schools. For example, *Suggestions of Ministry of Education on Promoting Teacher Education Curriculum Reform* (Ministry of Education, 2011) in 2011 states that: “building a contingent of high-caliber teachers. Taking effective measures to attract and stimulate high-level teachers to undertake teaching task of educational courses. There is need to support teachers in higher institutions to exercise experimental teaching reform in primary and middle schools. Teachers in charge of educational courses should have teaching and serving experiences in primary and middle schools. As for employing renowned teachers from kindergarten, primary and middle schools as guest teachers, they should account for no less than 20% of the teachers of educational courses. *Suggestions of Ministry of Education, National Development and Reform commission and Ministry of Finance on Deepening Teacher Education Reform* (Ministry of Education, National Development and Reform Commission & Ministry of Finance, 2012) again clearly promotes that:

Higher institutions should be fully staffed and completed with teachers of educational courses in accordance with their teaching needs. There is a need to strengthen building of a contingent of guest teachers. Excellent primary and middle school teachers

should make up over 20% of teachers of teacher education courses.

Young and middle-aged teachers in charge of educational courses should teach in primary and middle schools for at least one year.

## 2.2 Recruitment Requirements for Teacher Educators in Chinese Higher Institutions

At present, there are six normal universities under the direct control of Ministry of Education: Beijing Normal University, Northeast Normal University, East China Normal University, Central China Normal University, Southwest University (originally Southwest Normal University) and Shanxi Normal University. Let's take the minimum requirements of Beijing Normal University in recruiting top teacher educators (the basic level of teacher recruitment in Beijing Normal University) as an example (Talent Development Office of Beijing Normal University, 2015): The applicants should have hosted national scientific projects or received special fund from postdoctoral fund. They should have published high-level and original research achievements and at least three papers on Q1 section of SSCI or B level paper as first corresponding author. They should be top talents in think tank construction and special talents badly needed by disciplines and industries. Applicants should satisfy at least two items mentioned above. Moreover, they should have obtained a doctorate degree in world-famous universities and have overseas working experience (or postdoctoral experience). They should be no more than 40 years old. Besides, the Faculty of Education of Beijing Normal University makes further requirements for applicants, taking the education history as an example (Faculty of Education of Beijing Normal University, 2015): Applicants should be no more than 35 year old and should have obtained a doctorate degree in history, education and other relevant areas in first-class universities at home or abroad or domestic 985 universities. They should have published no less than 10 CSSCI papers and received provincial and ministry level fund research projects. "985" in China refers to the project carried out to build world-class and top-notch universities in China, namely "world-class university building project". China now has a total of 39 universities in Project 985. There are only 36 educational periodicals in CSSCI (Chinese Social Science Citation Index). Other normal universities have similar recruitment requirements for teacher educators. Generally speaking, there are two aspects: One is a doctorate degree in relevant major in famous universities; the other is excellent research capability.

## 2.3 Recruitment Procedures for Teacher Educators

Recruitment procedures for teacher educators refer to a work process that qualified and eligible teacher educators need to execute before starting to teach. And they should be recognized by authorized administrative bodies and

their associated agencies. It has to arrange qualification examination of eligible applicants' education background and published papers. Then the employment decision is made after the interview and trial lecture. There is three-month induction training for all teacher educators before formal teaching. The training involves all-round and systematical study of theories, mainly about how to be a good teacher, how to conduct scientific research, and about instructional theories, regular teaching management, teaching process design as well as teachers' professional development. The state clearly requires that young and middle-aged teachers of teacher education courses should have at least one year of working experience in primary and middle schools. However, most of them actually undertake teacher education courses right after having obtained a doctorate degree in education in university. They have neither relevant working experience in primary and middle schools, nor internship experience in those schools in their induction training.

## 3. PROBLEMS IN ADMITTANCE SYSTEM FOR CHINESE TEACHER EDUCATORS

### 3.1 Vague Professional Identity Without Specific Admittance Policy for Teacher Educators

There are limited researches and concerns about teacher educators and a specific admittance policy hasn't yet been made for them. Consequently, any person who researches in education field and has strong research capability can conduct professional teaching for normal university students. As a teacher educator and after a short period of induction training which is similar to training received by other teachers in higher institutions, they are able to teach teacher education courses. If the quality requirements for teacher educators are the same with those for ordinary teachers and they enjoy similar identification with other teachers, or they don't regard teacher education as their single responsibility, then the professional identity of teacher educators will be impeded. In universities where scientific research and theory are emphasized, while teaching and practice are underestimated, the unique culture atmosphere has deep influence over teacher educators' professional identity. If teacher educators want to achieve higher positions in academic level, they need to elevate the academic level of their research project. As a result, many of them are more willing to conduct the teaching of academic theories in their own disciplinary domain for master level or above, rather than train and instruct (perspective) teachers. As for research field, though many teacher educators in university are doing research, their research themes are usually associated with their identity as teachers in universities, instead of as teacher educators. The reason is that their promotion in university is mainly influenced by their research level as



well as the quantity and quality of their publications. Thus many research achievements don't aim at helping the professional development of (perspective) teachers.

### **3.2 Overstressing Education Background and Research Capability, Underestimating Teaching Ability in Recruitment Requirements for Teacher Educators**

Chinese universities overstress education background and research capability of teacher educators, while underestimate teaching ability with reference to their current recruitment requirements. There are two main reasons: Firstly, the education background of teachers in normal universities has been at a lower level for a very long time in China. So in 1999, the Ministry of Education clearly states in *Suggestions on Strengthening Building of Teachers' Contingent in the New Era* (Ministry of Education, 1999), by 2005, the education level of higher institution teachers should be: over 80% of the teachers in teaching-research oriented universities should have a master degree (30% of them should have a doctorate degree). Secondly, when the Ministry of Education carries out teaching evaluation in universities, the proportion of teachers with doctorate degrees in full-time teachers and researchers is a very important evaluation index. So, higher institutions usually demand a doctorate degree of teacher educators. China now also has Ed.D. program. The goal is to cultivate compound "research-oriented professionals" who undertake education and teaching practice as well as educational management. They should have strong leadership as well. The program enrolls primary and middle school teachers, administrative personnel from schools of all kinds and at all levels. They should have a master degree and not less than five years of full-time working experiences in education and relevant fields, and have made considerable achievements as well. Their research on key problems that are of great practical significance and strong application value. These problems come from practice in education, teaching and educational management. However, as higher normal universities make the transition to comprehensive universities, academic research is considered as the foundation of the core competitiveness of high-caliber universities. Higher institutions employ Ph.D.s to boost their strength of scientific research. Ph.D.s lay emphasis on mastery of knowledge and cultivation of theories in the relevant disciplinary domain and there is no teaching ability training for them.

### **3.3 Ignoring Requirements of Elementary Education Accomplishment in Recruitment Procedures for Teacher Educators**

A research about Chinese teacher educators (Zhang, 2011) shows that teacher educators' elementary education accomplishment is still to be improved. This is manifested in the aspects below. Teachers know little about the concept of the new curriculum reform and implementation process of the reform among primary and middle schools.

Teachers are unfamiliar with the teaching, curriculums, views about teachers and students and managements of elementary education. In classroom teaching, teachers fail to connect theories in practice and instill the concepts of elementary education in knowledge inculcation. Nowadays, only a small part of teacher educators are excellent primary and middle school teachers and they work as guest teachers of teacher education courses, most of teacher educators are Ph.D.s graduating from universities. They generally have strong academic background. However, they lack practical teaching training in their cultivation process and hardly have the chance to practice elementary education. Their daily work is far from the forefront of elementary education, so they are unfamiliar with the specific field of teachers' education practice and the professional development of teachers. Meanwhile, universities emphasize scientific research of teachers instead of their teaching work. Consequently, teacher educators devote much less time and energy to teaching, and their research concerns more about theories rather than practice of teacher education.

## **4. STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ADMITTANCE POLICY FOR CHINESE TEACHER EDUCATORS**

### **4.1 Making Professional Standards and Recruitment Policy for Teacher Educators**

The admittance policy for teacher educators should be made on the basis of clarifying their professional role and identity, making professional standards for them and clearly stipulating the quality requirements as well as the requirements and procedure of recruitment. As Smith (2005) stated that the quality requirements for teacher educators include six aspects: firstly, articulation of reflectivity and meta-cognition. Teacher educators are expected to be self-aware, to reflect and articulate in-action reflections, to explain tacit knowledge of teaching and make it available to perspective teachers, thus bridging theory and practice. The second is the quality of knowledge. Teacher educators' professional knowledge is expected to be comprehensive, rich and deep, based on theory and testing theories in practice. Thirdly, it is the knowledge of how to create new knowledge. Teacher educators are expected to engage in curricula writing and research. Research can promote ongoing and reliable professional development. Fourthly, teaching children and adults. Teacher educators are expected to be skillful in teaching all age groups of learners. Fifthly, it is a comprehensive understanding of the educational system. Teacher educators are expected to have a comprehensive understanding of the educational system which goes beyond their personal teaching context. Finally, it is professional maturity and autonomy. Teacher educators

are expected to have achieved a high level of professional maturity which is expressed within a framework of professional autonomy. Professional standards for teacher educators can guide professional development of individuals, provide framework for the professionalization of teacher educator groups and promote the construction of professional community of teacher educators.

#### 4.2 Elementary Education Accomplishments of Teacher Educators Should Be the Basic Requirement of Recruitment

The teaching objects of teacher educators are (perspective) teachers who teach and supervise primary and middle school students. Teacher educators not only impart knowledge to (perspective) teachers, but also have to teach them how to organize teaching activities. This is the difference between “teaching” and “learning to teach”. It also requires teacher educators, who train future primary and middle school teachers, to be familiar with the teaching and management work of elementary education so that they can design the courses according to the actual requirements for teachers and increase the efficiency of courses. First of all, the quantity and quality of research achievements published by teacher educators should not be the only requirement for them. Whether the research is related to teacher education or whether it can speed up solutions to practical problems are more important. Secondly, both Ph.Ds. and Ed.Ds. should have teaching experiences in primary and middle schools. With the deepening of cooperation, university teacher educators and primary and middle school teachers work together to instruct (perspective) teachers. Moreover, with a better understanding of teaching and management in primary and middle schools, teacher educators can enhance mutual understanding and cooperation. It is also of some help for their research on teachers’ education practice.

#### 4.3 Improving Induction Training for Teacher Educators

Induction training for teacher educators mainly aims at developing the professional capability of novice teacher educators in a well-planned, purposeful and systematical way. It can adapt them to the role as a teacher educator and lay a foundation for further professional development. When new teacher educators pursue professional development, they are somehow in isolation. When encountering problems, they are more likely to seek answers from books, the Internet, some conferences or one or two colleagues they know. At present, induction training for teacher educators refers to the centralized training before they start teaching in schools. It only lasts for three months and it is far from enough to satisfy the needs of teacher educators. Firstly, the training should last longer. One to three years of induction training can help new teacher educators to become more professional. Secondly, there is need to reform training courses for teacher educators: appropriately offering

more optional courses. In terms of theoretical courses and practical courses, it is necessary to inherit the tradition of addressing theoretical courses, while strengthen the construction of practical courses at the same time. Teacher educators should have the chance to practice in primary and middle schools.

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