

Three Main Abilities to Be Developed for Female College Teachers in China

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Abstract

The transformation and development of higher education in China demand new requirements for the enhancement of the competence of teachers in colleges and universities. In recent years, female teachers gradually make up half of Chinese higher education faculty, and their development and abilities determine largely the quality of higher education. Studies show that their competences in academic research, communication and management obviously lag behind those of male teachers. Thus, it is urgent female teachers should endeavor to develop these abilities to meet the ever-changing requirements of higher education.

Key words: Female teachers; competence in academic research, communication and management

Introduction

In recent years, women are an important component of the faculty in Chinese higher education. According to the statistics by the Ministry of Education in 2013, full-time teachers of the general higher education in China totaled 1496865, among which there are 714450 female teachers, accounting for 47.75 percent of the total.(website of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2015). It can be said that female teachers has hold up half of the sky of higher education. Thus, their development and abilities determine largely the quality of higher education. Marx has already pointed out: "Any person's duty, mission and task are to develop their full capacity."(P.330) "The Complete Collections of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels", the third volume, 1960:330), which shows that ability is the concentrated expression of man's essence power, the internal basis of all human activities, the foundation of human survival and development and the first element affecting career development. In a report entitled "Learning: the Treasure Within", the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century (ICC) also put forward that when facing the development of future society, everyone "must have the ability to seize and take opportunities in their lifetime and to update, deepen and further enrich the knowledge acquired at the outset in order to adjust to the ever-changing world."(The International Commission on Education for the 21st Century (ICC),1996:75) This shows that capacity development is the fundamental development of female teachers in colleges and universities. A study shows that, on the one hand, the transformation and development of higher education requires an all-round competence system for female teachers;(Xucai Yu,2015:17-19)on the other hand, the development of female teachers' competence obviously lagged behind that of male.(Xucai Yu,2012) Based on the new requirements for the development of female teachers and the gender differences in the development of teachers in colleges and universities, we believe that the competences in academic research, communication and management are currently three main abilities needing developed for female teachers in colleges and universities.

1. The Development of Academic Research Ability

"University is a place where the advanced knowledge is delved into" (Pingshu Gao, 1991:72.) which shows that academic research is the basic characteristic of the universities and without which there should be no universities. Academic research ability is the core content of professional development of college teachers and the foundation and precondition for the comprehensive development of female college teachers.

What is the competence in academic research? “Competence in academic research refers to the ability of scholars to carry out academic research in their fields and produce original research results, the sum of academic insight, academic thinking and academic creativity of a teacher, and also an important quality in leading a team of scholars to form a personal research style with the recognition of the academic world in professional research activities. We believe that for university teachers, competence in academic research is the sum of professional quality and relevant ability required in education, academic research and teaching research. Therefore, academic competence can be simply divided into three abilities: scientific research ability, teaching research ability and teaching ability. The development of scientific research ability and teaching research ability is helpful to improve teaching level and teaching effect. However, the insufficient development of female teachers' academic ability will have two results, on the one hand, it will hinder the development of female teachers, and on the other hand, it will greatly reduced the academic research and the quality of personnel training in higher education.

The insufficient development of female college teachers is mainly manifested in the following two aspects: First, the insufficient development of scientific research capacity which is reflected on the cognitive ability of female teachers in scientific research. We found in the interview a widely-held opinion among male teachers is that “scientific research ability is the core content of professional development for college teachers.” However, many female teachers hold that “scientific research is something like an elective course while teaching is something like a required course”. They generally believe that teaching is more important for a teacher, so they will focus on it. According to a survey by Yang Rui(1997) of 14 countries and regions, such as in the United Kingdom, and the United States, it is found that Male teachers hold more positive tendencies toward scientific research as they have realized the importance of scientific research in teacher evaluation and tend to be engaged in it. However, the basic interest of women is in teaching. Zhang Xiaoming(2003:49) has also pointed out that the percentage of men emphasizing the importance of scientific research is higher than that of women while the percentage of women emphasizing the importance of teaching is higher than that of men, and women have different opinions about the rationality of school operation. And the insufficient development of females' scientific research capacity is also reflected on the insufficient research achievements. Our survey shows that women teachers are lagged far behind not only in quantity but also in the level of registration of science and research projects, among which, the number of men sponsoring national research projects is 4.37 times that of women, provincial research projects 3.32 times and college projects 1.40 times.

In terms of publication, there is also obvious gender difference. (Xucui Yu : 2009:95.) There are almost no women among the expert group of National 863 Project (High-tech Research and Development Project) and sponsors of significant tender projects and entrusted projects. Secondly, women are poor in teaching research which is first showed by the absence of females in high-level courses. The survey of our research group shows that though female teachers mainly concentrated in teaching, yet in terms of the courses they teach, they are more likely teachers in public basic courses rather than specialized courses, more in lower level than in upper level, more in undergraduate courses than in graduate courses, and there are less female graduate tutors. (Xucui Yu, 2009:93) But it is generally believed that relatively speaking, specialized courses, upper level classes and graduate student courses are inseparable from the support of teaching and research capabilities. The fact that women are poor in teaching research is also showed by the absence of females in teaching achievement award. For example, there are few women in the list of “National Teaching Achievement Award of higher education in 2014”. There are all together 52 special prizes and first prizes, but only one female prize-winner is in the list according to the preliminary statistics,(The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China: 2014) and women also account for a miserably few amount of “The 10th Provincial Teaching Achievement Award of higher education in Hunan province”. There are all together 132 first prizes and second prizes while women only received 5 of them. (Education Department of Hunan Province: 2013) It can be said that all kinds of teaching achievement awards at all levels are the high-level display of the teaching research results, so the phenomenon of "the absence of females" does not match the situation of women's widely concentration in the teaching posts.

Thus, a clear gender gap has been formed in the development of the competence of academic research among college teachers and female teachers are lagging far behind male teachers. However, the essential characteristics and the transformation and development of higher education both require the academic competence among female teachers, so it is very important and urgent to promote their development. As for individual female teachers, they should not only improve their understandings of the development of scientific research capacity, but also enhance their abilities of scientific research and teaching research in their fields by consciously combining teaching practice with scientific research practice.

They should frequently participate in academic exchanges, expand academic vision and give full play to their potential, and also dare to challenge, to produce more good results and to win a certain academic reputation so as to ensure their discourse right in the advanced knowledge and academic power to break through the bottleneck restricting their own development.

2. The Development of Communication Ability

The lifestyle in narrow region would certainly lead to “a narrow individual” (Mingzhi Liu, 2014). Because of this, Marx once emphasized that communication is a “human faculty”, “Human nature is inherently not an abstract single person, in its reality, it is the sum of all social relations.” (“Selected Works of Marx and Engels”, first volumes, 1995:60) Obviously, human nature, human needs, and human development have a close relationship with human’s communication. On the one hand, a person’s survival and development are possible only in social interaction; on the other hand, the direction and the extent of a person’s development are closely related to his communication object. So “human communication and human development share a direct identity” (Lei Jin, 2013), in fact, a person’s level of communication determines to what extent a person can develop. In the same way, the communication extent of female teachers in colleges and universities determines the extent of her development. Therefore, the development of communication competence is the key to the development of female teachers in colleges and universities. The so-called communication competence refers to the ability needed by people by which they smoothly carry on the material and spiritual communication between people; it is prerequisite for the formation of comprehensive social relations, and also an important basis of and the essential condition for individual development. Agreeable interpersonal relationship is the catalyst for the success of the cause, and can make people have a positive development. The development of a man’s ability cannot be separated from his social environment and social interaction; human existence is restricted by the specific social relations. The connotation and characteristics of higher education demand that to be successful female teachers in colleges and universities they should require strong communication skills in addition to the strong academic ability.

But for a long time, due to the influence of “men outside, women inside” gender roles, women are always associated with the family, kitchen and children together, and their scope of communication is usually confined to the family, so that their communication competence is collectively damaged and female teachers in colleges and universities are no exception. Compared with male teachers, the development of their communication ability is far less than that of the males because the interpersonal communication of female teachers in colleges and universities is limited by the history and reality, the concept and practice, and so on, which are mainly manifested as follows: 1. the initiative of the interaction is not strong. Although such feudal regulation has gradually withdrawn from the stage of history as “when the daughter is raised in the house, they should not be out boudoir division; when the guests are in the household, she should keep silent”, but the influence on women of such feudal ideas as “women should not frequently appear in the public”, “women should not have social communication” are still very common and profound, which lead to the fact that women who are active in all kinds of public occasions tend to attract others’ criticism and misunderstanding, and that would affect their own development. Such cases are not uncommon. Female college teachers under long-term influence in this environment would on the one hand be engaged in their work and family and face on the other hand the unwarranted annoyance, which objectively inhibit their consciousness to go out of the house actively and to participate all kinds of social activities, thus their development in communicative competence is greatly hindered.

Comparison made by Yezhu Zhao of university teachers in Australia, Britain and the United States and other 8 countries and regions found that male teachers are more inclined to actively expand to the outside, in order to increase the influence and access to resources, while female teachers often tend to confine themselves in the schools, in the defined scope of teaching, and they are not actively looking for ways to expand their professional area. (Yezhu Zhao, 2002). 2. The scope of their communication is not large. Lin Jing’s research shows that the scope of female college teachers communication is primary limited in their schools, and they have very little contact with the outside world; communication between colleagues in the department accounted for 57.8%, and communication outside the departments and the universities accounted for only 9.6%; their communication among the subordinates and the superior is primarily confined to their universities, which accounted for 58.7%, and such communication outside their departments and the universities accounted for only 7.3%. (Jing Lin, 2008) According to the results of our interview, the communication range of female teachers in colleges and universities is generally characterized by the tendency of large, small and large.

Specifically, the general situation is that when the college female teachers get married, and especially before they give birth to children, they generally have large communication scope because time is abundant; but the scope of female communication is small and is almost confined to the classroom and family when they are raising children, especially before the children go to the nursery. A female teacher whose child has just gone to the kindergarten said: "The child is small, and I have lot of trivial things to deal with. Sometimes the child may get ill, together with the heavy task of teaching, on the other hand, for the lack of experience, I have little time and energy to get in touch with the other people, and is therefore almost closed up." This is a common situation for female teachers. But as the children grow up, the communication scope of female teachers is gradually expanding. But they generally believe that, compared with their husbands and other male colleagues, their contacts with the school outsiders are much narrower. Due to the lack of communication with others, female college teachers are short of necessary communication skills and methods. (Xucui Yu, 2009:103). 3.

The content of the female college teachers' communication is not wide. The survey results show that, on the one hand, the female college teachers' communication focuses on life, and not on academic exchanges, while the male college teachers' communication is largely on academic exchanges (Xucui Yu, 2009:99); on the other hand, "professional individualism" among the female college teachers is very prominent. In other words, the female college teachers generally communicate with other teachers in the same fields, especially with the other professional people of the same specialties. When they do communicate with other professional people outside their specialty, the topic is also limited to daily life. But even if the female college teachers engage in professional communication with teachers of the same specialty, the number of times is one of the few, and the frequency is very low. "One classroom is like a wall and a moat of the castle, the teachers never go out, and their colleagues are ashamed to come in." (Xiaofeng Mao, 2004) This to a certain extent limits their development. Teachers cannot develop without the communication, association, and cooperation, and only with constant exchanges and cooperation can female college teachers get rid of the shackles of the individual education. 4. They have too many worries in interaction. On the one hand, they are worried that they go too far away from the traditional culture required of women and do not want to take the initiative to the community; on the other hand, women is very cautious in their communication with the opposite sex. A female teacher's point of view has been shared by a large number of women, that is, "it is better to have less contact with the opposite sex, otherwise a love affair scandal story may be made about you without your little attention to it." Another female teacher who has just got married said: "when I have a contact with the opposite sex while my husband is nearby, people would not say anything, but if my husband is not in the school, I should be particularly careful."

In short, from a realistic perspective, the female teachers' communication ability is far less than the males, which is mainly manifested in the old concept of communication, the narrow scope of communication, the one-side communication content, too many worries in the communication and so on. These deficiencies will inevitably lead to the narrow academic network of female teachers, and make them disassociated from the academic community, which will obviously restrict the establishment of a wide range of social relations and their own development. For in the communication, every person can enrich themselves by making good use of the material and spiritual culture created by others, so that they can bring themselves to the full development. (Jin Lei, 2013) Therefore, female teachers in colleges and universities should make full use of the limited communication time and space to update constantly the concept of communication, expand the scope of communication, expand the content of communication, abandon communication burden, improve communication skills, establish a wide range of social relations, and expand their development space. The communities and colleges should pay more attention to the comprehensive development and progress of female teachers in colleges and universities, create a better psychological environment and build a better material platform for the further development of their communicative ability.

3. The development of management ability

Management is one of the most important activities of mankind. Management ability is also a very important component of the competence structure of female teachers in colleges and universities. Along with the higher education reform in full swing, on the one hand the role of management will have more obviously effect on the teachers' work, study and life in colleges and universities, on the other hand higher requirements are put on the management ability of university teachers. In recent years, Britain, the United States and other countries have included the management capacity in their assessment of teachers, such as in "Teacher Professional Standards" [Teacher Education Department, Ministry of Education: 2001:240].

The so-called management capacity refers to the transition and control of oneself or other people's thought and behavior according to the social goal, with consciousness and destination. For female teacher in colleges and universities, there are many discussion perspectives on the management ability: from the view of women teachers, there are time management ability, emotional management ability and career planning and management ability; from the work perspective, there are teaching management ability, scientific research management capacity and administrative capacity. According to the needs of the research, this article only makes a preliminary discussion on the administrative capacity of women teachers in colleges and universities, that is, the female teachers' ability to participate and exercise their rights in the political and various affairs in colleges and universities.

As it is known to all, the construction of democratic society and the development of higher education demand that female teachers participate in higher education affairs positively, and the comprehensive development of female teachers also urgently requires that they have the corresponding power and participation ability. Undeniably, throughout the world, the situation in which men alone dominate the senior management in universities has gradually faded, and the management responsibility of the women era has quietly come. From Shirley Tillman, who was the 19th president of Princeton University in 2001, to Drew Gilpin Foster, the first female president appointed by Harvard University in more than 370 years, from Yifang Wu who is China's first female president and was praised as the "female god of wisdom" by the American president Roosevelt, to Weide Xie, Yu Wei, Qidi Wu, and to 42 female college leaders "in 39 universities of 985 project in 2014 China". (Nanfang Dushi Daily: 2014) All these show that a broad management stage has been built for more and more women to enter the senior management in colleges and universities to display their talent and these also show the female college teachers can promote the entire development of higher education with their hands with which they once shook the cradle of the babies. But on the whole, there are only a small number of women engaged in middle and senior management in colleges and universities, and women teachers' voice is still not fully heard. There are still larger differences whether it is compared with other sectors of society, or compared with the male teachers. The differences are mainly manifested in the following three aspects:

First, compared with other departments, the proportion of female participating in administration in colleges and universities is obviously low. First of all, let us look at the female proportion of the members of committee to the National People's Congress and member of the national committee of CPPCC. The 12th National People's Congress has 699 female deputies, accounting for 23.4% of the total, with 2.1 percentage increase to the previous one. It is the highest female proportion of the deputies of the National People's Congress. There are 25 female members of standing committee, accounting 15.5% of the total, which is lower than the previous in 0.7 percentages. The 12th CPPCC National Committee has 399 females, accounting for 17.8% of the total, with 0.1 percentages higher than the previous; there are 38 female members of standing committee, accounting for 11.8% of the total, with 1.3 percentages higher than the previous. Next, let us look at the proportion of women involved in business management. In 2013, the proportion of female directors in the board of director was 29.1%, and the proportion of female supervisors in the board of supervisors was 29.2%, which have declined 3.6 and 6 percentage respectively compared with those of 2010. However compared with those of 2012, they have increased 2.7 and 2.2 percentage respectively.

Again, let us look at the female participation in grass-roots democratic management. In 2013, the proportion of female participation in residents' committees was 48.4%; the proportion of participation in village committee management was 22.7%, which have increased 1.3 percentages than 2010. However, there was still a long distance from the proportion of 30% specified in "Outline". (National Statistics Bureau, 2014) In addition, the females have higher political participation level in Beijing, but the bureau-level female cadres only accounted for 20% of the total bureau-level cadres, the female cadres in the party and government accounting for 24.4% of total cadres of the section rank, and the proportion of female cadres in reserve reached 36.1%. (Xiu-e Zhang, 2007). In contrast, the proportion of female participation in administration in colleges and universities is obviously lower, for example, in 71 colleges and universities affiliated to the Ministry of Education, the female cadres only accounting for 8.6% of the section rank level, and there are only three female presidents in these universities. (Xiulian Gu, 2005) And there are the absence of female in decision-making bodies of higher education in colleges and universities, that is to say, there are no presidential leaders in many colleges and universities, which is a leadership of "monks" (Ping Luo, 2004), therefore it does not meet the basic conditions for female teachers to express their wills.

The third problem is the marginalization of females in decision-making bodies, so female's interests cannot be effectively expressed in the decision-making bodies and their interests cannot be integrated into the policy. That is to say, female teachers' democratic participation is largely a kind of peripheral participation which is away from the core of power. They can appeal for female's rights to decision-makers, but they have a little influence on the direction of decision-making bodies and the related systems.

Therefore, with the gradually increasing proportion of females' participation in China's government of all kinds of level, various departments and industries, female teachers' participation in administration in colleges and universities is still in a relatively backward state in terms of the breadth and depth, and men are still in the absolute control of the rights and discourse in various decision systems. Weihong Li who is the vice minister of National Education Ministry pointed out "Chinese females are holding up half higher education with their gentleness, wisdom and knowledge, but we must be clearly aware that the status of the females in the field of higher education has not fully improved even though the proportion of female faculty members and the number of female presidents have increased." (Nanfang Dushi Bao, 2014). This is not only incompatible with the new demands of teachers in the transition and development of higher education, but also is incompatible with the important role played by female teachers in higher education, which not only prevents the comprehensive development process of female teachers in colleges and universities, but also prevents the process in achieving the democratic politics in the whole society.

In short, female's participation in administration is an important symbol of women's liberation, but also an important factor to measure a country and society of its level of development and civilization. The full development of female teachers' management ability is an important guarantee for the democratic construction of colleges and universities. The extent of female teachers' participation in the management affairs of universities and the proportion of their posts in the leadership group will play a great role in the healthy development of higher education. To improve the female teachers' backward condition of administration participation, and to promote the development of female teachers' management ability, it is not only the efforts of the female teachers to improve their comprehensive qualities so that they may win a role in administrative decision-making by their own excellence, but also the efforts of the whole society to create a favorable environment and to build a broad platform enabling female teachers in higher education to participate in management of affairs.

Conclusion

In summary, the "female problem" in the field of higher education today does not disappear or become unimportant in China. On the contrary, many new problems have emerged in terms of the development of gender equality and harmony. The developments of academic ability, communication ability and management ability, are not only the necessary requirements of China's higher education transition, but also the way to the all-round and free development for female teachers in universities. But Rome was not built in a day. Therefore the female teachers should exert themselves to the utmost, and the society and the colleges and universities should create a relaxed environment and build a favorable platform for them. It is our firm belief that female teachers in colleges and universities are the representative group of Chinese women, and the extent of their development reflects the extent of civilization and progress of the society and the times. Therefore, the great concern for the development of female teachers in colleges and universities is the concern for the development of the humanity and also the concern for the times. And to pursue the comprehensive development of the female teachers is to pursue not only the harmonious development of gender but also the all-round and free development of all people.

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