

Undergraduate Specialty Construction of Local Colleges and Universities in China: A case of Jiaying University

¹Liu Yaonan, ²Roselan Baki

¹PHD Student (Education), City University, Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia,

²City University, Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i6/17139> DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i6/17139

Published Date: 05 June 2023

Abstract

China's local colleges and universities are based on the service of local economic and social development. Facing the transformation and upgrading of local economy and the new round of industrial layout, the local colleges and universities need to think about how to focus on the training goal of talents and innovate the training mode of talents. We should cultivate specialties characteristics and strengthen connotation construction to meet the needs of development in the new era. Taking the undergraduate specialties construction of Jiaying University as an example, aiming at the common problems in the specialties construction of local colleges and universities, this paper proposes a new path for the undergraduate specialties construction of local colleges and universities in the new era: taking specialties certification as the starting point, to improve the personnel training system; to serve the needs of local development, to promote the construction of specialties with characteristics; to firmly promote the curriculum construction, to consolidate the foundation of personnel training; to broaden the channels for raising funds for running schools, to ensure specialties development.

Keywords: China's Local Colleges and Universities, Undergraduate Specialty, Specialty Construction, Talents Training, Characteristic Specialties

Introduction

At present, China's economic and social sectors are in a key historical period of deepening reform in an all-round way (Wang et al., 2020). China has entered a new stage of development. As the Highland of talent training, colleges and universities shoulder the important mission of cultivating talents for the society. Local colleges and universities base themselves on the local areas and mainly serve the local economic and social development. Facing the transformation and upgrading of local economy and the new round of industrial

¹Corresponding Author: Liu Yaonan, Jiaying University, Meizhou city, Guangdong Province, 514015, China. (jyulyn@qq.com)

layout, local colleges should actively combine their own position and give full play to their own advantages. And local colleges and universities should focus on talent training objectives, innovate talent training models, cultivate specialties characteristics, and strengthen connotation construction to promote high-quality development of the school. This has become an important topic for research and practice in colleges and universities. Based on the case study of Jiaying University in Guangdong, China, this paper explores how local colleges and universities to carry out specialties construction to meet the needs of local economic and social talents and the needs of higher education reform and development.

Chinese colleges and universities are divided into several categories. They are the Central Affiliated colleges and universities, ministry-province cooperation to build colleges and universities, local colleges and universities, private colleges and universities. Local colleges and universities are ordinary colleges and universities belonging to all provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government. Most of them are funded by local finance and allocated by local administrative departments. They are the main of China's higher education system, colleges and universities responsible for the training of talents for the region and for the local economic and social development (Baidu, 2022). Local University is not only a historical concept, but also a concept with universal significance (Cai, 2022). For a long time, the general train of thought of running a local university is: Technical Secondary School -- vocational college -- undergraduate college -- undergraduate university -- Postgraduate degree in authorized university, which aims at imitating the orientation of academic research university personnel training. With the development of China's higher education and the need of local economic and social personnel training, some local colleges and universities have changed their school-running mode and begun to change to the application-oriented colleges and universities or the application-oriented direction, the reform and innovation in personnel training goal, specialties setting, curriculum system, teaching method and evaluation method (Le & Xu, 2020).

The Basic Concept of Specialty Construction

Specialty is a kind of specialized curriculum system, which is based on the teaching organization of discipline construction that aims at specific knowledge demand. It is the basic platform for colleges and universities to realize talent training (Zou, 2019). According to the needs of social occupation, colleges and universities use subject knowledge to solve social practical problems (Cai, 2020) on the premise of meeting the needs of social talents. Different specialties settings correspond to different talent training specifications. Thus, specialty construction is the construction of related elements around the training of talents. Specialty development focuses on the following aspects of the establishment through a sound management system.

- First, the training objective should be established.
- Second, the talent training programs should be formulated.
- Third, curriculum system should be set up and teaching material construction should be planned.
- Fourth, the teaching staff should be built.
- Fifth, teaching operation management should be guaranteed, including the construction of teaching conditions, classroom teaching, practical teaching base, and quality assurance system.
- Sixth, campus culture should be established.

In general, undergraduate education in institutions of higher learning depends on specialties construction Qu (2020), which determines the quality of talent training and social satisfaction in institutions of higher learning (Ma, 2019). The training of talents in colleges and universities is multi-level, including academic talents, management talents, various applied talents and compound talents. The specialty construction of local colleges and universities is to train the application-oriented compound talents according to the local actual needs.

Current Situation of Specialty Construction

China's local colleges and universities generally implement two-level management. The Academic Affairs Department, Division of Human Resources, Student Management Division, Office of Academic Research, Youth League Committee and other departments exercise administrative functions on behalf of the school. These administrative departments coordinate and manage the specialties construction, teaching operation, teacher construction, practice, teaching and research, campus culture and other work. The secondary college shall establish a department or teaching and research section based on the specialties according to the specialty construction requirements. They set talent training objectives and specialty construction standards, formulate talent training programs, set curriculum systems, and monitor the specialties construction process. The Teaching and Research Department is responsible for curriculum construction (Wang et al., 2020), implementation of teaching practice activities, and implementation of talent training. In the course of running a school for a long time, over time, local colleges and universities have formed their own distinctive features. This is carried out by fully excavating their advantages and condensing the connotation of specialty construction according to the needs of social talents and the developing situation. Thus, local colleges and universities have produced certain school-running benefits and social impact.

In recent years, with the quickening pace of China's higher education reform, local colleges and universities have developed by leaps and bounds. However, there are series of challenges and bottlenecks in the development of local colleges and universities. The specialty construction problems are mainly manifested in the following aspects: homogenization of specialty setting, decoupling of curriculum construction from social needs, and restrictions on school-running funds (Huang et al., 2020).

Homogenization of Specialty Setting

Most local colleges and universities set up similar specialties, lack of macro-control, and the specialties advantage is not obvious. For the setting of new specialties, there is a phenomenon of following the trend, especially in some colleges and universities in the same region. No combination of the school's own conditions and the level of objective analysis, competing to declare popular specialties. This often leads to the homogeneity of specialties construction, so that the school-running characteristics are not distinct. The students thus trained are not competitive and have a negative impact on the employment quality of school-leavers.

Decoupling of Curriculum Construction from Social Needs

Local colleges and universities focus on serving the development of local economy and society and transporting talents for local economic construction. The specialties courses offered by local colleges and universities should keep up with the needs of the times and the market, but most of them lag behind in the course system construction and the course contents are old and old. The educational concept is not advanced enough to keep pace with the times.

The teaching method is also more traditional unitary, can not make good use of modern education technology. The school specialties brand is not many, the quality curriculum construction lacks. The school curriculum construction and the social demand cannot correspond effectively.

Limited School-running Funds

Due to the unbalanced development of regional economy, the local governments' investment in education in local colleges and universities is also quite different. Most of the local colleges and universities are funded from a single source and mainly depend on the per-student funding from the government. Due to insufficient funds, it has been inevitably led to the weak construction of teachers, lack of motivation for research and teaching conditions. All these directly restrict the construction and development of the school's specialties.

The Undergraduate Program Development of Jiaying University

Jiaying University is a local university in China. It's specialty development has the general characteristics of professional development in China's colleges and universities, but also has its own characteristics and advantages. The traditional Jiaying University specialty is the normal education. It also responds to the needs of local industries by adjusting and optimizing the professional structure to provide support and intellectual support for the training of high-quality talents to meet the needs of local economic and social development. Jiaying University has some constraints on specialty development due to its location. This needs to explore a breakthrough way to promote the school specialty high-quality development.

The Jiaying University is a full-time public university with a history of 100 years. It is located in Meizhou, Guangdong Province, China. The Jiaying University was upgraded to an undergraduate institution in 2000 and has a history of 109 years. The school hold the aspiration of "Taking root in the hometown of overseas Chinese, serving the local people and promoting Hakka people culture". The mode of undergraduate specialty construction in this university are the same as the traditional mode of specialty construction in local colleges and universities in China, which implement the two-level management. The Jiaying University has comprehensive disciplines, covering 11 disciplines, such as literature, science, engineering, Law and medicine. To further implement the Meizhou Action Plan on science and Technology Services, promotion and integration of government bodies, industry, academia and research institutes were carried out. The university has cooperated with more than 300 enterprises and institutions in Meizhou, and established "Industry institutes" with local industries and enterprises to help Meizhou's industrial transformation and upgrading. In response to the national "Belt and Road" initiative, the university has strengthened international exchanges and cooperation with universities in Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, Southeast Asia, countries bordering the Indian Ocean, and Europe and the United States.

Problems in Specialty Development

After 22 years of construction, Jiaying University has made great progress, formed a relatively mature talent training system, and trained a large number of application-oriented talents to meet the needs of local economic and social development. With the deepening of the reform of undergraduate education in China, the Jiaying University face more and more problems in the process of running a school. In addition to some common problems in specialties construction in most local colleges and universities, the Jiaying University specialty

construction also faces the following bottlenecks. These are serious constraints on the development of Jiaying University.

Geographical Disadvantage

Meizhou, a mountainous city in Guangdong province, is economically backward. This geographical location makes the Jiaying University have obvious disadvantages in terms of space, cost, local government support and information symmetry. The school in the introduction of high-level talent, key personnel construction and other aspects of the lack of competitiveness. It is also not attractive enough to attract high-quality students, making it more difficult to develop Jiaying University than similar local colleges and universities with geographical advantages.

Shortage of School-running Resources

Jiaying University has a single source of school-running funds, and it mainly depends on the government's per student funds to maintain the daily education and teaching. Jiaying University has long been dominated by normal education, which mainly trains local basic education teachers. As a result, Jiaying University have limited access to school-running resources through social services. Therefore, the school's funding situation is more prominent.

Poor Specialty Structure

The existing undergraduate Jiaying University cover 11 first-level disciplines. The traditional dominant discipline is normal education. The adjustment of science and engineering disciplines is subject to the funding mechanism. This is not a reasonable specialty structures, it results in such outstanding problems as scattered teaching resources and unbalanced specialties development. At present, the Guangdong government are making arrangements for the strategic talent demand for major economic and social development. Meizhou is at a critical period of industrial restructuring and upgrading, and needs a large number of high-level application-oriented talents, there is a structural contradiction between the specialties structure of Jiaying University and the needs of local economic and social development.

Various Thoughts about The Construction of Undergraduate Specialty

In view of the new problems and challenges in the new stage of reform and development, colleges and universities in China, especially local colleges and universities, are thinking about how to give full play to their own advantages and adjust their specialty structure according to the needs of local development, give prominence to specialty characteristics, strengthen connotation construction and realize sustainable development.

Specialty Certification as the Starting Point

We should give full play to the advantages of traditional disciplines, consolidate the achievements of basic disciplines, strengthen the central position of personnel training, deepen the reform of personnel training mode, and improve the quality of personnel training. With the Ministry of Education to develop undergraduate specialties guarantee qualified, high-level, pursuit of excellence three-level certification for the grasp, it covers the training and graduation requirements of the national standards of teaching quality for undergraduate specialties in general institutions of higher learning and China's engineering education certification standards. Adhere to the advanced educational concept of 'Student-centered,

output-oriented and continuous improvement', scientifically formulate training plan, rationally set up curriculum system, effectively support the achievement of goals, and fully implement the fundamental task of setting up morality and cultivating people, to achieve the training objectives and graduation requirements, according to the evaluation results, continuous improvement (Jiang, 2020).

Jiaying University issued the implementation plan for the accreditation of undergraduate specialties of Jiaying University, the work plan for the accreditation of Jiaying University Teachers, and the management measures for the evaluation of the quality of Jiaying University Teachers' training, in accordance with the 'All-round start, step-by-step promotion, priority investment, benefit from the results', the top of the specialties construction design and overall planning. To organize and carry out the work of teacher training specialties certification according to the evaluation standard of the quality of teacher training. The evaluation of the degree of accomplishment of personnel training is an important part of the accreditation of Teachers' major in colleges and universities, it is also the touchstone of implementing the concept of 'Student-centered, output-oriented and continuous improvement' in the specialty certification of normal education (Tian, 2020). The evaluation of personnel training quality achievement degree includes the evaluation of personnel training goal achievement degree, the evaluation of graduation requirement achievement degree and the evaluation of curriculum goal achievement degree. Jiaying University organized experts from inside and outside the school to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the 20 undergraduate normal education program and to take their pulse. Regular evaluation of training objectives, graduation requirements and the degree of achievement of curriculum objectives, specialties evaluation results based on continuous improvement. Through the development of teacher training specialties certification, radiation school other undergraduate specialties construction, improve the personnel training system, improve the level of specialties construction and quality.

Serving Local Development Needs and Promoting Specialties Distinctive Features

Focusing closely on the needs of local economic and social development, we should find out the orientation of running a school, deepen the supply-side reform of undergraduate specialties, focus on optimizing the structure of personnel training, and promote cross-training among departments, disciplines and specialties, to strengthen general education, curriculum ideology and politics, to tap and integrate the advantages of resources, to promote the development of school characteristics, to meet the new requirements of new technology, new industry, new business forms and new models for personnel training, we will strengthen the development of relevant disciplines and disciplines.

Jiaying University is located in the economically underdeveloped mountainous cities, the Hakka people region, the old revolutionary Communist-controlled China, and is based in Meizhou to run a university to serve the local economic and social development. As a result, the school has a very clear orientation, is to build into a 'Leading domestic universities of the same kind of high-level application-oriented university'. Therefore, Jiaying University should take the road of characteristic specialties development according to its own advantages and the needs of local economic and social development, so as to avoid homogeneous competition and realize the school-running goal.

Promoting the School's Traditional Specialty Training and Local Talents

After 22 years of tertiary education and 2000-present undergraduate education, Jiaying University normal education has never been interrupted. There are 20 undergraduate specialties in the normal education category, covering all specialties in pre-primary, primary and secondary education, which have irreplaceable status in the local basic education teacher training, for the local training of more than 80% of primary and secondary school backbone teachers. The school has integrated educational resources, deepened the reform of the training model for teachers' specialties talents, strengthened the interaction and integration with local basic education, and explored a path for teachers' specialties development that connects pre-service education with post-service education, to provide quality teachers and management staff for local basic education.

We should give full play to the advantages of the traditional normal education in schools, cooperate with local governments, primary and secondary schools (including kindergartens), and other social forces, and construct a cooperative normal education training mechanism, to promote the balanced development of local basic education. In collaboration with the Education Bureau of Meizhou, Jiaying University has integrated normal education in schools and educational resources in Meizhou to create a national normal education innovation experimental zone, construction of 'The cooperative research project on Normal Education Innovation', off-campus teacher training practice base, provincial-level model normal education practice base, excellent teacher guidance workshop and Teacher specialties Development Model School, to organize the rotation training of all teachers of 'Sending teachers to the countryside' and 'Three districts', to build the platform of teaching resources and the special database of normal education in schools, to set up 'Training classes for excellent teachers', the implementation of the 'Double tutorial system, the implementation of the project (including a good word, a standard fluent mandarin, a good class, an art skills, and an ability to communicate), and so on, we will work to develop a community of teachers' education between schools and districts, strengthen the ability of schools to serve local primary and secondary schools, integrate pre-service training with post-service training, and improve the specialties quality of teachers' college students.

Optimizing Settings and Extending Industry-Education Integration of in Schools and Enterprises

Guangdong province constructs "One nuclear, one belt, one area" regional development pattern and "1 + 1 + 9" work deployment as the plan to strengthen higher education. The plan is for revitalizing universities in The Northeast and Northwest Guangdong. The implementation of the plan aims to further increase the gross enrollment rate in higher education, strengthen the construction of 'New normal', 'New engineering', 'New liberal arts', 'New medicine' and 'New agriculture'. Consequently, the plan actively established the National Experimental Zone of Normal Education Innovation. In line with the plan, the Provincial Government of Guangdong Province has adjusted the reform of the school-running system of local universities in the east and the west of Meizhou Province. The Municipal Party Committee and Government of Guangdong Province have actively implemented the strategy of innovation-driven development, focusing on the development of a new generation of information technology industry, new energy, new materials and other real economy, the implementation of rural revitalization strategy, and building a new pattern of regional development.

To meet the needs of local and regional economic development and industrial transformation and upgrading, Jiaying University has integrated the resources of the relevant disciplines, deepened the cooperation between schools and enterprises, integrated industry and education, and realizing the strategic adjustment of the specialty structures.

There are currently 30 science and engineering specialties, with 'Excellent engineers' as the carrier, to open up new disciplines such as electronics, information, computer, civil and other disciplines, and more than 400 enterprises to carry out cooperation, innovative teaching methods, extending the classroom to the enterprise, merge laboratory with the workshop, bring students into the production line, build the demonstrative software college, create applied talents training demonstration base, set up the football (industry) college, build the school's characteristic college and create college brand, as the initiatives of taking the students into the local economic industry development.

Taking full advantage of Meizhou Meizhou's geographical advantages and leveraging its advantages in agricultural resources and environment, the government has set up new agricultural disciplines to meet the needs of the country's distinctive industries, such as grapefruit, medicinal herbs, aquatic poultry and others, and innovated the training model for agricultural talents, to train and serve local agricultural talents. Relying on the key laboratory of protection and accurate utilization of agricultural resources with mountain characteristics in Guangdong province, in collaboration with Guangdong Modern Agricultural Science and technology innovation center (Guangdong Wuhua Sanhuangji Science and Technology Innovation Center) and Guangdong Ordinary University's engineering technology development center (Guangdong Pomelo Engineering Technology Development Center), to carry out scientific research, to promote the work of rural science and as Technology Commissioners in serving the countryside. They are to guide farmers in scientific cultivation, to promote the achievements of agricultural science and technology, to plan for industries to lift people out of poverty, and to train new farmers. Through the integration of resources, science and technology to support agriculture, to promote the development of rural revitalization.

Utilizing Local Cultural Resources and Promote Local Characteristic Industries

Meizhou is home to the famous Chinese historical and cultural city, the world's most representative Hakka settlement -- the Hakka capital of the world, Marshal Ye Jianying's hometown. It is, among others, the 'hometown of culture, hometown of Overseas Chinese, and hometown of football'. Jiaying University has fully absorbed the essence of Hakka People's traditional culture and tapped into Hakka People's outstanding cultural resources in the development of liberal arts specialties, to promote and renew Hakka People's culture.

With a view to fulfilling the fundamental task of setting up morality and cultivating people, Jiaying University should integrate the construction of general education courses and specialty courses, and optimize the curriculum system, a rich red cultural resource, and the excellent traditional culture of Hakka people are integrated into the educational model. The model constructed an all-round coverage from developing features and setting up a typical curriculum that is blended into ideological and political system. Jiaying University Plan is also designed to build a first-class curriculum.

We will improve Hakka People's disciplinary system and introduce the latest theoretical achievements of Hakka People's cultural studies into textbooks and classrooms. To strengthen the construction of a Hakka people research reference centre, enrich the historical documents and research materials of Hakka people through various means, highlight the

cultural values of Meizhou, and promote the development of cultural industries in Hong Kong and other guest regions.

Advancing the Curriculum Construction and Foundation of Talent Training

Local colleges and universities should set up specialties according to the needs of local economy and society, establish a reasonable specialties structure, determine the target and standard of personnel training, design training programs and curriculum system (Chen, 2022). Curriculum is the core of specialties construction. Local colleges and universities should set up corresponding courses according to the program of specialties personnel training, and establish and perfect the course teaching system (Pan, 2022). First, we should strengthen the construction of teachers, improve the organizational structure of teaching at the grass-roots level, and improve teachers' teaching ability and scientific research level. Second, we should promote curriculum reform, integrate teaching resources, strengthen curriculum construction and textbook construction, develop high-quality curriculum content, optimize teaching methods, and make full use of modern educational technology and Internet technology, adopt online, offline and blended teaching mode, disseminate high-quality curriculum resources, improve the quality of curriculum teaching. Third, it is necessary to strengthen curriculum assessment and evaluation, improve the teaching evaluation mechanism, stimulate teachers' enthusiasm for teaching, and enhance students' learning ability of high level.

Widening Channels to Raise Fund to Ensure the Success of Specialty Construction Development

With the deepening of the reform of higher education, China's investment in higher education is also increasing, the overall cost of running colleges and universities has been greatly increased. However, because of the limitation of local universities, compared with the universities under the central government and the cooperation of the ministry and the province, the funds for running schools are not enough, and the running schools are often hard to come by. This requires local colleges and universities must broaden the channels of fund-raising for school-running. These channels include seeking more support from local governments, actively applying for central financial support for the development of local colleges and universities, special funding for provincial-level higher education, and strengthening the development of alumni-nurtured alma mater. Local colleges and universities should need to enrich school education resources through various channels, and make rational plans and optimize their layout, with a clear aim, and focus on supporting and favoring policies for advantageous specialties and specialties specialties with good foundation and prospects for development, and increase investment efforts, speed up the pace of development, to form the core competitiveness of the school.

Summary

As the largest country of higher education in the world, China is making great efforts to open up the way of sustainable development of education and teaching reform. Local colleges and universities have made important contributions to the popularization of higher education in China. Focusing on the new needs of local industries and the new goals of talent cultivation, the traditional professional construction of local colleges and universities in China can no longer meet market demand. Local colleges and universities have encountered series of challenges and several key issues in their development process. In response to the issue of

specialties development, this study has proposed a new path for the construction of undergraduate majors in local colleges and universities. We take professional certification as the starting point to improve the talent cultivation system and focus on the quality of talent cultivation. To serve the needs of local development, tap into one's own advantages, highlight disciplinary characteristics, and establish brand majors to promote the construction of characteristic majors. To solidly promote curriculum construction and consolidate the foundation of talent cultivation. To expand funding channels for education and ensure the development of professional construction. And to create a campus quality culture and create internal driving forces. Through the above measures, local colleges and universities in China have broken through the bottleneck of professional development and met the needs of higher education development in the new era. And local colleges and universities should coordinate the efforts of all parties to form a joint force and effectively promote the construction of high-quality specialties.

References

- Baibu, B. (2022). *Local institutions of higher learning*. Retrieved October 18, 2022, from <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%9C%B0%E6%96%B9%E6%89%80%E5%B1%9E%E9%AB%98%E7%AD%89%E5%AD%A6%E6%A0%A1/6714760?fromtitle=%E5%9C%B0%E6%96%B9%E9%AB%98%E6%A0%A1&fromid=11220615&fr=aladdin>.
- Cai, J. (2020). New Concepts of the Construction of First-class Undergraduate Course and Major. *Journal of Northeast Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, (3):8-12.
- Chen, G., & Ye, Y. (2022). 'Collegiate Leadership under Provincial Pilot, Internal and External Collaboration': Construction Strategy and Practice Path of Specialties Construction Mechanism in Local Universities and colleges. *Journal of Kunming University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences)*. (4):107-113.
- Huang, W., Dou, Z., Wu, S., Zhang, X., & Huo, L. (2020). Problems and Countermeasures in the Construction of Non-dominant Disciplines in Local Colleges and Universities. *Modern University Education*, (10):51-54.
- Jiang, Z. (2020). Take the Road of Connotative Development and Build the first-class specialties. *China University Teaching*, (8):7-13.
- Ma, T. (2019). 'Double ten thousand plan' and the Connotative Development of Higher Education. *Jiangsu Higher Education*, (9):15-20.
- Pan, J., Pan, X., & Xiao, Y. (2022) . Problems and Improvements in the Construction of Undergraduate specialties in Local Universities under First-class Undergraduate education. *Journal of Science and education*. (11):1-3.
- Qu, Z. (2020). On the history, Present Situation and development of discipline construction. *Chinese higher education research*, 2020(11) : 7-12.
- Tian, T. (2020). Evaluating the Training Quality of Normal Education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, (7):79-86.
- Wang, Y., Liu, M., & Lu, D. (2020). Research on the Strategy and Practice of Distinctive Construction of Discipline and Specialty in Local Universities. *Chinese Polymer Bulletin*, (7) :72-76.
- Zou, J. (2019). Thoughts on the Construction of Disciplines and Majors. *Higher Education Review*, (1): 1-6.