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DEVELOPING TEACHER COMPETENCY FOR PRIVATE APPLIED UNIVERSITIES IN GUANGDONG PROVINCE

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Abstract

The transformation of local undergraduate universities into applied universities is an important decision and deployment for the development of higher education in China. Private universities in Guangdong Province have all chosen the positioning of applied universities, but there is a gap between the competency of their teachers and the transformation and development of universities. This will hinder the quality of cultivating applied talents and the high-quality development of universities. Faced with the transformation and development of the new era and the cultivation of applied talents, the competency of teachers in private applied universities in Guangdong Province is facing severe tests. How to cultivate and improve teachers' competencies to make their moral, knowledge, and abilities meet the requirements of cultivating applied talents are the primary tasks and challenges faced by private applied universities in Guangdong Province. This study organized and analyzed literature from Chinese and foreign scholars on the competency of university teachers, summarized representative views of scholars on the elements and dimensions of competency for applied university teachers, provided reference and guidance for the author to construct an effective competency model for private applied university teachers, and provided planning and guidance for the development of teacher competency.

Keywords: Competency, Teacher competency, Private applied universities

Introduction

In 2019, the gross enrollment rate of higher education in China reached 51.6%, surpassing the critical milestone of 50%, achieving a historic transition from massification to popularization of higher education. In 2023, it reached 60.2%. In the process of rapidly moving towards popularization, the scale of higher education in China is increasingly expanding, and the issue of education quality has attracted widespread attention from the whole society. China's higher education, especially at the undergraduate level, has entered a new period of development and is facing new challenges. These challenges focus on two aspects, one is to improve the quality of talent cultivation, and the other is the classified development of universities. In this regard, rethinking the quality of undergraduate talent cultivation from the perspective of cultivating applied talents has become a topic of concern for the Chinese government and researchers. The transformation of local undergraduate universities into applied universities has also become an important strategic deployment for the development of higher education in China.

From 2001 to 2019, China's applied universities have gone through a process of "concept proposal", "type confirmation", and "strengthened development" (Zhang Qiang et al., 2023). Private universities are an important component of higher education in China. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education of China, as of 2023, there are a total of

1242 ordinary undergraduate universities in China, including 391 private undergraduate universities. Students studying in private universities account for nearly 1/4 of China's higher education. The vast majority of private universities have chosen the positioning of applied universities in the practice of educational reform, aiming to adapt to the needs of social development and cultivate applied talents that better meet market and industry requirements.

Applied universities are the driving force for cultivating applied talents. Without the improvement of the quality of talent cultivation in such schools, the improvement of the quality of higher education cannot be achieved. Whether in China or abroad, applied universities have had a mission different from traditional universities since their establishment - to cultivate applied talents. Cultivating high-quality applied talents is the top priority for the high-quality development of applied universities. Faced with the transformation and development of the new era and the cultivation of applied talents, the competency of teachers in private applied universities will face severe tests. The construction of applied universities has put forward new and higher requirements for university teachers in teaching, research, social services, and other aspects. The role expectations of leaders in innovation and entrepreneurship education, implementers of smart education, cultivators of digital citizens, creators of original knowledge, and promoters of the transformation of patented technological achievements, which are not included in the traditional teacher view, quietly deepen and expand the main content of the competency of university teachers (Li Hong, 2021).

Context of teacher development in Guangdong Province

Applied positioning of private universities in Guangdong Province

Guangdong is a strong province in China's economy and a major province in education. The number of private universities and their student population rank among the top in the country, making it one of the most influential and competitive gathering places for private higher education in China. At present, there are 176 higher education institutions in Guangdong Province, including 53 private universities. The student population of private universities in Guangdong accounts for about one-third of the student population in Guangdong universities. There are a total of 23 private undergraduate universities in these private universities.

According to the university profiles and charters on the official websites of these 23 universities, they have all chosen the positioning of applied universities (Table 1), focusing on full-time undergraduate education and aiming to cultivate applied talents. Among them, Zhuhai College of Science and Technology, Guangzhou Nanfang College, and Guangdong Baiyun University are also applied pilot universities in Guangdong Province.

Table 1 Applied Positioning of Private Universities in Guangdong Province (Part)

Name of University	City	Educational Positioning
Dongguan City University	Dongguan	To build innovative, applied, international, and distinctive high-level university.
Zhuhai College of Science and Technology	Zhuhai	To build a first-class innovative and applied university.
Guangdong Baiyun University	Guangzhou	To build a well-known high-level applied technology university in China.
Guangdong University of Science and Technology	Dongguan	To build high-level applied and innovative university.
Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology	Guangzhou	To build distinctive high-level local applied university.
Guangzhou College of	Guangzhou	To build an applied undergraduate university that

Name of University	City	Educational Positioning
Commerce		ranks among the advanced local private universities in China.
Guangzhou Nanfang College	Guangzhou	To build a first-class applied university in China.
Guangzhou College of Applied Science and Technology	Zhaoqing	To build the university into a high-level applied undergraduate university with distinctive characteristics, high reputation and influence in China.
Guangzhou Xinhua University	Guangzhou	To build a first-class and distinctive applied university in China.
Guangdong Peizheng College	Guangzhou	To build a first-class in Guangdong and nationally renowned applied private undergraduate university.

Source: The content in the table is sourced from the official websites of these universities, 2024.

The vast majority of these 23 schools are newly established undergraduate universities converted from independent colleges and must pass the qualification assessment of undergraduate teaching in ordinary higher education institutions organized by the Ministry of Education of China before 2026. The evaluation includes 40 monitoring indicators, including whether the school's educational positioning is mainly focused on cultivating applied talents, whether the talent cultivation plan and curriculum reflect the positioning of applied talent cultivation, whether the "dual qualified" teachers can meet the needs of applied talent cultivation, etc. The key evaluation is the quality of applied talent cultivation. Improving the quality of applied talent cultivation is the core task of the development of private applied universities in Guangdong Province.

Development status of teacher competency in private applied universities in Guangdong Province

The level of teachers is a key factor in determining the quality of education. The Chinese education sector refers to competent teachers in applied universities as "dual qualified" teachers. The key to cultivating high-quality applied talents in applied universities lies in the construction of the "dual qualified" teacher team. The 2015 Guiding Opinions proposed that strengthening the construction of a "dual qualified" teacher team is the main task for universities to transform into application-oriented ones. The data disclosed in the "Monitoring Report on the Construction of National Applied Undergraduate Universities (2022)" shows that from 2017 to 2021, the average proportion of "double qualified" teachers in full-time teachers in national applied undergraduate universities has increased from 22.42% to 24.52%, which is more in line with the needs of the development of applied undergraduate universities. But in the long run, this ratio does not match the demand for cultivating applied talents in applied universities (Zhang Ying, 2023).

According to data released on the official websites of 12 private applied universities in Guangdong Province, including Zhongshan Institute, Dongguan City University, and Guangdong Baiyun University, the proportion of "double qualified" teachers in these universities ranges from 5.55% to 39%, which is not high (Table 2).

Table 2 The proportion of "dual qualified" teachers in private applied universities in Guangdong Province

Name of University	City	Proportion of "dual qualified" teachers
Zhongshan Institute	Zhuhai	5.55%
Zhujiang College	Guangzhou	9.67%
Beijin Normal University, Zhuhai	Zhuhai	14.55%
Guangzhou Institute of Science and Technology	Guangzhou	15.38%
Guangzhou College of Applied Science and Technology	Zhaoqing	17.87%
Dongguan City University	Dongguan	21%
Guangdong Technology College	Guangzhou	22.83%
Guangzhou Nanfang College	Guangzhou	24.01%
South China Business College	Guangzhou	31.58%
Guangzhou City University of Technology	Guangzhou	31.91%
Guangdong Baiyun University	Guangzhou	39%
Guangdong University of Science and Technology	Dongguan	41.90%

Source: The data in the table is sourced from the official websites of these universities, 2024.

More importantly, there is currently a lack of unified and authoritative evaluation standards for the recognition of "dual qualified" teachers in applied universities nationwide (including Guangdong Province), and a lack of a unified and scientific indicator system and evaluation criteria for the competency that "dual qualified" teachers should possess. In practice, each school formulates its own recognition standards, which are vague and unscientific. According to the management measures for the certification of "dual qualified" teachers announced by five universities including Dongguan City University (Table 3), the focus of the certification standards is basically on three aspects: professional knowledge, practical ability, and applied research ability. This falls far short of covering all the competency characteristics of whether applied university teachers can successfully fulfill their profession. Moreover, these recognition standards lack quantitative indicators and evaluation criteria. For example, for practical ability, the evaluation criteria are only based on "having work experience in enterprises" or "having industry qualification certificates".

Table 3 Recognition criteria for "dual qualified" teachers in private applied universities in Guangdong Province

Name of University	Professional knowledge	Teaching ability	Practical ability	Applied research ability	Innovation ability	Modern information technology ability
Dongguan City University	√	√	√	√		
Guangzhou College of Applied Science and Technology	√	√	√	√		√
Guangdong Technology College	√		√	√	√	
Guangzhou City University of Technology	√		√	√		
Guangzhou Huashang College	√		√	√		

Source: The data in the table is sourced from the official websites of these universities, 2024.

Research related to the development of teachers' competency

International research

Different scholars have put forward their own understanding and definition of teacher competency based on the specific usage background of the term "competency" and have classified teacher competency according to specific dimensions or components based on their own theories and research purposes.

Bisschoff & Grobler (1998) used structured questionnaires and factor analysis methods to construct a teacher competency model with two factors and eight levels. Two of these factors include educational competency and collaborative competency, while the eight levels include learning environment, professional commitment, discipline, educational foundation, teacher reflection, cooperative ability, effectiveness, and leadership.

McBer (2000) believes that the competency for excellent teachers includes five aspects, namely professional ethics, leadership, thinking ability, planning and foresight ability, and collaboration ability, and is subdivided into 16 competency characteristic indicators.

Martina Blašková et al. (2014) analyzed the competencies and characteristics that teachers should possess and should not possess based on the results of surveys conducted on 686 students in 2012, 2013, and 2014. They created a university teacher competency model, which includes seven dimensions: professional competency, educational competency, motivational competency, communication competency, personal competency, research competency, and publishing competency.

Mandal (2018) believes that many studies on teacher competency focus on the teaching role of teachers in the classroom, rather than their competence. Teachers' abilities in areas such as educational reform research, teacher education development, and educational science achievements are constantly expanding. He redefined new areas of teacher competency based on different dimensions of teacher competency and proposed a general framework for teacher competency, including field ability, research ability, curriculum ability, lifelong learning ability, socio-cultural ability, emotional ability, communication ability, information and communication technology ability, and environmental ability.

Raúl Gonzalez-Fernández et al. (2024) found through a questionnaire survey of over 100 teachers that teachers place greater emphasis on planning, communication, evaluation, methodology, numbers, and coaching abilities, with leadership and research abilities scoring the lowest. He suggested that teacher training programs should focus on relevant skills,

especially digital abilities. There is complementarity between digital knowledge, methods, coaching, and planning abilities.

Purwati & Sukirman (2024) proposed that teacher competency is the combination of individual abilities and technical, society and social knowledge, which collectively constitute the standard competency of teachers. The competency standards for teachers should be comprehensively developed from four main aspects: teaching ability, personal ability, social ability, and professional ability. Teacher competency also includes the knowledge, skills, and behaviors necessary to achieve their performance correctly and effectively. Each ability includes several sub abilities.

Research in China

During the transformation and development of local undergraduate universities towards application, they generally face problems such as teachers lacking practical ability, weak applied research ability, and insufficient ability to serve social development. The application transformation requires teachers to update their knowledge structure and enhance their competency (Zang Xiaolin, 2021). Domestic researchers have used different research methods to construct competency models for applied university teachers.

Xie Jun (2019) comprehensively used literature review, interview, questionnaire, factor analysis, and other methods to construct the indicators for the qualification standards of "double qualified" teachers in newly established applied undergraduate universities, mainly including 32 indicators in five dimensions: (1) professional ethics cultivation, including caring for students, professional ethics, dedication to work, fairness and justice, spirit of dedication, ideological and moral cultivation, and sense of responsibility; (2) practical application ability, including guiding students to participate in innovation and entrepreneurship competitions, research achievement transformation ability, social service ability, attending professional training, understanding industry trends, school enterprise cooperation awareness, and innovation ability; (3) course teaching ability, including practical teaching ability, curriculum reform ability, organizational management ability, communication and collaboration ability, advanced teaching philosophy, advanced teaching methods, and classroom control ability; (4) theoretical knowledge level, including research ability level, professional technical title, industry influence, degree and education background, academic exchange ability, and industry background; and (5) personality traits, including proactive, lifelong learning ability, psychological resilience, broad interests, and professional knowledge.

Lin Tao et al. (2020) used the grounded theory research method to construct a competency model for applied undergraduate university teachers, which includes five dimensions and 16 indicators: teaching competency, scientific research competency, practical competency, social service competency, and role competency. These 16 factors include professional knowledge, teaching quality, teaching skills, dual qualified, scientific research, transformation of scientific and technological achievements, technological innovation, practical teaching guidance, industry university research cooperation, participation in social activities, "four skills" service activities, serving enterprises or social institutions, personality traits, achievement orientation, role identity, and professional ethics.

Wan Heng & Gao Xinyu (2023) starts with the four major roles of teachers in project-based learning, and based on the "overall competency model", identifies the elements of teacher competency from three levels: cognitive competency, professional competency, and social competency.

Zhan Zhengxiang et al. (2024) constructed a competency model for private undergraduate university teachers, including 15 specific competency characteristics, from three aspects: intelligence, attitude, and interpersonal communication ability, using key behavior

event interview method, questionnaire survey method, and combining MAP theory model and competency model. These 15 competency characteristics include classroom teaching ability, professional theoretical knowledge, logical analysis ability, scientific research and innovation ability, and professional practical knowledge; teacher student communication skills, student-centered approach, environmental adaptability, guidance and monitoring, organizational and coordination abilities; Integrity, teaching effectiveness, work enthusiasm, continuous learning ability, and teaching responsibility.

From domestic literature, it can be seen that in the construction of the competency model of applied university teachers, professional ethics, practical ability, teaching ability, professional knowledge, personal traits, and research ability are the six dimensions with the highest frequency of occurrence (Table 4), and scholars have different influencing factors for these six dimensions.

Table 4 List of dimensions of teacher competency model proposed by domestic scholars

Dimension	professional ethics	practical ability	teaching ability	professional knowledge	personal traits	research ability
Xie Jun (2019)	√	√	√	√	√	√
Yu Wenlin (2019)	√	√	√	√		√
Luo Qiuxue & Gao Chaomin (2019)	√	√	√	√		√
Li Zheng (2020)	√	√	√	√		
Mu Jie (2020)	√	√	√		√	
Lin Tao., et.al (2020)	√	√	√	√	√	√
Wan Heng (2023)				√	√	
Zhan Zhengxiang., et al. (2023)		√	√	√	√	√
Su Liecui (2023)	√	√	√	√		
Tan Cheng (2024)	√		√	√		√

Summary of teacher competency development to support Guangdong education

As the primary resource of universities, teachers, especially those with outstanding competency, have a direct impact on the overall quality of talent cultivation and the development of higher education in Guangdong Province. At present, the teaching staff of private applied universities in Guangdong Province have not yet met the requirements for cultivating applied talents, and the effectiveness of cultivating applied talents is not high. The teaching staff has become the main factor restricting the development of these universities and the education development in Guangdong Province.

The research results of domestic and foreign scholars on the competency development of applied university teachers provide a lot of reference materials for this study, but these studies still have shortcomings, such as simply applying general university teacher competency dimensions without truly reflecting the characteristics of applied undergraduate universities, borrowing too much from foreign competency model construction methods that do not conform to the actual situation in China, and not attaching importance to verifying the predictive validity of the model, resulting in weakened reliability and validity of the model. It is urgent to study a

teacher competency development model that is in line with the characteristics of private applied universities in Guangdong Province, based on the existing research results on teacher competency.

For private applied universities in Guangdong Province, studying teacher competency and constructing a teacher training system based on competency models to provide feasible solutions for improving the overall competency level of the teaching staff is not only a fundamental requirement for implementing national policies, but also a rational choice for pursuing their own development. How to cultivate and improve teachers' competencies to make their moral, knowledge, and abilities meet the requirements of cultivating applied talents are the primary tasks and challenges faced by private applied universities in Guangdong Province.

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