

Comparative Study on the Development Status of Higher Education in Ningxia

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Abstract: As one of the autonomous regions for ethnic minorities, ordinary higher education in Ningxia, like other regions in the country, has also made further development on the basis of long-term development. However, there is still a significant gap compared to other provinces and autonomous regions in the northwest and the whole country. Research has found that there are prominent problems in the development of ordinary higher education in Ningxia, such as an unreasonable faculty structure, small scale, and insufficient funding for scientific research. The main reason is due to the slow development and small scale of local higher education in Ningxia, which has certain shortcomings and deficiencies in independently cultivating high-level talents. The phenomenon of excellent talent loss is relatively serious, talent introduction is difficult, and the overall proportion of teachers with senior professional titles is relatively low. The proportion of scientific research funds allocated to higher education is low in the entire education sector, and the funding structure is unreasonable. In the future development, higher education in Ningxia should expand the scale of education and optimize the structure of higher education on the basis of its original foundation; Increase the number of high-quality teachers, optimize the structure of the teaching staff, and enhance the overall level of the teaching staff; Appropriately tilt education funding towards scientific research in universities and optimize the structure of education funding investment.

Ningxia has achieved historic achievements in various undertakings, and the social landscape has undergone historic changes. For Ningxia, promoting local economic development and comprehensive social prosperity is the fundamental guarantee for achieving high-quality development in Ningxia now and even in the future. In the context of high-quality development, higher education, as an important indicator, plays a leading and supportive role in the economic and social development of Ningxia. Ningxia, as a region with slow development and backwardness, has experienced rapid economic growth in recent years, which has led to significant development in higher education. However, compared to the whole country, the scale of higher education in Ningxia is relatively small, the development speed is relatively slow, and the structure lacks certain rationality.

1. Analysis of the Changes in the Development of Higher Education in Ningxia

Ningxia has achieved rapid development and abundant vitality. The economy of Ningxia has

developed rapidly, and education has also experienced sustained and rapid growth. As of 2022, the conditions for compulsory education in Ningxia have been continuously improved, with a consolidation rate of 99.3%. The level of high school education popularization has been continuously improved, and the gross enrollment rate is 94.7%.^[1] The continuous improvement of the development and popularization level of compulsory education and high school education has laid a good foundation for the development of higher education and provided guarantees for its rapid development. Higher education in Ningxia has made significant progress. In 2022, there were a total of 21 higher education institutions in Ningxia, including 8 regular undergraduate colleges (including 1 independent college) and 12 vocational (college) colleges. There are four graduate training institutions with a total of 13000 graduate students, including 917 doctoral students and 13000 master's students. There are a total of 172500 undergraduate and junior college students in Ningxia, including 101400 undergraduates and 71100 vocational (junior college) students. The enrollment rate of higher education in Ningxia in 2022 is 59.90%.^[1]

1.1 The scale of higher education in Ningxia continues to expand

The number and scale of universities are important indicators of the development of higher education.^[2] Since 2012, the scale of higher education in Ningxia has continued to expand, and the structure of university types has become increasingly perfect. On the one hand, the number of ordinary universities in Ningxia has increased from 16 in 2013 to 21 in 2022, including 8 undergraduate institutions and 12 vocational colleges. On the other hand, the number of enrolled students, including graduate students, undergraduate students, and vocational college students, has been continuously increasing, from 108000 in 2013 to 185000 in 2022, an increase of nearly 80000 people. At the same time, the layout and structure of universities in Ningxia are becoming increasingly reasonable. On the one hand, the 21 universities in Ningxia basically cover all cities in Ningxia, which has progressive significance in promoting regional balance. On the other hand, Ningxia University of Technology has also set up master's training points through various efforts, and a series of measures such as the establishment of Ningxia Normal University Affiliated Middle School have provided a better foundation for the development of higher education and talent cultivation in Ningxia. The continuously expanding scale of higher education in Ningxia, along with the increasingly perfect layout and university structure, have laid a solid foundation for the development of higher education in Ningxia.

1.2 The overall student teacher ratio in ordinary universities in Ningxia is showing an increasing trend

The student teacher ratio is an important data for universities, and it is an important indicator for universities to evaluate whether their educational level meets the standards and qualifications. Since 2013, the overall student teacher ratio in universities in Ningxia has shown a stable growth trend. From 15:1 in 2013 to 19:1 in 2022, the student teacher ratio in higher education in Ningxia has continued to increase rapidly, indicating that the level of education in Ningxia's universities is constantly improving. This can also indirectly reflect that the scale of higher education in Ningxia is constantly expanding, and the quality and level of education are constantly improving.

1.3 The number of full-time teachers with senior professional titles continues to increase

As a key resource in higher education, university teachers are essential for its development. The number of teachers at Ningxia University has seen a significant increase, from 10,400 in 2013 to 14,000 in 2022, providing a solid talent base for the stable and healthy development of higher

education in Ningxia. Additionally, the number of teachers with senior professional titles in Ningxia's regular colleges and universities has steadily increased, from 1,024 in 2013 to 1,625 in 2022, an increase of 601, with an average annual growth rate of 5.26%. Although the number of full-time teachers with senior professional titles has been increasing, the overall growth rate is relatively slow, and the number of teachers with senior professional titles is still relatively small.

2. Comparison of the Development Status of Higher Education between Ningxia and Other Provinces, Cities, and Autonomous Regions in China and Northwest China

2.1 The scale of higher education in Ningxia is relatively small

In 2022, the number of students enrolled in ordinary higher education institutions in Ningxia was 172000. In the same year, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions nationwide was 46.55 million, which was 36.422 million more than the number of students enrolled in Ningxia. The average number of students enrolled in other provinces and cities in the northwest region was 661000, which was 489000 more than the number of students enrolled in Ningxia. It can be seen that the scale of ordinary higher education in Ningxia is far below the national level and the average level of other provinces and regions in Northwest China.

2.2 The student teacher ratio in ordinary universities is slightly lower, and there is a serious shortage of teachers with senior professional titles

From 2013 to 2021, the student teacher ratio in universities in Ningxia was lower than other provinces and cities in the country and northwest region. In 2022, the student teacher ratio in universities in Ningxia was 18.37:1, which was 0.05 higher than the national average student teacher ratio. Compared with the other four provinces and cities in China and the northwest region, the student teacher ratio is slightly lower. In addition, in 2022, there were only 1600 teachers with senior professional titles in ordinary universities in Ningxia, while there were 252000 teachers with senior professional titles in higher education nationwide. There is a serious shortage of senior professional title teachers in Ningxia, and the number is far lower than the average number of teachers in other provinces, cities, and districts in China and the northwest region.

3. Analysis of Problems and Causes in the Development of Higher Education in Ningxia

It is not difficult to see from the actual development of higher education in Ningxia itself and the comparison with other provinces and cities in the country and northwest region that Ningxia's higher education has achieved significant and rapid development to a certain extent. However, compared with other places in the country and northwest region except Ningxia, there are still obvious gaps, which are also constraints to the high-quality development of higher education in Ningxia.

3.1 The scale of higher education in Ningxia is relatively small

Since 2013, the number of students in ordinary universities in Ningxia has maintained a continuous growth trend, but in terms of the northwest region, the scale of ordinary higher education in Ningxia is significantly smaller. The main reason is that, firstly, there are significantly fewer higher education institutions in Ningxia, and there is no significant increase reflected. In 2013, there were 16 universities in Ningxia, but by 2022, including one adult university, there will be only 21, which is 60 fewer than the national average universities. Secondly, the number of

students enrolled in ordinary universities in Ningxia is relatively small. In 2022, the average number of students enrolled in universities in Ningxia is 9000, which is 5000 fewer than the national average. Thirdly, the development of ordinary higher education in Ningxia is relatively slow. From 2013 to 2022, the average annual growth rate of students in Ningxia was 5.73%, far lower than the average annual growth rate of other provinces and cities in Northwest China. Overall, the development of Ningxia is relatively slow, which to some extent hinders and limits the development of higher education in Ningxia. In the development process of higher education in Ningxia, like in some regions, there is an imbalance and mismatch between various factors such as population size and economic development level. Therefore, there may be a disconnect between the development of higher education and social and economic development, which leads to the inability of higher education to meet the local economic development needs and provide more support for technological development.

3.2 Unreasonable faculty structure in universities in Ningxia

In 2022, there were 9631 full-time teachers in universities in Ningxia, while only 1625 teachers with senior professional titles accounted for a very small part of the full-time teacher population. Although the number of teachers with senior professional titles increased from "404" in 2013 to 1625 in 2022, ^[3]the growth trend has been extremely slow, mainly due to the following reasons:

There is a serious phenomenon of talent loss in the local area, making it difficult to attract talent. The fundamental aspect of talent mobility is that talent follows capital, and wherever capital is, talent is there. Overall, the development of Ningxia is relatively backward and not very fast; Weak ability to cultivate local high-level talents. The relative scarcity of educational resources in Ningxia's universities has limited their ability to cultivate high-quality talents. By 2022, Ningxia will have only one "211" project university, four graduate training institutions, and 12737 graduate students, including only 917 doctoral students, far below the average level of other provinces, cities, and districts in China and the northwest region. The small scale of graduate education has also led to shortcomings and deficiencies in the cultivation of high-level and high-quality faculty and teaching staff in Ningxia universities; The professional title evaluation mechanism is not perfect. According to statistics, as of 2022, there are only 1625 full-time teachers with senior professional titles in ordinary universities in Ningxia, which is far from the average level of other provinces and cities in China and the northwest region. This indirectly leads to the backwardness and shortage of teaching staff in the development of higher education in Ningxia, thereby affecting the development of higher education in Ningxia. Far below the average level of the whole country and other provinces and cities in the northwest. This significant gap highlights the urgent need for policy support and resource allocation to improve the teaching standards in Ningxia. Efforts should be made to enhance professional training programs and encourage more qualified educators to join the faculty team. Additionally, increasing investment in educational infrastructure could create a more appealing work environment, attracting talent from other regions. Collaboration with universities in more developed areas might also provide valuable learning opportunities and help bridge the existing gap. Such measures are essential to foster sustainable growth in higher education within the region.

3.3 Insufficient guarantee of higher education

The development of higher education in Ningxia requires multiple guarantees to ensure its growth. Firstly, the insufficient carrying capacity of universities is a disadvantage in the development of higher education in Ningxia. There are only 21 universities in Ningxia, and as the number of students continues to increase, the student capacity of universities will significantly

decrease, making it insufficient to accommodate more students; Secondly, the operating funds of universities in Ningxia are insufficient. According to the data released by the Ministry of Education and the provincial education departments in 2022, the average student funding of the universities directly under the Ministry of Education is more than 100000 yuan, the first-class schools are more than 200000 yuan, the central and eastern universities are between 40000 and 100000 yuan, and the western Xizang University and Qinghai University are equivalent to the central and eastern universities. However, the investment in education funds by universities in Ningxia is lower than the national average, and the lack of support from education funds will hinder the development of higher education in Ningxia to some extent, making it difficult to form a joint force on some "bottleneck" issues.

4. Suggestions for Promoting the Development of Higher Education in Ningxia

There are significant regional differences in the level of economic and social development in our country, and there are certain regional differences in the comprehensive development level of higher education in different regions. ^[4] Higher education is an important support for economic development. Since the 18th National Congress, the rapid development of the economy in Ningxia has continuously put forward new requirements for the speed and level of development of local higher education, but the scale of local higher education development is relatively small. Therefore, the development of higher education in Ningxia should follow the local development reality, adapt to local conditions, adhere to the principles of ensuring fairness and promoting efficiency in higher education, continuously expand the scale on the basis of the existing scale, strive to break through the bottleneck of higher education development, and promote and achieve coordinated development of scale, efficiency, and structural quality.

4.1 Expand the scale of higher education and optimize its structure

Adapting to the development of Ningxia's economy, moderately expanding the scale of higher education, and accelerating the development speed of higher education are important tasks for Ningxia's higher education. On the one hand, the local government should establish applicable systems in higher education to encourage and assist in increasing the number of higher education institutions and expanding enrollment scale in conjunction with local social forces, thereby expanding the scale of higher education through two aspects. In this process, we cannot only pursue the expansion of scale, but also pay attention to the improvement and stability of the structure of higher education. Firstly, there is a significant disparity in the number of higher education institutions among the five prefecture level cities in Ningxia, with three of the only four regular undergraduate universities in Ningxia concentrated in Yinchuan city. In addition, vocational colleges with strong local talent cultivation capabilities are mostly concentrated in Yinchuan City, and there are very few higher education institutions in other places. Therefore, in the spatial distribution of higher education institutions, it is necessary to appropriately radiate to the entire region, striving to have one regular undergraduate and one vocational college in each prefecture level city, promoting the spatial balance of higher education in Ningxia, and effectively driving the development of the surrounding economy. Secondly, by 2022, the number of undergraduate students and graduate students in Ningxia's regular higher education institutions will be 172000 and 13000, with only 917 being doctoral students. Relatively speaking, the scale of graduate education in Ningxia is very small, and there are not many regular undergraduate and junior college students, which leads to the problem of relatively small scale of higher education.

4.2 Increase the number of teachers, improve the quality and level of teachers

Education, technology, and talent are the fundamental and strategic supports for the comprehensive construction of a socialist modernized country. Teachers, as the primary resource in higher education, are an important support for the development of higher education. The development of teacher scale and student scale should be synchronized, especially the number and scale of full-time teachers, in order to ensure the effectiveness and rationalization of the student teacher ratio and avoid affecting the quality of education and teaching due to a large student teacher ratio. Starting from the obvious shortage of full-time teachers with senior professional titles in ordinary universities in Ningxia, optimizing the teacher structure requires more substantial efforts in policy measures and visible achievements to enhance the abilities and levels of university teachers. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to introduce targeted training programs and incentive mechanisms. Providing opportunities for further study and academic exchange can help teachers broaden their horizons and improve their professional skills. At the same time, increasing financial support for scientific research projects will encourage teachers to engage in innovative research, which is crucial for their career development. In addition, establishing a sound evaluation system that emphasizes both teaching and research contributions will promote a more balanced and comprehensive improvement in the overall quality of the teaching staff.

Firstly, the state should provide support for higher education in Ningxia, with appropriate policy incentives to encourage and support the establishment of more doctoral programs in Ningxia, improve the doctoral training capacity of local universities in Ningxia, and provide guarantees for the delivery of high-quality local teacher talents. Secondly, each university should increase the number of teachers with senior professional titles, improve the admission threshold for teachers, and encourage teachers with lower educational backgrounds to continue their studies. In teacher recruitment, more doctoral degree teachers should be recruited to strengthen their own teaching staff. Thirdly, we will continuously promote various talent development projects in Ningxia Autonomous Region, such as the "Top Talent Program", the "Top Young Talents Program", and the "Ten Thousand Talents Plan". We will continuously improve the relevant remuneration system to provide better and more favorable working and living environments for high-level talents, in order to attract them to serve the development of higher education in Ningxia, retain high-level talents, and prevent talent loss. Fourthly, schools need to improve their employment mechanisms. Each university should encourage young teachers to stand out among full-time teachers, provide more opportunities and platforms for young teachers to showcase their abilities, fully mobilize the initiative and enthusiasm of in-service teachers, and unleash their creativity and innovation abilities, so that every teacher can make full use of their talents. Fifth, each university should adjust the evaluation and review system for teacher professional titles based on its own development reality and the characteristics of each discipline, appropriately increase and adjust the number and quantity of teachers with senior professional titles, and increase the proportion of senior professional title teachers in the number of full-time teachers. Finally, it is necessary to strengthen the corresponding support from other top domestic universities to Ningxia universities. Local universities in Ningxia should strengthen their connections and exchanges with first-class universities, so that Ningxia universities can better accept and absorb the advantageous resources supported by other universities, use the various resources they bring for their own development, improve their research level and the overall ability and level of the teaching staff, and thus promote the high-quality development of higher education in Ningxia.

4.3 Steadily increasing fiscal investment in higher education and improving diversified funding models

The expenditure of financial education funds in higher education can reflect the level of development of higher education in a region and school. Therefore, while increasing the fiscal expenditure on higher education in Ningxia, attention should also be paid to optimizing and adjusting the structure of funding investment. Firstly, it is necessary to increase the proportion of higher education fiscal expenditure in the total fiscal education funds and increase support for higher education funding. Secondly, it is necessary to appropriately increase the proportion of general public budget education funds. In 2022, the general public budget education funds for higher education in Ningxia increased by 28408.03 yuan, an increase of 1.16% over the previous year, while the national fiscal education expenditure was 27.922 billion yuan, an increase of 14.84% over the previous year. Finally, we should actively mobilize and encourage social forces to invest in higher education. The government has formulated and improved tax and other preferential policies for individuals and enterprises willing to donate to universities, encouraging them to contribute to the development of higher education in Ningxia, such as setting up special scholarships named after enterprises or individuals; In addition, universities should leverage the power of alumni associations to attract outstanding alumni from previous years to invest and donate to the school. In addition, they can actively use and leverage educational foundations to raise and manage funds, achieving maximum fund benefits. Universities should also continuously improve their research level and talent quality to attract more social donations, forming a positive interaction between the school's reputation, comprehensive development strength, and social donations.

4.4 Strengthening the guarantee mechanism for higher education

Higher education is an important pillar of economic development in Ningxia, therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the guarantee mechanism of higher education in Ningxia, promote high-quality development of higher education, and enhance competitiveness. Firstly, optimize the enrollment mechanism. In the enrollment process of universities in Ningxia, they should fully consider the local development characteristics and reality, adopt more scientific and reasonable enrollment plans, and form a joint dynamic training mechanism among affiliated universities in the region to cultivate comprehensive talents. The second is to establish diversified courses that highlight the characteristics of Ningxia. In curriculum design, in addition to professional courses, attention should also be paid to interdisciplinary curriculum design, establishing interdisciplinary programs, cultivating students' comprehensive abilities, and better adapting to the practical development needs of Ningxia. The third is to improve the teaching evaluation mechanism. Efforts should be made from multiple aspects such as "fairness, objectivity, supervision and management, application of results, and system optimization" ^[5] in teaching evaluation to ensure the objectivity, impartiality, and scientificity of the evaluation. The government should encourage multiple stakeholders to participate in the evaluation, so that problems can be identified and resolved in a timely manner. The fourth is that the government should create a favorable academic environment for the development of higher education. It should timely hold a high-level forum on the development of higher education in the autonomous region, invite nationally renowned experts and scholars in higher education to provide suggestions and guidance for the development of higher education in the autonomous region; provide certain financial support for higher education research institutions to host journals, and build and provide more platforms to showcase the research achievements of higher education in the autonomous region; actively apply to organize various higher education research conferences, attract outstanding talents and higher education researchers from inside and outside the region to exchange and learn from each other, adopt various incentive

measures to attract outstanding higher education researchers, and guide them to provide suggestions and strategies for the development of higher education in Ningxia.

The government should encourage local universities to strengthen cooperation with international higher education institutions, support them in establishing exchange programs for teachers and students, and enhance the international perspective of education in the autonomous region. It should set up special funds to support innovative research projects in higher education, focusing on solving practical problems faced by the development of higher education in Ningxia. The government should promote the construction of digital resources in higher education, improve online teaching platforms, and facilitate the sharing of educational resources. Local universities should strengthen the training of young teachers, implement professional development plans, and enhance the overall quality of the teaching staff. Both the government and universities should create a good academic atmosphere, encourage free exploration and innovation, and provide a solid foundation for the sustainable development of higher education in the region.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the sustainable development of higher education in the region relies heavily on the collaborative efforts between the government and universities. By focusing on nurturing young talents and fostering an environment that encourages academic exploration and innovation, a strong foundation can be established. Future work should continue to monitor the progress and effectiveness of these initiatives to ensure long-term success and adaptability in the ever-evolving educational landscape.

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