

Research on the Influence of the Universal Two-child Policy on Career Development of Female University Teachers in China

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Abstract

At present, the number of female university teachers is climbing and young female teachers account for a major proportion. Besides, of all female teachers, there are few have senior professional title, which means there is larger career development space for young female teachers and appropriate attention should be paid on that. Meanwhile, the implement of the universal two-child policy makes young female teachers spend more time and energy on family responsibilities, which must affect their career development. For this purpose, making use of the mutual efforts from society, family and individuals, female university teachers can gain policy support, financial support and spiritual support to their career development.

Keywords

The universal two-child policy, female university teachers, career development

1. Introduction

The Fifth Plenary Session of 18th Central Committee pointed out clearly: "China will allow all couples to have two children to balance population development and address the challenge of an ageing population". The policy is welcomed by most families in China, however, as for the female teachers in Universities, what the policy bring to them is a mixture of joys and worries or even confusion because in traditional Chinese culture, women play an important role that cannot be replaced in the process of bearing and raising children. When female teachers in universities give birth to the second child of their family, they will have to spend more time and energy on family responsibility, which would have influence on females' career choice of being staff in universities and female teachers' role consciousness as well as career development. Relevant measures should be taken by nation, society, universities, families and individuals to help female teachers achieve career development during the special time segment in China. The universities female teachers mentioned in this research refer to those full-time teachers who mainly engage in teaching, researching and social service, not including administrative staffs.

2. The present status of female teachers in Chinese universities

With the appeal for higher education quality, career development of university teachers has gained more and more attention in China. Since 2011, faculty development centers have been set up one after another by Chinese universities to looking forward effective way of improving university teachers' career development. However, few universities pay close attention to gender differences in teachers' career development. Via a questionnaire distributed to more than 500 teachers of seven research universities in China, Zhang Lili found that female university teachers experience greater pressure and challenges in stress factors of conflicts between work and family, lower career progress and gender barriers than their male counterparts. Therefore, female teachers as an important component of university teachers ought to be given the most attention.

2.1 An increase in the overall number of female university teachers

From 2013 to 2019, the number of female full-time teachers in Higher Education Institutions increased from 732219 to 894860, accounted for 50.82% of the full-time teachers from 2013's 47.84%. The proportion of female full-time teachers has increased continuously (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1 Number of Female Full-time Teachers in HEIs (From 2013-2019)

| | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Female Full-time Teachers | 732219 | 755423 | 780782 | 802298 | 827116 | 854033 | 894860 |
| Full-time Teachers | 1530512 | 1566048 | 1602811 | 1627182 | 1657238 | 1694661 | 1760786 |
| Percentage | 47.84 | 48.24 | 48.71 | 49.31 | 49.91 | 50.40 | 50.82 |

DATA SOURCES: Number of Educational Personnel in HEIs (Total) by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (From 2013-2019)

2.2 High proportion of young female university teachers

As is shown in following Table, from 2013 to 2019, the proportion of female full-time teachers at the age of 29 and under has increased continuously and all exceeded the half, of which the proportion of 2019 reached about 65%. The percentages of female full-time teachers at the age of 30 to 39 were almost all over 50%. And the percentages of female full-time teachers at the age of 40 to 49 were almost over 40%, of which the percentage of female full-time teachers at the age of 40 to 44 reached 50.86 in 2019. And along with the increasing of the age, the percentages of female full-time teachers decreased gradually and the percentages of those at the age of 50 and over were almost less than 40% (as shown in Table 2).

Table 2 Proportion of Female Full-time Teachers by Age (From 2013 to 2019)

| | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 29 and Under (%) | 59.67 | 59.73 | 60.64 | 61.19 | 62.78 | 63.57 | 64.57 |
| 30 to 34 (%) | 55.06 | 55.68 | 55.93 | 56.09 | 56.16 | 56.60 | 57.09 |
| 35 to 39 (%) | 49.29 | 50.55 | 51.88 | 53.28 | 54.44 | 55.26 | 55.33 |
| 40 to 44 (%) | 45.12 | 45.80 | 46.58 | 47.59 | 48.53 | 49.69 | 50.86 |
| 45 to 49 (%) | 41.03 | 42.55 | 43.31 | 44.14 | 44.95 | 45.42 | 46.04 |
| 50 to 54 (%) | 35.70 | 36.58 | 37.58 | 38.58 | 39.85 | 41.20 | 42.44 |
| 55 to 59 (%) | 23.79 | 23.36 | 23.48 | 24.84 | 27.40 | 29.22 | 30.35 |
| 60 to 64 (%) | 23.43 | 23.87 | 24.30 | 25.01 | 25.58 | 26.47 | 26.10 |
| 65 and Over (%) | 14.81 | 15.37 | 16.60 | 17.46 | 18.55 | 19.52 | 21.69 |

DATA SOURCES: Number of Full-time Teachers by Age (Total) by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (From 2013-2019)

In addition, the number of female students of postgraduates presents an increasing trend on the whole from 2013 to 2019, though the percentage slightly declined during 2017 and 2018. Anyway, the number of female students of doctor's degree increased continuously, which was up to 41.32 in 2019 (as shown in Table 3). Therefore, in the foreseeable future, the proportion of female young teachers in universities is still continuing to increase.

Table 3 Proportion of Female Students of Postgraduates (From 2013 to 2019)

| | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Postgraduates (%) | 48.97 | 49.16 | 49.71 | 50.64 | 48.42 | 49.64 | 50.56 |
| Doctor's Degree (%) | 36.9 | 36.93 | 37.85 | 38.63 | 39.27 | 40.37 | 41.32 |
| Master's Degree (%) | 51.38 | 51.65 | 52.15 | 53.14 | 49.88 | 51.18 | 52.17 |

DATA SOURCES: Number of Female Students of All Level and Type by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (From 2013-2019)

2.3 More space for further career development of female young teachers in universities

It is shown from the data that the proportion of female full-time teachers in different professional titles and grades increases year by year from 2013 to 2019. The percentages of middle and under were all over 50%. In addition, the percentages of sub-senior were all over 40% and it reached 47.56% in 2019. Nevertheless, the proportion of senior showed that only about 30% full-time teachers are women (as shown in Table 3), which means there are more space in career development of female full-time teachers.

Table 4 Proportion of Female Full-time Teachers by Professional Title (From 2013 to 2019)

| | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Senior (%) | 29.03 | 29.51 | 30.12 | 30.56 | 31.06 | 31.22 | 31.52 |
| Sub-senior (%) | 44.12 | 44.49 | 45.10 | 46.08 | 46.75 | 47.19 | 47.56 |
| Middle (%) | 52.52 | 53.11 | 53.68 | 54.22 | 54.81 | 55.43 | 56.02 |
| Junior (%) | 56.33 | 56.83 | 57.15 | 57.88 | 59.13 | 60.02 | 60.61 |
| No-ranking (%) | 53.2 | 53.85 | 54.26 | 54.52 | 55.55 | 56.73 | 57.15 |

DATA SOURCES: Number of Educational Personnel in HEIs (Total) by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (From 2013-2019)

All in all, according to the above data, the current number of female teachers in universities is increasing continuously. Besides, the number of female young teachers at the age of 35 and under is over one half of the full-time teachers at this age period, which even shows an increasing trend. Moreover, there is more development space in the proportion of female teachers in senior and sub-senior titles. Therefore, proper attention should be paid to career development of female teachers in universities.

3. Professional career of university teachers and professional development of female university teachers

At present, there is no unified understanding on professional career of university teachers. Some scholars believe that professional career of university teachers develops two aspects including the “external career” and “internal career”. The “external career” refers to the actual job sequences and process of being university teachers, including work unit, working contents, titles, salary, promotion and so on. The “internal career” refers to university teachers’ subjective feelings of keeping balance between individual demands, family responsibility, leisure time and their work. The author believes that the professional career of university teachers mainly refers to the different development experiences gained in different periods by individuals who engage in teaching in universities, including the realization process of both external social value and internal subjective value.

3.1 Professional career development stages of university teachers

Wu Qiufeng put forward the concept of teacher’s “life cycle”, by which she means there are three stages in the growth process of university teachers: juvenescent stage below age 35, middle stage between age 35 and 50, and gerontic stage over age 50. Young teachers are in input stage of cultivation, with more input and less output. Middle-aged teachers are in mature stage, a golden stage with the most achievements. In gerontic stage, the increase amplitude of teachers’ achievements slows down and even decreases. It can be said that teachers below age 35 are in “brewing” period of career development, in which they put more time and energy but gain few achievements. In addition, Zhang Yanfang and other authors divided the career development of university teachers into six stages on the basis of theory of career development stage: adapting, adjusting, mature, stagnant, update, and withdrawal. Adapting stage begins from the first year of new teachers’ teaching. Adjusting stage refers to the three to five years after being teachers when they adapt to teaching environment step by step and can afford the work of teaching basically. Mature stage must need five to ten years of teaching during which teachers develop gradually into backbone teachers. Besides, teachers usually have to experience stagnant stage which would produce job burnout after years of teaching, update stage in which teachers take active countermeasures, and withdrawal stage when teachers get old. To most university teachers, before 35 years old, they are mainly in adapting and adjusting stages when they have to face great pressure from teaching, researching, teaching reform and so on. Bao Wei and other authors claimed from empirical studies that three stages exist in teachers’ career: stage of high pressure below age 40, stage of slow pressure between age 41 to 45, and stage of low pressure over age 56.

3.2 Professional career development of female university teachers

During different stages of professional career development, female university teachers not only have more responsibility for setting up families, bearing and raising children than male teachers, but also undertake the same career responsibility and pressure as them. Many female university teachers under the age of 35 are in adapting or adjusting stages after they went into the job and they might start families, having no or one child. Thus, there is conflict between the demands of professional development and family responsibility.

Cheng Fang and Zhou Erhua divided professional development of female university teachers into five stages in accordance with empirical research on 10 management journals: attempting stage (age from 23 to 30), adjusting stage (age from 31 to 40), rebuilding stage (age from 41 to 43), readjusting stage (age from 44 to 47), and recessing stage (age from 48 to 55). The research manifested that during attempting stage, the quantity of teachers’ publication increases rapidly because most female university teachers are childless; in adjusting stage, the quantity of publication decreases because most female university teachers are in period of starting families, bearing and raising children and they put more time and energy on family construction; while in rebuilding stage, female university teachers come into a new peak of academic development because the children of most female teachers were growing up or are supervised. So starting families and raising children has great influence on female university teachers’ professional development.

The implementation of the universal two-child policy would disrupt many female university teachers. On the one hand, they themselves or their families might want to have two or more children. On the other hand, with their own need for career development, female teachers could become quite concerned. Female teachers under age of 35 are in key period of their professional adaption and adjustment and at the same time in the essential period of their life to undertake familial responsibilities and be mothers the first time. Neither can be neglected. At this very moment, if they had a second birth, more pressure would put on them when bearing and raising the second children. Thus, career advancement required them to work harder and overwhelm more and tougher difficulties.

4. The possible influence of the universal two-child policy on female university teachers’ professional development

The implementation of the universal two-child policy may have influenced female postgraduate students’ future career choice of being university teachers. Moreover, it could prolong the adapting and adjusting time of female teachers after they

come into work.

4.1 Career choice for female university teachers

For one thing, from the perspective of employers, medical care and maternity leave is the responsibility of the employment sectors in China and under the pressure of benefit, all employment sectors tend to recruit male graduates because male employees are relatively less affected by housework and the care of the children when working and they are liable to be called for business trip or work out of doors. And even in work units which are suitable for women, like medical institutions or education units, men are more welcome than women. Thus, in recruiting university teachers, women have to face bigger challenges.

For another, from the perspective of university teachers' professional development, the direct influence of the universal two-child policy on female teachers is they spend more time and energy on families, which makes them have to shift their focus from work to family for a specific time. Nowadays, when recruiting, universities require candidates to have master's degree or doctorate. However, under normal conditions, graduates with masters or doctorates are between the ages of 25 and 30 and they are at a key phrase of getting a job and getting married. For women, they could be dedicated in academic research during the schooling and get a lot of achievements. But after they graduated and started to work, the responsibility of taking care of families and raising children for the first time would have great impact on their academic study and career needs so they need adapt and adjust.

Women would have additional considerations on whether or not to be university teachers based on employers' recruiting bias, huge tasks of teaching and academic research, and heavy burden of bearing children. Many female university teachers already have been stressed by having one child, and there is no doubt at all that they have more scruples about having two or more children.

4.2 The role conflicts of female university teachers

Gender role refers to the characteristics and behaviours that different cultures attribute to the sexes. All the time the gendered social division of labor in Chinese traditional culture is that men's work centers around outside and women's work centers around the home. Women are endowed with higher expectation on family roles and they have lower status in society. But with the development of society, female independent consciousness is becoming stronger and women hanker for reconciling their career ambitions with the need of families. Modern women are playing an increasingly important role in our society. They are active and independent instead of being passive and submissive.

According to Maslow's needs theory, people have needs of self-actualization. Female university teachers are senior intellectuals who receive higher education, which make them have more expectations and aspirations. Research shows that the identification with women's role in society is directly proportional to qualifications. The more advanced degrees a person has the higher they identify with women's role in society. Well-educated women are more likely to achieve the dual value of family and society though they have to spend considerable time on maternity and lactation and suffer the disadvantage in academic competition. However, the long-held cultural concept has penetrated the spirit of the people in China and many female teachers are hampered by family responsibilities. In the workplace, they are university teachers who have to deal with intrinsic requirement of career development as well as performance evaluation and appraisal by universities and meanwhile at home, they are daughters, wives, mothers, and caregivers. In such a circumstance, they must take corresponding time and energy on different roles and conflict between roles is almost inevitable.

Researchers have known that female scholars would have more concerns in the process of pursuing success and it is very important to them whether they can juggle work with their family commitments. Generally speaking, female university teachers have heavier psychological and cultural burden and are loaded down with family responsibilities. Most female teachers feel frequently that there is huge conflict between work and family and of course the Two-child policy may intensify the conflict and force more female teachers into returning to their families.

4.3 The professional development of female university teachers

The Table 4 above illustrates that the proportions of female teachers with junior and middle professional titles were almost over 50% for five consecutive years and the proportions of female teachers with sub-senior professional title have increased year by year, but the proportions of female teachers with senior professional title were small comparatively. There are two reasons that female teachers retire earlier than male teachers and they undertake more family responsibilities. If female teachers have two or more children, they would be more affected in professional development. Nowadays, measures are being rolled out by government and universities to facilitate university teachers' professional development. The only thing is that if female teachers cannot participate in these activities effectively because of limited time and energy, it would be hard for them to benefit from that. Through investigation Teaching and Learning International Survey, TALIS for short, found that there are 30%

teachers couldn't participate in professional development activities out of family commitments and female teachers under 40 at all nations' public schools couldn't have their needs of career development met even further.

Wang Chuanmin and Sun Yu suggested that university teacher is an academic profession. Academic promotion usually marks the recognition of university teachers' academic ability by academic community and is a decisive factor for the career development of teachers. In China, raising the second child could make more female university teachers' needs of professional development be met, which has some negative impact on their career development. Distracted by family life, female university teachers would suffer from career plateau, namely, the stagnancy of their career development.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

The universal two-child policy, of course, will not affect all female university teachers. For today's young female teachers, some of them may only want to have one child or none at all. However, such female teachers only occupy a small portion and under the influence of Chinese traditional culture, more female teachers would pay more attention on families. Therefore, in order to guarantee the career development of female university teachers, the implement of the universal two-child policy needs more support in many aspects.

At the national level, China should introduce relevant policies on taxes, education, health care and other areas to lighten the burdens of raising families, arousing the enthusiasm of people to raise a second children.

At the university level, female teachers should be given care and support on child-rearing and work flexibility. Apart from the statutory maternity leave, subsidies should be given to female teachers when they give birth. During their period of caring infants, female teachers' workload should be reduced with the help of universities or colleges so that they have more time to take care of children. In consideration of the dependence of infants on their mothers, colleges could allow female teachers to be more flexible with their working hours as long as they could perform their respective tasks within the given time. In addition, during this period, colleagues could offer helps and cares to those female teachers who are suffering from bearing and raising children. It is believed that the humanistic care could stimulate female teachers' enthusiasm to a greater extent to get down to works afterwards.

At the family level, family members should be more likely to encourage and support female university teachers. They could help female teachers with some household chores, taking care of children, collecting children from nursery or school and so on, in order to ease off female teachers' pressure of life and make them have more time to restore to health, adjust the state, and return to work. As far as female teachers are concerned, they should make plans on career development in advance. During the period of pregnancy, parturition and parenting, they should readjust physically and psychologically as soon as possible, enhance their working efficiency, and strike the balance between work and family.

It requires the joint efforts that worries and scruples brought by universal two-child policy to female university teachers could be reduced and those female teachers who have a second child could achieve sound opportunities for career development.

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