

# Research on the Educational Model of Normal Universities

Nai manjin\*

College of Educational Science and Technology, Inner Mongolia Minzu University, Tongliao, 028000, China

\*Corresponding author: m18604751200@163.com

**Abstract:** This paper takes M University, a local normal university, as a case study to systematically examine the innovation in educational models at local normal universities over the past two decades. The research reveals that the university's educational philosophy has undergone a profound transformation from a knowledge-based approach to a "student-centered and outcome-oriented" one, adapting to the developmental demands of the new century and breaking down institutional and systemic barriers to deepen the core model of applied talent cultivation. Through its practical teaching system and active promotion of educational informatization, the university has developed a distinctive educational pathway, effectively enhancing the quality of talent cultivation. This case offers valuable experience for local normal universities in "maintaining its teacher-training essence and strengthening regional services"; its future development should continue to explore ways to deepen its distinctive features and enhance resource integration.

**Keywords:** local universities; teacher education; educational model

## Introduction

As a key comprehensive institution in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, M University is located in a prefecture-level city in eastern Inner Mongolia. For a long time, it has undertaken the significant responsibility of cultivating high-quality teaching professionals for basic education in eastern Inner Mongolia and the three northeastern provinces. Throughout its over sixty-year history, the university has consistently adhered to the fundamental mission of fostering virtue through education, preparing tens of thousands of educators and other specialized professionals for the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and the entire nation. Against the backdrop of China's comprehensive efforts to revitalize teacher education and deepen the reform of teacher workforce development in the new era, M University, based on its actual conditions, has actively explored a teacher education model suited to regional characteristics and continuously advanced comprehensive reforms in teaching and learning. This has laid a solid foundation for regional universities in exploring and establishing distinctive curriculum development.

Over the past two decades, the educational philosophy of M University has undergone a profound transformation, shifting from traditional knowledge transmission to comprehensive quality cultivation. This evolution can be divided into three main stages.

The Initial Exploration Stage (2005 – 2011) was primarily centered on single classroom-based teaching, emphasizing the systematic delivery of specialized knowledge. Teacher training focused on subject knowledge and fundamental teaching skills, with relatively weak practical components and insufficient connection to basic education. During this period, the university began to recognize the limitations of the traditional model and started preparing for systematic reform.

The Systematic Reform Stage (2011 – 2018) was marked by the launch of the talent cultivation model reform in 2011, during which the university entered a phase of systematic change. Achievements of this stage include breaking away from a closed educational model and actively exploring collaborative education pathways through university-local government and university-enterprise cooperation. Reforms in ideological and political courses were also initiated, establishing a collaborative education mechanism involving ideological and political course instructors, subject-specialized teachers, and counselors. In teaching methodology, the university began experimenting with the "1+1+1" teaching model reform, which integrates thematic classroom teaching,

classroom discussions, and social practice.

The Deepening Innovation Stage (2018 – present) has seen the university fully implement the philosophy of "student-centered, outcome-oriented, and continuous improvement," establishing a more systematic and comprehensive education system. The university has not only further promoted blended teaching reforms but also refined the collaborative education mechanism involving higher education institutions, government bodies, research institutes, and primary and secondary schools. As a result, the university's educational philosophy has become increasingly mature, forming a distinctive regional model for teacher training.

## **1. Research Methodology**

### ***1.1 Research Methods***

This study employed a combination of various research methods to form a rigorous empirical research system.

#### ***1.1.1 Case Study Method***

This method serves as the core research approach of this paper. Focusing intensively on the typical case of M University, the researcher treats its nearly two decades of educational practices since the beginning of the new century as a sample for in-depth analysis. Through sustained observation, the study systematically collects first-hand materials such as its training programs, teaching reform initiatives, and curriculum designs. This enables a thorough examination of the internal logic, specific pathways, and actual outcomes of the reform of educational models in regional teacher-training institutions.

#### ***1.1.2 Literature Research Method***

This research is grounded in a robust analysis of literature. The author systematically reviewed and analyzed educational policy documents at both the national level of China and the regional level of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (such as the "Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teacher Workforce Development in the New Era"), official websites of M University, news reports, and relevant academic literature. This work provides a solid policy background and scholarly context for the study, ensuring that the analysis is built upon existing research findings.

#### ***1.1.3 Historical Research Method***

The paper adopts a dynamic, diachronic perspective. It divides the evolution of M University's educational model into three distinct historical stages: "initial exploration, systematic reform, and deepening innovation." This approach reveals its developmental trajectory and evolutionary patterns, thereby enhancing the study's depth and explanatory power.

## **1.2 Theoretical Framework**

The analysis in this paper is grounded in established pedagogical and sociological theories, forming its underlying conceptual framework.

### ***1.2.1 Teacher Professional Development Theory***

The analysis in this paper is underpinned by the understanding that teacher professional development is a continuous, dynamic, and multi-stage process. Models at the case study institution, M University, such as the "tripartite community," "three-mode integration," and "university-local collaborative education," are essentially explorations of how to systematically facilitate the evolution of teacher candidates into professional educators through the integration of knowledge, skills, and reflective practice.

### ***1.2.2 Collaborative Governance Theory***

This paper analyzes the "university-government-school collaborative education mechanism," emphasizing how multiple actors integrate resources and collectively address public issues through institutionalized cooperation, which is also a global concern. The research details how M University attempts to break down barriers between higher education institutions, local governments, and basic education entities such as primary and secondary schools to build a collaborative education community.

This constitutes a direct application of this theory in the field of teacher professional development.

### **1.2.3 *Community of Practice Theory***

In analyzing the "teacher-student learning community" and the "university-local-enterprise collaborative education community," this paper applies the concept of the "Community of Practice." This theory posits that learning is a process of social participation, occurring within a shared domain, through common practices, and via community interaction. The initiatives promoted by M University, such as joint research between teachers and students and university-enterprise co-construction, are precisely conscious efforts to build and foster such learning and practice communities.

### **1.2.4 *Regional Model Theory***

The fundamental aim of this study is to explore a "regional model" of teacher education suitable for less-developed areas. It seeks to answer the question of how to construct a teacher development pathway that not only aligns with national standards but also incorporates local characteristics and effectively serves regional development needs, given the different conditions in resource endowment, cultural context, and service orientation compared to top-tier universities.

In summary, this study has conducted an in-depth analysis of the educational model of regional teacher-training institutions by integrating multiple research methods—including case study, literature research, and historical research—and by drawing on theoretical frameworks such as teacher professional development theory, collaborative governance theory, community of practice theory, and regional model theory.

## **2. The Construction and Implementation of the Core Teacher Education Model**

### **2.1 *The "Tripartite Community" Application-Oriented Talent Cultivation Model***

The "Tripartite Community" application-oriented talent cultivation model, which M University focuses on building, represents an innovative approach. The purpose of the teacher-student learning community is for the university to foster such a community by deepening classroom teaching reform, which promotes the deep integration of modern information technology with education and teaching, and advances the integrated teaching reform across "pre-class, in-class, and post-class" stages. Since 2014, the university has issued several documents and incentive policies, establishing a curriculum reform approach characterized by "policy guidance, project-driven initiatives, pilot projects before broader implementation, training prior to teaching reform, and continuous improvement alongside reform." It has implemented the "Two-Three-Four-Five" curriculum reform project, which involves horizontal coordination among functional departments such as the Academic Affairs Office, the Teacher Development Center, and the Network Information and Modern Educational Technology Center, as well as vertical promotion across the university, college, and teaching-research section levels. These two main lines, horizontal and vertical, jointly drive classroom teaching reform. Building on this foundation, the university took the lead in establishing the Eastern Alliance for Teacher Education in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, strengthening cooperation with local governments, education bureaus, and primary and secondary schools to jointly develop and share high-quality educational resources, thereby forming a collaborative teacher candidate cultivation model. Simultaneously, through in-depth cooperation with numerous enterprises, the university has co-developed majors and training bases, creating a university-local-enterprise collaborative education community characterized by "Four Co-constructions and Four Integrations": co-developing talent cultivation plans and curricula, co-developing teaching staff, co-constructing training bases, and co-establishing industry colleges. Since 2015, the university has secured 56 Ministry of Education Industry-Academia Cooperation Collaborative Education Projects and obtained approval for 9 New Liberal Arts, New Agricultural Sciences, and New Engineering Construction Projects.

### **2.2 *The Practical Teaching and Skill Development System***

#### **2.2.1 *The "Three-Mode Integration" Educational System***

In the process of developing its ideological and political courses, M University organically integrates classroom teaching, campus culture, and social practice to construct a comprehensive educational system. In its specific implementation, the university deepens teaching reform, strengthens inter-departmental collaboration, fulfills the required hours for practical teaching, and connects the first

classroom (formal instruction) with the second classroom (extracurricular activities). Furthermore, it expands the pathways for practical education by organizing students to engage deeply in social practice, guiding young university students to take the lead and serve as a vital force in various fields such as technological innovation, rural revitalization, green development, and social services. The university's "Three-Mode Integration" educational system has yielded significant outcomes. It successfully secured approval for one comprehensive reform and high-quality development project under the Ministry of Education's initiative to enhance the quality of ideological and political work in universities. Additionally, a research report on rural revitalization in a prefecture-level city, authored by students, won the second prize in the 18th National "Challenge Cup" Extra-curricular Academic Science and Technology Works Competition and was selected for inclusion in the 2024 17th National College Students Innovation Annual Conference.

### **2.2.2 The Teacher Candidate Professional Skill Development Model**

In developing the professional skills of teacher candidates, M University emphasizes the routine, diversified, and practical training of fundamental teaching competencies and pedagogical skills. Micro-teaching serves as a primary venue for refinement, while teaching skill competitions represent a highly concentrated practical scenario integrating knowledge, skills, and determination. The university fully utilizes modern teaching facilities such as micro-teaching laboratories to conduct teaching skill training for teacher candidates. By employing methods like simulated classrooms, recording teaching videos, and conducting video-based teaching reviews for improvement, the university has effectively enhanced the pedagogical skill levels of its teacher candidates. The micro-teaching laboratory has become a "live drill room" for teacher candidates to hone their teaching skills. Activities such as club rehearsals, group seminars, and course recordings conducted there provide diversified professional development scenarios for teacher candidates. The university adopts a combined approach of in-class and extracurricular activities, utilizing various formats such as club activities, micro-lesson competitions, and blackboard writing exhibitions to make the cultivation of fundamental teaching competencies and the training of pedagogical skills routine, diversified, and practical, thereby tangibly improving the core teaching abilities and skills of teacher candidates. This competition system not only enriches campus cultural life but also serves as a crucial platform for teacher candidates to showcase their teaching talents and enhance their professional capabilities. The establishment of practice bases in collaboration with primary and secondary schools across various leagues and cities serves as a bridge for advancing the distinctive "university-local collaborative education" model. The Regional Education Department has established, in batches, 300 regional-level primary and secondary school teacher education practice bases, further standardizing the collaborative training of teacher candidates and teacher professional development. These practice bases provide teacher candidates with authentic teaching environments and practical opportunities, enabling them to continually reflect and grow through hands-on experience.

### **2.2.3 Integration of Educational Informatization and Practical Teaching**

M University places high importance on the deep integration of educational informatization and practical teaching. To this end, it has implemented reforms in the blended teaching model and carried out the construction of an informatized teaching environment, thereby enhancing the level of informatized instruction. The university has promoted blended teaching reform since 2015, and by 2016, it had successfully implemented 101 courses using this model. Blended teaching combines the advantages of traditional classroom instruction with online teaching, meeting the demands of the "Internet+" era and stimulating students' interest in learning. In a survey of over 2,400 teachers and students, 93.9% of teachers considered blended teaching worthy of promotion, while 95.2% of students believed that blended teaching increased their learning motivation. The university invested 3.6 million yuan to expand campus-wide free wireless network coverage, procure mobile client services for the comprehensive online teaching platform, and establish dedicated computer labs for blended teaching model reform. This enables students to access teaching resources, participate in course discussions, and submit assignments anytime and anywhere—whether in classrooms, libraries, dormitories, or dining halls—truly becoming masters of their own learning. In 2017, the university was recognized as an outstanding institution in the first batch of the Ministry of Education's educational informatization pilot program. To assess the effectiveness of the blended teaching model, the university conducted a comparative analysis of written examination results from final exams for selected courses. The data revealed that, among 30 courses compared, the average scores and pass rates of classes using blended teaching were significantly higher than those of the control classes in 23 courses. This outcome demonstrates that blended teaching plays an important role in improving teaching quality.

## **2.3 Quality Assurance and Effectiveness Evaluation Mechanism**

### **2.3.1 Internal Quality Monitoring System**

M University has established a comprehensive internal quality monitoring system to ensure the continuous improvement of its educational quality. Professional certification and evaluation, along with teaching assessment and feedback, serve as strong drivers of this internal quality monitoring system. The university leverages professional certification as a key initiative to solidify the foundation of its educational quality. The College of Education Science attaches great importance to the certification of teacher education programs, treating it as a crucial measure for standardizing program development and aligning with national education standards. This work is implemented in phases with focused priorities. In May 2024, the Early Childhood Education and Primary Education programs successfully completed the on-site expert review. To comprehensively enhance the quality of undergraduate education and teaching, the college has also made the undergraduate education and teaching audit evaluation a key focus, advancing the evaluation work through multiple measures to ensure tangible results. The university has refined its course assessment and evaluation methods by strengthening formative assessment, which has increased student learning motivation and improved classroom teaching effectiveness. By establishing a diversified evaluation system that emphasizes process evaluation and developmental assessment, teaching evaluation has become more scientific and comprehensive. Simultaneously, the university collects teaching feedback through various channels such as leadership class observations, teaching supervision, and student evaluations of teaching, thereby facilitating continuous improvement in instruction.

### **2.3.2 External Collaborative Safeguard Mechanism**

M University actively constructs an external collaborative safeguard mechanism to form a synergistic force in education, a process that has received strong support from the government. The Party Committee and Government of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region attach great importance to teacher education. In September 2018, they issued the "Implementation Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teacher Workforce Development in the New Era," proposing vigorous revitalization of teacher education and increased support for teacher-training institutions and teacher education programs. In April 2021, the Education Work Leading Group of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region issued the "Task Assignment for Implementing the <Overall Plan for Deepening Educational Evaluation Reform in the New Era> in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region," which explicitly called for improving the evaluation of teacher-training institutions, prioritizing the provision of high-quality teacher education as their primary responsibility, and using the cultivation of qualified teachers as a key assessment indicator. To collaborate closely with local governments, the university has adopted a university-local cooperation mechanism to jointly advance the training of teacher candidates. For example, the university signed a framework agreement for university-local cooperation in jointly developing vocational education with the governments of eight banners (counties/districts) in Ordos City. Within this framework, the government plays a guiding and coordinating role, while the university entered into cooperation agreements with over 50 kindergartens affiliated with these banners/districts. These kindergartens provide venues for educational observation, teaching practicum (including research and study), and other practical teaching activities, meeting the practical teaching needs of the university. This "government-led" cooperation model provides ample practical opportunities for teacher candidates. The university actively forms collaborative education communities with primary and secondary schools (and kindergartens), appointing renowned teachers from these schools as postgraduate supervisors, among other roles. This approach attracts various social forces, including primary/secondary schools, teacher development institutions, and social organizations, to participate in cultivating outstanding teachers. Teacher-training institutions establish student teaching and practice bases in primary and secondary schools within the relevant leagues and cities. Centered on training the fundamental professional skills of teachers—"writing, speaking, teaching, doing, observing, and reading"—they design a scientific practical teaching system.

## **2.4 Analysis of Educational Effectiveness and Challenges**

### **2.4.1 Summary of Educational Effectiveness**

The innovative educational model of M University has achieved significant results. Through the reform of the blended teaching model, student learning outcomes have markedly improved, and the teaching and research capabilities of the faculty have significantly increased. These achievements demonstrate the university's leading position in the reform of psychology education. The quality of

teacher candidate training at the university has gained broad societal recognition. According to relevant survey data, graduate satisfaction with employment status, attainment of general competencies, and the job-major relevance have all shown steady improvement. In May 2023, the People's Government of Hanggin Banner, Ordos City, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, conducted a targeted recruitment of 40 early childhood education graduates from the university, reflecting local government recognition of the quality of the university's talent cultivation.

#### **2.4.2 Challenges and Responses**

M University also faces certain challenges in its reform of the educational model. The university has encountered issues such as insufficient and fragmented utilization of resources. To address this challenge, the university conducted special investigations, restructured management processes, and implemented measures including flexible opening hours, simplified reservation procedures, and consolidation of fragmented time slots, thereby genuinely enhancing the utilization of high-value spaces. This approach has improved resource efficiency and provided strong support for the educational model reform. The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region covers a vast territory, with significant differences in economic development and educational foundations between its eastern and western parts. This imbalance poses challenges to the cultivation and employment of teacher candidates. In response, the university actively collaborates with local governments to establish a number of teacher education practice bases, aiming to cultivate adaptable and locally-retained educational professionals for different regions. As a local university, integrating traditional culture with modern educational concepts represents a significant challenge. M University is exploring an innovative path of blending traditional culture with modern education by creating original artistic works with thematic focus.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the study of M University's teacher education model, we can project its future development direction and summarize its implications for local teacher-training institutions. Looking ahead, we believe the following strategies and measures should be adopted. Regarding the pathway of specialized development, the university should further deepen the "Outstanding Teacher Training Program," innovate the talent cultivation model for teacher education, and explore the institutional mechanisms for cultivating outstanding teachers. By selecting students to form "Excellence Classes," it will build a reserve force for cultivating high-quality, innovative teachers. Concurrently, the university should continuously optimize its training programs to ensure they align with national teacher education standards and meet regional educational development needs. In terms of digital transformation and upgrading, the university should continue to promote intelligent management and service optimization, expand more specialized teaching scenarios, and advance micro-teaching laboratories from "open spaces" to "high-capacity educational platforms," thereby contributing to the construction of a high-quality teacher education system. Furthermore, it should strengthen blended teaching reforms, expand the scale of online open course development, and enhance the level of informatization in education and teaching. The university should establish an international perspective in its operations and build the "Study at BaoShi" brand. By introducing advanced international educational concepts and resources, it will cultivate teacher education talent with a global outlook, thereby enhancing the university's international influence and competitiveness. The university should further refine the "university-government-school collaborative education mechanism," deepening cooperation with local governments, primary/secondary schools, and enterprises, as there is still room for improvement in this area. Additionally, it should fully leverage excellent resources such as returnee doctoral graduates to establish model subject demonstration bases, master teacher studios, and doctoral research workshops, assisting young teachers in improving their educational and teaching methods, and enhancing their teaching capabilities, research proficiency, and classroom instruction quality.

The teacher education model of M University provides valuable experience for the training models of teacher education programs in local universities. Through its multi-level, comprehensive educational system and by taking blended teaching as a breakthrough point, it has achieved deep integration of information technology with education and teaching. Utilizing university-local-enterprise collaboration as a platform, it has formed an open and mutually beneficial educational framework. These experiences offer significant reference value for other higher education institutions in ethnic regions and also provide useful insights for the reform and innovation of teacher education in China.

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