

Research on Strategies for Enhancing the Sense of Belonging of Teachers in Private Universities

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Abstract: With the continuous growth of the number of private education institutions in China's higher education system, the career development and psychological state of teachers in private universities have become one of the important factors affecting the teaching quality and long-term development of schools. This article aims to explore the key factors that affect the sense of belonging of teachers in private universities and propose corresponding strategies for improvement. Research has found that salary and benefits, as well as career development opportunities, are limited. Management system and career development space are the main aspects that affect teachers' sense of belonging. So measures to enhance teachers' sense of belonging can effectively improve the overall satisfaction and sense of belonging of the teaching staff in private universities, thereby promoting the healthy development of the entire private education industry.

Keywords: private university teachers, sense of belonging

1. Introduction

As an important organizational force in China's higher education, private universities play a crucial role in education and teaching. The stability of the teaching staff is a direct factor affecting the quality of teaching, but private universities have the problem of unstable teaching staff. Private universities spend a lot of financial and energy costs on a series of new teacher recruitment processes such as personnel interviews, screening, and trial lectures every year. And the sense of belonging of teachers is an important factor affecting the stability of the teaching staff. Therefore, exploring the sense of belonging among teachers in private universities has important theoretical and practical value.^[1]

2. Overview of the sense of belonging among teachers in private universities

The sense of belonging among teachers in private universities refers to their sense of identification, dependence, and responsibility towards their school, which is a very important psychological state in the professional development of teachers. This sense of belonging is not only about teachers' satisfaction with the material conditions and working environment of the school, but more importantly, teachers' emotional and psychological identification and attachment to the school.^[2]

3. The current situation of sense of belonging among teachers in private universities

3.1. Low and unstable salary and benefits

The sense of belonging among teachers in private universities is generally affected by low and unstable salary and benefits. Many private universities, due to limited funding sources, usually offer lower salary levels than public universities. At the same time, welfare benefits such as social insurance and housing provident fund are often implemented at lower standards, and in some cases, they are not fully guaranteed. In addition, teachers in private universities face significant career instability, including a variety of contract based employment forms and limited promotion opportunities. These factors collectively lead to a lack of long-term commitment and identification with their institutions, which in turn affects the overall stability and teaching quality of the teaching staff. This situation not only reduces teachers' job satisfaction, but may also lead to the loss of outstanding talents, posing a challenge to the long-term development of the school.^[3]

3.2. Lack of career advancement opportunities

A significant issue in the sense of belonging among teachers in private universities is the lack of career advancement opportunities. Many private universities have limited resources in professional title evaluation, professional development, and continuing education opportunities, which makes it difficult for teachers to obtain promotion and growth opportunities. In addition, due to limitations in school management and systems, teachers may face issues such as unclear career planning, inadequate training systems, and limited opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. These factors work together to make teachers feel limited in realizing their personal value and uncertain in their career development prospects, thereby reducing their sense of belonging and loyalty to their school, and affecting the stability and enthusiasm of the teaching staff.^[4]

3.3. Management system needs improvement

In the current situation of the sense of belonging among teachers in private universities, the unreasonable management system is a significant problem. Many private universities have problems such as opaque personnel systems, lack of democratic participation in decision-making processes, and overly rigid evaluation systems, which lead to teachers feeling marginalized in their career development and daily work. In addition, some schools may adopt stricter control measures, which limit teachers' teaching autonomy and innovation space. This management approach not only weakens teachers' work enthusiasm, but also affects their sense of identity and belonging to the school, making it difficult for teachers to feel that they are important members of the school community, thereby reducing overall career satisfaction and stability.^[5]

4. Reasons affecting the sense of belonging of teachers in private universities

4.1. Nature and positioning of private universities

One important reason for the low sense of belonging among teachers in private universities is the nature and positioning of the school. Due to the fact that private universities usually rely on self-raised funds such as tuition income for operation, they have disadvantages compared to public universities in terms of resource allocation, stability, and long-term planning. Private universities often focus more on short-term economic benefits and may overlook long-term investments in teacher career development, such as providing sufficient research funding, ongoing vocational training opportunities, and stable promotion channels. In addition, the social recognition of private universities is sometimes lower than that of public institutions, which also affects teachers' sense of identification with their work units. These factors work together to make teachers feel a lack of professional security and limited development prospects, thereby reducing their sense of belonging to their school.^[6]

4.2. Low social status

One key reason for the low sense of belonging among teachers in private universities is their relatively low social status. Compared with public universities, private universities and their teachers often enjoy less reputation and recognition in public perception, which not only affects teachers' professional pride, but may also lead to more obstacles in academic exchanges, project applications, and other aspects. In addition, due to social status issues, teachers in private universities may feel that their work value is not fully respected, which further weakens their sense of identity and long-term commitment to the school, and affects the stability of the teaching staff. The differences in social status are also reflected in salary and social security, which work together to reduce teachers' job satisfaction and sense of belonging.^[7]

4.3. The management style of universities is too strict

One important reason for the low sense of belonging among teachers in private universities is that the management methods of universities are too strict. Some private universities tend to adopt a centralized management model, closely monitoring and restricting teachers' teaching activities, research directions, and even personal behavior. This high-pressure environment not only compresses teachers' professional autonomy and innovation space, but may also lead them to feel a lack of respect and support. Strict regulations and frequent assessments may increase teachers' work pressure, reduce their

job satisfaction, and ultimately affect their sense of identification and loyalty to the school. This management approach makes it difficult for teachers to find a sense of achievement and personal value in their work, thereby weakening their sense of belonging to the school.^[8]

5. Measures to enhance the sense of belonging among teachers in private universities

Improving the sense of belonging among teachers in private universities is a systematic project that requires multiple approaches. Here are some specific suggestions:

5.1. Improve internal management system

One effective measure to enhance the sense of belonging among teachers in private universities is to improve the internal management system, which includes establishing a more transparent and fair decision-making mechanism to ensure that teachers can participate in the school's management and development planning; Develop reasonable personnel policies, such as clear promotion paths, fair performance evaluation systems, and stable contract systems, to enhance job security; At the same time, optimize the teaching management and research support system, provide sufficient academic freedom and support, and encourage innovation and cooperation. Through these improvements, a more open and supportive work environment can be created where teachers feel their contributions are recognized, thereby enhancing their sense of identification and belonging to the school.^[9]

5.2. Improve teacher welfare benefits

A key measure to enhance the sense of belonging of teachers in private universities is to improve their welfare benefits, including increasing basic salaries, providing competitive performance bonuses, improving social security such as social insurance and housing provident fund, and establishing career development funds to support teachers' further education and participation in academic activities. In addition, schools can provide a good working environment, such as improving office conditions, setting up teacher rest rooms, and offering health check ups and other benefits. Through these practical supports, not only can the quality of life of teachers be directly improved, but it can also reflect the school's recognition and respect for the value of teachers, thereby enhancing their professional satisfaction and loyalty to the school, and further enhancing their sense of belonging.^[10]

5.3. Develop a reasonable incentive system

According to Fromm's expectancy theory, the magnitude of the excitation force (M) is determined by the valence (V) and the expected value (E), that is, the excitation force (M)=valence (V) x expected value (E). Therefore, when setting performance goals, managers of private universities need to consider whether the goals they can achieve can meet the material or spiritual needs of teachers. This way, teachers can see from the performance evaluation goals set by the school that the greater the value they are interested in, the greater the effectiveness; When setting performance goals, schools should also show employees the likelihood of achieving them (0-1). If no matter how much effort is put in, the goal cannot be achieved, and teachers will lose their enthusiasm for work and fail to achieve their motivational effect.

When setting performance evaluation goals, it is advisable to follow the SMART principle of specificity, which can better stimulate teachers' behavioral motivation, and the difficulty of achieving the goals. There should be a certain level of difficulty to make teachers willing and willing to accept challenging tasks, have the motivation to achieve the goals, and work hard to achieve them. In this process, the combination of short-term incentives should also be considered. Satisfying the current needs of teachers in the short term, while long-term incentives are accompanied by achievable long-term goals, such as the growth of teachers' abilities in teaching and educational achievements. Combining short-term and long-term incentives can reduce teacher burnout and maintain their work motivation.^[11]

According to Herzberg's two factor theory, there are two main factors that affect teachers' work motivation: health factors and motivational factors. For example, if employees with health factors are not satisfied, their salary and benefits will lead to dissatisfaction. If possible, if teachers can achieve growth in their work, just like motivational factors, then employees will be satisfied. An appropriate salary system can improve employees' job satisfaction, enhance their sense of belonging to the school,

and motivate them to realize their self-worth.

5.4. Optimize career development path

An important measure to enhance the sense of belonging of teachers in private universities is to optimize their career development path, which includes establishing clear promotion mechanisms, providing continuous professional development opportunities, and setting up personalized growth plans. Schools should establish transparent professional title evaluation standards and procedures to ensure that every teacher has a clear understanding of their career prospects; Regularly organize teaching seminars, academic exchanges, and professional training to help teachers continuously improve their teaching and research abilities; At the same time, encourage and support teachers to participate in domestic and international academic conferences and project collaborations, broaden their horizons, and enhance their influence in professional fields. Through these measures, not only can teachers' work enthusiasm be stimulated, but their personal growth and professional achievements can also be promoted, thereby significantly enhancing their sense of belonging to the school.

5.5. Enhance sense of identity and honor

One effective measure to enhance the sense of belonging of teachers in private universities is to strengthen their sense of identity and honor, which can be achieved through commending outstanding teachers, holding annual award ceremonies, and widely promoting teachers' achievements both on and off campus. Schools should establish a fair evaluation system and give full recognition and rewards to teachers who have outstanding performance in teaching, scientific research, and social services; At the same time, actively showcasing teachers' professional contributions and personal style through school magazines, official websites, and social media platforms, and strengthening their sense of pride as educators. In addition, encouraging teachers to participate in the decision-making process of the school, making them feel that they are an indispensable part of the school's development, this sense of participation will further deepen their identification and sense of belonging to the school. Through these methods, it is possible to effectively enhance the professional satisfaction of teachers and promote the enthusiasm and cohesion of the entire teaching team.

6. Conclusion

This study comprehensively analyzes the factors that affect the sense of belonging of teachers in private universities, revealing that salary and benefits, career advancement, management systems, etc. are key factors determining teachers' identification and loyalty to the school. The research results indicate that enhancing the sense of belonging among teachers in private universities can not only improve their personal job satisfaction and happiness, but also significantly promote the overall stability of the teaching staff and the long-term development of the school. To this end, this article proposes multiple specific strategies, including improving internal management systems, increasing teacher welfare benefits, developing reasonable incentive systems, optimizing career development paths, enhancing identity and honor to ensure job stability, providing professional growth and development platforms, creating a positive campus culture atmosphere, and increasing teacher participation in management decision-making. The implementation of these measures requires joint efforts from the management of private universities and educational administrative departments, as well as support and guidance from national policies. In short, by optimizing management systems, strengthening humanistic care, and improving the working environment, it is possible to effectively enhance the sense of belonging of teachers in private universities, thereby laying a solid foundation for achieving higher quality teaching outcomes. Future research should continue to pay attention to the development and changes in this field, and explore more innovative solutions to address the challenges brought by the constantly changing educational environment.

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