



# Research on the Current Situation and Differences of Academic Career Development of Young Teachers in Chinese Universities

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**Abstract.** University teachers belong to the academic profession, and the research on the academic career development of university teachers has significant academic and practical value. This study explores the academic career development of young university teachers from three dimensions: academic career achievements, academic career competencies, and academic career identity. Through descriptive statistical analysis, the current state of development is described, and through independent sample T-tests and variance analysis, the differences in development under different individual characteristics are explored. The study suggests that Chinese universities need to pay attention to vulnerable groups, especially the career development of young teachers.

**Keywords:** young university teachers, academic career development, current situation, differences.

## 1 Introduction

Academic careers are characterized by professionalism, fundamentality, autonomy, organization, and service<sup>[1]</sup>. Chinese university teachers are gradually transforming from the general concept of "intellectuals" to the subdivided "academic careers", reflecting the transition of university teachers from class identity to professional identity<sup>[2]</sup>. Young teachers' level of academic career development is directly related to the overall quality of human resources in academia. By precisely grasping the direction and standards of academic career development for young university teachers, we can more effectively promote their professional growth and academic advancement. The study will explore the academic career development of young university teachers from three dimensions: academic career achievements, academic professional competencies, and academic career identity. In detail, academic career achievements are classified into two parts: achievements in research papers and projects, other explicit achievements, and internal implicit achievements; academic professional competencies encompass teaching academic abilities, academic research abilities, and academic development abilities; and academic career identity comprises the identity of academic professional status, value

identification, and behavioral tendencies related to the academic profession among young university teachers.

## 2 Analysis of the Current Situation of Academic Career Development for Young University Teachers

### 2.1 Basic Information of the Sample

The questionnaire for investigating the academic career development of young teachers in universities and colleges was designed based on the Likert 5-point scale, which encompasses two parts: basic information and current status of academic career development. The survey was conducted online, and a total of 671 valid questionnaires were collected. The basic information of the sample is shown in Table 1. After reliability and validity tests, the questionnaire was proven to have good reliability and stability.

**Table 1.** Basic Information of the Sample.

Item		Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	183	27.3
	Male	488	72.7
Discipline	Humanities & Social Sciences	160	23.8
	Sciences	151	22.5
	Engineering	324	48.3
	Others	36	5.4
Overseas Experience Over One Year	No	218	32.5
	Yes	453	67.5
Total		671	100

### 2.2 Description of the Current Situation

**Table 2.** Current Situation Description.

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic Career Achievement	Research Paper and Project Achievement	3.70	1.10
	Other Explicit Achievements	<b>2.49</b>	1.09
	Implicit Academic Achievements	3.19	1.00
Academic Career Competence	Teaching and Academic Competence	3.83	0.80
	Academic Research Competence	4.21	0.64
	Academic Development Competence	3.63	0.83
	Identity with Academic Career	3.56	0.92
Academic Career Identity	Value Recognition of Academic Career	<b>4.34</b>	0.67
	Behavioral Tendencies in Academic Career	4.09	0.86

The study analyzed the current status of academic career development for young university teachers through descriptive statistical analysis. As can be seen from Table 2, among the continuous variables, the score for "Other Explicit Achievements" was the lowest, averaging only 2.49, and it was also the only variable among all continuous variables that scored below 3, indicating that the surveyed teachers did not highly recognize their achievements in terms of teaching and research awards. In contrast, "Value Recognition of Academic Career" had the highest average score, reaching 4.34, suggesting that teachers generally agreed on the significant value of academic careers in promoting social development and student growth. Additionally, the score for "Academic Research Competence" was also relatively high, indicating that teachers generally recognized their own abilities in academic collaboration, evaluation, communication, and expression.

### 3 Analysis of Differences in Academic Career Development among Young University Teachers

Compared to other social professions, academic professions constitute a highly differentiated and specialized occupational group, with such differentiation primarily manifested through gender and disciplines<sup>[3]</sup>. While overseas experience is highly valued in the recruitment and title evaluation of university teachers in China, research has found that studying abroad has not significantly promoted the professional development of university teachers<sup>[4]</sup>. To further explore the significance of differences in the academic career development of young university teachers in terms of gender, discipline, and overseas experience, the study conducted difference tests on various variables. For dichotomous variables, an independent sample T-test is used, while for multi-category variables, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) is employed to conduct the difference test. According to the test for homogeneity of variance, appropriate results of the difference test are selected.

#### 3.1 Differences in Academic Career Development at the Gender Level

**Table 3.** Statistics on Gender Differences in Academic Career Development.

Academic Career Development	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance of Variance Homogeneity Test	T
Research Paper and Project Achievement	Female	3.27	1.11	0.151(satisfying the homogeneity of variance)	-6.39 ***
	Male	<b>3.86</b>	1.05		
Other Explicit Achievements	Female	2.11	0.92	< <b>0.001</b> (less than 0.05, not satisfying)	-6.10 ***
	Male	<b>2.63</b>	1.12		
Implicit Academic Achievements	Female	2.80	0.96	0.950	-6.26 ***
	Male	<b>3.33</b>	0.98		
	Female	3.82	0.76		

Teaching and Academic Competence	Male	3.84	0.81	0.198(The teaching ability gap is not significant)	
Academic Research Competence	Female	4.13	0.60	0.443	-1.78
	Male	4.23	0.65		
Academic Development Competence	Female	3.44	0.82	0.866	-3.70***
	Male	<b>3.71</b>	0.83		
Identity with Academic Career	Female	3.52	0.90	0.968	-0.71
	Male	3.57	0.92		
Value Recognition of Academic Career	Female	3.64	0.89	0.302(Social approval of female teachers' identity)	-1.14
	Male	3.74	0.98		
Behavioral Tendencies in Academic Career	Female	3.91	0.95	0.144	-3.42***
	Male	<b>4.16</b>	0.82		

Note: \*sig<0.05, \*\*sig<0.01, \*\*\*sig<0.001. Same below.

As shown in Table 3, The independent sample t-test revealed significant differences between males and females in various dimensions of academic career achievements, academic development competence, and behavioral tendencies towards academic careers. In terms of the mean values, males scored significantly higher than females, indicating that male teachers outperform female teachers in terms of current achievements, future development potential, and academic aspirations. It is well-known that in the development of female academic careers, academic women tend to concentrate in teaching fields, with weaker academic discourse power, making it difficult for them to enter the "core circle" of academia. This leads to insufficient academic resources for women and marginalization of their academic status. Moreover, during their development, they encounter challenges such as the "Matthew Effect" and the "Glass Ceiling," resulting in lower overall academic achievements and unsatisfactory career development for female academics<sup>[5]</sup>. However, due to the long-standing societal support and recognition of women in teaching professions, there are no differences between male and female teachers in terms of identity and value recognition within academic careers.

### 3.2 Differences in Academic Career Development at the Disciplinary Level

**Table 4.** Specific Differences in Academic Career Development Across Disciplines.

Academic Career Development	Humanities and Social Sciences vs Sciences	Humanities and Social Sciences vs Engineering	Sciences vs Engineering
Research Paper and Project Achievement	<b>-0.55***</b>	<b>-0.70***</b>	-0.16
Other Explicit Achievements	-0.22	<b>-0.90***</b>	<b>-0.68***</b>

(There are extremely significant differences)

Implicit Academic Achievements	-0.31**	<b>-0.55</b> ***	in all dimensions of academic career achievements.)	-0.24*
Teaching and Academic Competence	0.19*	0.00		-0.19*
Academic Research Competence	-0.07	-0.07		0.00
Academic Development Competence	-0.11	-0.23**		-0.12
Identity with Academic Career	-0.02	-0.07		-0.05
Value Recognition of Academic Career	0.03	-0.02		-0.05
Behavioral Tendencies in Academic Career	-0.20*	-0.17*		0.04

The results of the difference test are shown in Table 4. The results indicate that Humanities and Social Sciences and Engineering exhibit extremely significant differences in all dimensions of academic career achievements, as well as notable differences in academic development competence and behavioral tendencies towards academic careers, with Engineering scoring significantly higher on average than Humanities and Social Sciences. Humanities and Social Sciences and Sciences display very significant differences in research paper and project achievements. Sciences and Engineering show very significant differences in other explicit achievements, as well as some differences in implicit academic achievements and teaching and academic competence. These findings align with existing research, which suggests that the negative impact of differences in teacher identity on academic quality is more pronounced in the sciences than in engineering<sup>[6]</sup>.

Different disciplines monopolize specific knowledge domains, constructing unique disciplinary boundaries, professional terminology, and subcultures, and sometimes even fostering exclusive labor markets. Scholars in popular disciplines are not only confined to academic careers within universities, but also have opportunities to enter government or enterprises to obtain high-paying positions. Currently, engineering disciplines are popular in China, which is a social factor that significantly contributes to the superior performance of engineering teachers in multiple indicators of academic career development compared to other disciplines. There are significant differences between engineering and humanities/social sciences in terms of disciplinary research paradigms, and these differences are prominently reflected in academic career achievements, especially in other explicit achievements, where engineering has a more pronounced advantage over science and humanities/social sciences.

### 3.3 Differences in Academic Career Development Based on Overseas Experience

**Table 5.** Statistical Differences in Academic Career Development Based on Overseas Experience.

Academic Career Development	Overseas Experience	Mean	Standard Deviation	Homogeneity of Variance Test	T
Research Paper and Project Achievement	No	3.53	1.16	0.054(Greater than 0.05, LSD)	-2.71**
	Yes	<b>3.78</b>	1.05		
Other Explicit Achievements	No	2.50	1.09	0.866	0.29
	Yes	2.48	1.09		
Implicit Academic Achievements	No	3.08	1.05	0.195	-1.88
	Yes	3.24	0.97		
Teaching and Academic Competence	No	3.87	0.82	0.249(no significant difference)	0.76
	Yes	3.82	0.78		
Academic Research Competence	No	4.15	0.63	0.677	-1.55
	Yes	4.23	0.65		
Academic Development Competence	No	3.61	0.86	0.324	-0.57
	Yes	3.65	0.82		
Identity with Academic Career	No	3.74	0.88	0.255(significantly weaker)	3.52**
	Yes	<b>3.47</b>	0.92		
Value Recognition of Academic Career	No	3.84	0.95	0.971(significantly weaker)	2.45*
	Yes	<b>3.65</b>	0.95		
Behavioral Tendencies in Academic Career	No	4.01	0.85	0.422	-1.69
	Yes	4.13	0.86		

As shown in Table 5, The independent samples T-test revealed that teachers with overseas experience significantly outperformed those without in terms of academic career identity, which is consistent with existing research that suggests that "sea turtles" (overseas returnees) have stronger professional belongingness and behavioral tendencies than teachers without overseas experience<sup>[7]</sup>. Overseas experience can indeed help university teachers secure positions in better institutions and higher-ranked disciplines. However, in the process of their academic career development, "sea turtle" teachers did not exhibit particularly significant advantages, and in some aspects, they even showed certain disadvantages<sup>[8]</sup>. This study found that teachers with overseas experience possess a distinct advantage in terms of paper and research project achievements, however, their academic career identity is significantly weaker compared to those without such experiences.

## 4 Conclusion and Recommendations

The research highlights the diverse impacts of various factors on the academic career development of university teachers. Specifically, Male teachers significantly outperform female teachers in terms of current achievements, future development potential, and academic aspirations. Due to the nature of disciplines and research paradigms, engineering teachers have significant advantages in multiple indicators of academic career development. In terms of educational background, while overseas experience enhanced academic career identity, it did not confer an overall advantage in all aspects of academic career development, particularly in research achievements. These findings underscore the complexity and multidimensional nature of factors influencing academic career trajectories. Gender, education background, and experience are social symbols that distinguish young university teachers, with youth, females, and those without overseas experience often becoming vulnerable groups in academia. John Rawls, in his book *A Theory of Justice*<sup>[9]</sup>, argued that the difference principle essentially embodies the concepts of mutual benefit and universal love, suggesting that those who are better off should strive to improve the treatment of disadvantaged groups. Based on this perspective, the following recommendations are proposed:

### (1) Strengthen support for young teachers

From the research approach focusing on the living conditions of university teachers' development, young teachers are often marginalized in the academic ecosystem, facing difficulties in limited resource acquisition and immense assessment pressure. Due to the inadequacy of human capital and social capital, they frequently confront conflicts between ideals and reality<sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, policies should provide young teachers with a certain degree of preferential resource allocation. However, Chinese universities often fail to adequately support young teachers, and they face numerous challenges in terms of research funding, teaching facilities, and research teams. To address this, universities and educational departments need to increase their support for young teachers to improve this situation.

### (2) Addressing the Work-Life Balance of "Female Young Scholars"

From a gender perspective, the timing of the family life cycle and the starting point of career development for "female young scholars" in universities are almost concurrent, resulting in these two simultaneously evolving trajectories becoming intertwined. This situation exposes them to dual pressures from both "work" and "family". Consequently, universities can offer female teachers more flexible working hours and locations, such as allowing remote work, to facilitate a better balance between their family and professional life.

### (3) Foster a Collaborative and Supportive Environment

Universities should foster a collaborative and supportive academic environment that encourages faculty members to share their experiences, knowledge, and resources. This can help mitigate some of the disadvantages associated with certain backgrounds and promote a more inclusive and equitable academic community. Universities should actively promote international cooperation and exchange programs to broaden teachers' horizons and enrich their academic achievements, while assisting returnee teachers in

better integrating into the domestic academic environment and striving to enhance their professional identity.

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