

Private Undergraduate Colleges and Universities in Guangxi under Classification Management Research on Sustainable Development

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Abstract:

Guangxi has 11 private undergraduate colleges and universities engaged in research and analysis of the current status and issues facing these institutions. A representative sample of these colleges and universities in Guangxi, including Nanning University, was selected for a case study, and its development profile was analyzed. Furthermore, the study examined the characteristics of the educational pathway. Finally, it considered the transformation of academic concepts, adherence to differentiated development, expansion of diversified funding sources, and the depth of integration between industry and education, among other factors influencing the sustainable development of private colleges and universities in Guangxi. Based on these findings, the study put forth recommendations for promoting the sustainable development of private colleges and universities in Guangxi. Ultimately, recommendations are provided for the sustainable development of private colleges and universities in Guangxi, focusing on the following key areas: evolving school management concepts, commitment to differentiated development, diversification of funding sources, and deepening the integration of industry and education.

Keywords:

Sustainable Development, Private Undergraduate Colleges and Universities, Classification Management

1. Introduction

A total of 37 colleges and universities at the undergraduate level are currently in operation in Guangxi. Of these, 26 are public institutions, while 11 are private. Collectively, these 11 private colleges and universities account for approximately 30% of all private institutions of higher education in the region. [1] It is evident that the proportion of undergraduate private colleges and universities in Guangxi is still relatively small, and their influence is limited.

To encourage social forces to assume responsibility for the operation of educational institutions and to facilitate the healthy development of private education, the State Council issued “Several Opinions of the State Council on Encouraging Social Forces to Run Education and Promoting the Healthy Development of Private Education” (Guofa [2016] No. 81) in December 2016. [2] Guangxi has also issued a series of implementing opinions at the provincial level. Additionally, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region issued the “Implementation Opinions of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region People’s Government on Encouraging Social Forces to Run Education and Promoting the Healthy Development of Private Education” (Guo Fa [2018] No. 31). In 2018, the policy of supporting private education was revised. The Law on the Promotion of Private Education was revised for the third time in December 2018, and the newly revised Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Promotion of Private Education of the People’s Republic of China began to be implemented on September 1, 2021. The policy of classified management has become the main line of policy for private higher education. [3] The disparity between nonprofit private colleges and public colleges and universities in the three dimensions of fairness—opportunity, process, and result—in the context of the new policy is diminishing by the Implementing Rules for the Classification and Registration of Private Schools (hereinafter referred to as the Implementing Rules), nonprofit private colleges and universities that meet the requisite criteria may be registered as institutions. This signifies that nonprofit private colleges and universities will be afforded the same degree of support as public colleges and universities, including the same rights and interests for their faculty members and the same financial support for their students. Nevertheless, how the government oversees the operations of nonprofit colleges and universities and how such institutions can flourish sustainably has become a significant challenge that requires immediate attention.

2. An Overview of the Development of Private Undergraduate Colleges and Universities in Guangxi

As of February 2024, there were 11 private colleges and universities (including independent colleges) in Guangxi, with the majority located in Nanning, the capital of Guangxi. There were six colleges and universities in Nanning, two in Guilin, one in Beihai, and one in Chongzuo. About the type of educational institution, there are four comprehensive schools, four science and technology schools, and one each of foreign language, medicine, and art schools. [4] In terms of ownership, Nanning University is a Democratic party-run institution, while Guilin College and Liuzhou Institute of Technology are wholly state-owned enterprises. Individual citizens established the Guangxi Foreign Language Institute, while the remaining state-owned private independent colleges and enterprise groups have invested in the establishment of colleges and universities. [5] About the nature of the institutions in question, it should be noted that the Guangxi Institute of Foreign Languages has yet to disclose the specific characteristics of its status. The remaining colleges and universities have been registered as nonprofit entities. Nanning University is the earliest privately run college in Guangxi, having been established in 1985. Since 2001, the emergence of state-owned private independent colleges in Guangxi has propelled the region’s private higher education sector into a phase of accelerated expansion. Guangxi City Vocational University is the youngest private undergraduate university in Guangxi. Previously known as Guangxi City Vocational

College, it was founded in 2005 and renamed in May 2019. It is one of the first undergraduate vocational education pilot universities in China and the only private undergraduate vocational university in Guangxi.

3. The Development Characteristics of Private General Undergraduate Colleges and Universities in Guangxi

3.1. Slow upgrading of the school level

Of the ten Guangxi colleges and universities approved to establish new master's degree-granting programs between 2021 and 2025, only two are private institutions: Guangxi Institute of Foreign Languages and Nanning University. In the "2023 Softech China University Ranking," issued by Softech, a national higher education professional evaluation organization, only Nanning University and Guilin College in Guangxi are ranked within the top 100. The quality of private colleges and universities in Guangxi is progressing at a gradual pace.

3.2. The majority of these independent colleges have been transferred to public institutions

As of December 2023, the Ministry of Education has announced the completion of the transfer of six of the original nine independent colleges in Guangxi. [6] The Guangxi University College of Health and two other independent colleges and universities have been transferred to public colleges. Additionally, four colleges and universities, namely the Liuzhou Institute of Technology and three others, have been transferred to nonprofit private colleges and universities. The transfer of Guangxi University for Nationalities and three other institutions still needs to be completed. The four private colleges and universities in Guangxi that offer undergraduate programs are Nanning University, Guangxi Institute of Foreign Languages, Beihai College of Art and Design, and Guangxi City Vocational University. [7] These institutions have been in operation for over a decade and have developed their distinctive characteristics based on the local Guangxi context, the formation of their respective specializations, and the characteristics of their personnel training programs. The transition period of independent colleges and universities will present several challenges, including the loss of brand resources, a decline in the attractiveness of the student body, uncertainty regarding the continuity of funding, and difficulties in securing funding for the development of new programs.

3.3. Insufficient Public Financial Support

Among the 11 private colleges and universities at the undergraduate level, only Nanning University, Liuzhou Institute of Technology, and Guilin College are funded by state-owned enterprises. The remaining institutions are privately run or operated by private corporations, needing more support from local governments. Moreover, private colleges and universities rely on a single source of funding, with tuition and fees representing a significant portion of their revenue. To secure the requisite resources, private colleges and universities frequently raise tuition fees in a relatively short period, and the operational mode could be more commercialized. [8] A utilitarian approach to education is likely to result in a myopic strategy that will fail to enhance the quality of education. Students at nonprofit private colleges and universities are also required to pay high tuition fees due to the inability to obtain the same per capita funding as students at public colleges and universities.

3.4. Significant Obstacles to Connotation Construction

As public colleges and universities are naturally advantaged in terms of funding, faculty, and policies, they have a monopoly in the allocation of educational resources, the construction of academic disciplines, and scientific research and innovation. For instance, despite the advantages of flexibility, innovativeness, close industrial connection, and efficient management mechanisms in the construction of industrial colleges, private colleges, and universities have only one representative in the list of 50 modern industrial colleges in Guangxi, namely Nanning University, out of 50 industrial colleges in the province. The Department of Education has allocated 127.93 million yuan for the construction of critical undergraduate education and teaching projects at the national and autonomous region levels. This funding is intended for first-class undergraduate majors, first-class undergraduate courses, and the "four new" construction. Twenty-five undergraduate colleges and universities have obtained funding, including Nanning University, a private undergraduate college. Nanning University has also been awarded 1 million yuan for undergraduate teaching reform.

4. The Sustainable Development of Nonprofit Private Colleges and Universities in Guangxi: A Case Study of Nanning University

4.1. The institution's guiding principle is the pursuit of public welfare through the operation of educational institutions

The Guangxi District Committee of the Democratic Revolutionary Party established the school with the objective of "popularizing national education." At its inception, the school's guiding principle was "helping every student to achieve success." At that time, the school's reputation was enhanced, and the foundation was laid for its subsequent development. The Guangxi Regional Committee of the Democratic Revolution employs the abundant resources of high-end talent and social capital from democratic parties to facilitate the expansion of the school. The integration of the abundant resources for school management provided by democratic parties with the robust financial capabilities of enterprises offers a robust foundation for the long-term growth and advancement of the school. The collaboration between democratic parties and enterprise groups in the operation of educational institutions challenges the traditional model of school governance by the government alone and represents a significant step towards the involvement of a diverse range of social actors in the development of private colleges and universities. Nanning University has consistently upheld the tenets of public education and the nonprofit model for educational institutions.

4.2. The school adheres to the principle of running schools with applied technology

Nanning University is oriented towards the industrial transformation and development of Guangxi and the regional economic and social needs, to optimize the professional structure and focus on the regional critical development of machinery and equipment manufacturing, electronic information, and other key industries. To achieve this, the college is opening intelligent manufacturing engineering, new energy automobile engineering, and big data science and technology. The establishment of five major course clusters has been completed, with the structure of majors based on new engineering and new liberal arts. These clusters focus on the creation of advanced equipment manufacturing, food and quality management, information

technology, digital economy, and art and design. The curriculum is designed to be market-adaptable. The implementation of the action plan for the construction of “Golden Courses” will result in the establishment of a curriculum construction system that focuses on core courses and is led by model courses for the integration of specialization and creativity, model courses for the integration of industry and education, and model courses for the ideology and politics of The curriculum will comprise a group of courses based on the integration of industry and education with an output orientation. A standardized process for the teaching of applied courses will be designed, and the classroom teaching mode will be changed to an applied mode. An application-oriented curriculum system will be established. Nanning University has been selected as one of the inaugural universities in China to implement an application-oriented curriculum system. Nanning University has been selected as one of the inaugural pilot colleges of universities of applied technology in China, a pilot school for the transformation and development of newly established undergraduate programs in Guangxi, and has been recognized by the Ministry of Education as a model institution for applied curriculum reform.

4.3. The objective is to innovate the talent training mode of industry-teaching integration

Nanning University has established “openness” as one of the three major school-running concepts, with a particular focus on the innovation of talent cultivation modes of industry-teaching integration. The initial formation of these modes has resulted in a collaborative cultivation mode of

industry-teaching integration with diversified subjects, various forms, and in-depth integration. Nanning University has established six modern industrial colleges in collaboration with ZTE Corporation, KDDI, and Guangxi Research Institute of Standards and Technology. These colleges have developed six distinctive collaborative educational models, including the “factory and school as a whole” and “employment and entrepreneurship through” approaches. This integration of the education, innovation, and industrial chains has led to a profound fusion of these three domains. The school has established 10 types of collaboration with enterprises, including a “common cultivation plan, common curriculum, common teaching materials, common training of teachers, common resources sharing, common projects, common teaching, common management, common quality assessment, and common employment assistance.” These initiatives have facilitated the transformation of the school from a fragmented structure to an integrated one and have enabled the deep integration of the entire production, education, and human resources process. The institution has received approximately 90 million yuan in educational funding from external sources and has established several training facilities, including the China-ASEAN Comprehensive Transportation International Joint Key Laboratory, the Ministry of Education-ICT Industry-Teaching Integration Innovation Base, and the inaugural cohort of Big Data Talent Cultivation Bases in Guangxi. Additionally, it has developed a model industrial college for higher education institutions in Guangxi.

4.4. It is recommended that innovation and entrepreneurship education be vigorously implemented

Nanning University regards innovation and entrepreneurship education as a means of achieving a breakthrough in the reform of applied talent cultivation. It integrates

dual-creation education into all aspects of the whole process of talent cultivation, to comprehensively improve students' innovation and entrepreneurship spirit and innovation and entrepreneurship ability. It establishes an ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship education, comprising college students' patent clubs and innovation and entrepreneurship societies. It also organizes and carries out various forms of innovation and entrepreneurship competitions and innovation and entrepreneurship project training. Furthermore, it provides consulting and guidance, financial support, financing docking, and other help and services for the incubation of innovation and entrepreneurship projects. It establishes on-and-off-campus innovation and entrepreneurship bases, college students' parks for entrepreneurship, and innovation and entrepreneurship workshops. It improves the incentive mechanism for innovation and entrepreneurship, encourages teachers and students to participate in innovation and entrepreneurship education reform, and emphasizes the cultivation objective of cultivating students' innovative spirit and practical ability. To this end, disciplinary competitions are employed as a means of fostering an atmosphere conducive to promoting teaching, learning, research, reform, creativity, and achievement. The university was designated as a model institution in the autonomous region for its contributions to the advancement of innovation and entrepreneurship education reform. Additionally, it was recognized as a top-tier educational establishment for its exemplary implementation of an innovation and entrepreneurship training program for college students at the autonomous region level. Nanning University is ranked 10th in the "2019-2023 National Private Colleges and Universities Student Competition List" in the "2023 National Competition Analysis Report for College Students in General Colleges and Universities," as published by the Chinese Society of Higher Education.

5. The "Nanning University" Model for the Sustainable Development of Private Colleges and Universities in Guangxi Serves as an Inspiring Example

5.1. Adhere to the original intention of running schools and promptly adapt the philosophy of running schools

Some educators at these institutions continue to rely on the resources and platforms of their predecessor institutions due to a lack of trust in the new school-running body, an inability to adapt to the new school-running mode, and resistance to change. This ultimately affects the quality of teaching. The establishment of a quality consciousness represents a fundamental aspect of the sustainable development of private colleges and universities. To facilitate the transfer of private colleges and universities, it is essential to implement a fair and effective incentive structure that encourages teachers to demonstrate enthusiasm and creativity in their teaching practices. This structure should also motivate teachers to embrace new educational concepts and methodologies, expand their knowledge base, and enhance their teaching abilities. Furthermore, a long-term and scientific strategic plan is formulated, which includes the development objectives of the school, the allocation of educational resources, and the improvement of teaching quality. Concurrently, an efficacious implementation and supervision mechanism is constituted to guarantee the fulfillment of the strategic plan and the effectiveness of its implementation, thus enabling the sustainable development of the school and the enhancement of the quality of education.

5.2. Cultivating a consciousness of quality and developing distinctive characteristics and advantages

Private colleges and universities should be founded on market demand and their resources, identify a unique educational positioning, define clear training objectives; through a comprehensive examination of the school's history, culture, and professional strengths, identify opportunities for innovation, and create a distinctive educational model to enhance the school's visibility and influence, and facilitate accelerated growth. For instance, private colleges and universities may select one or more distinctive strengths, such as innovation and entrepreneurship education, internationalization exchanges, teacher competitions, student examinations and certifications, and so forth. They can then continue to cultivate these strengths to establish a unique brand identity. In the process of professional construction, private colleges and universities should refrain from pursuing popular majors or imitating the professional settings of other schools. Instead, they should combine their distinctive characteristics and advantages through measures such as strengthening the faculty, improving teaching facilities, optimizing the curriculum, and other strategies. This approach allows them to enhance the competitiveness of their professions, create a unique professional system, and avoid homogeneous competition.

5.3. Revitalize fixed assets and address financial challenges

Securing adequate funding has consistently represented a significant obstacle to the advancement of private higher education, a hurdle that has proven difficult to overcome. It is imperative that private colleges and universities proactively seek financial investment from the government, such as the allocation of special funds, loan subsidies, and tax incentives, to alleviate the financial burden on these institutions. Secondly, private colleges and universities should proactively identify and pursue a diverse range of revenue streams. This may include seeking financial support from external partners through collaborative initiatives such as joint school management, technology transfer, and knowledge incubation. Furthermore, schools may leverage their resources to engage in activities such as social service, education, and training, thereby augmenting their operational revenue and revitalizing fixed assets through rental, sale, and collaborative business endeavors. For instance, the leasing of unused activity venues represents a potential avenue for the expansion of income sources. Ultimately, it is essential to prioritize the enhancement of financial efficiency and the refinement of management practices to guarantee the optimal utilization of all resources and the generation of substantial benefits.

6. Conclusions

In recent years, Guangxi has formulated a series of policies to support the development of private education, and private universities have maintained stable growth. However, there are still issues such as slow development at different educational levels and a single source of funding, posing significant challenges to their internal development. Nanning University has adhered to the direction of applied education and explored a unique path for the development of private higher education. The "Nanning University Model" provides valuable reference for the sustainable development of private undergraduate universities in Guangxi, as well as inspiration for the reform and development of private education nationwide. With the accelerated implementation of classified management in Guangxi, private undergraduate education in Guangxi will develop rapidly in terms of policy environment,

educational quality and characteristics, funding sources and financial management, industry-education integration and school-enterprise cooperation, as well as internationalization. This will gradually narrow the gap with public universities, contributing to the dual goals of advancing both educational equity and quality.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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