

Research on the Reform of Legal Education in Local Universities from the Perspective of Grassroots Legal Talent Supply

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Abstract: The in-depth advancement of the comprehensive law-based governance strategy has set higher requirements for the development of grassroots law-based construction. Sufficient quantity and competence-matching capacity of grassroots legal talents have become core elements for consolidating the foundation of building a law-based society. As the main position for cultivating grassroots legal talents, local undergraduate universities undertake the important mission of delivering application-oriented and localized legal talents. At present, China's supply of grassroots legal talents faces prominent problems such as structural shortage and inadequate competence matching, which stem from the disconnection between the legal-education system of local universities and the demands of grassroots legal posts. From the practical perspective of grassroots legal-talent supply, this paper systematically analyzes the practical dilemmas of legal education in local universities and explores reform paths from four dimensions: talent-training orientation, curriculum system, practical teaching, and faculty building. It aims to construct a legal-education model adapted to the needs of grassroots law-based construction, improve the quality of legal-talent cultivation in local universities, and provide talent support for building grassroots legal teams as well as law-based villages and law-based communities.

Keywords: Grassroots legal talents; Talent supply; Local universities; Legal education; Educational reform

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1. Introduction

Grassroots work constitutes both the priority and difficulty of law-based construction. The professionalized and standardized development of grassroots legal-talent teams serves as an important cornerstone for advancing the modernization of national governance systems and governance capacity. With the continuous improvement and refinement of law-based governance at the grassroots level, grassroots judicial offices, legal-service offices, legal-service posts in villages and communities, as well as grassroots administrative-law-enforcement sectors have witnessed growing demand for legal talents, who are expected to possess brand-new capabilities in practical operation and local adaptation. Relying on regional school-running advantages, local universities

act as core providers of legal talents for grassroots communities, and the quality of their legal education directly determines the supply level of grassroots legal talents ^[1]. For a long time, most local universities have adopted traditional school-running modes in legal education, emphasizing imparting theoretical knowledge while ignoring the practical demands of grassroots posts. This results in a disconnection between talent cultivation and market supply, giving rise to the dual contradiction of employment difficulties for graduates and talent shortages in grassroots legal posts. Accordingly, reconstructing the legal-education system of local universities from the perspective of grassroots legal-talent supply and resolving the mismatch between talent cultivation and job demands bears great practical significance and application value.

2. Dilemmas faced by legal education in local universities from the perspective of grassroots legal-talent supply

2.1. Talent-training orientation deviating from grassroots demands

Talent-training orientation represents the core guideline of legal education. It directly defines the objectives and specifications of talent cultivation and profoundly influences the supply quality of grassroots legal talents. At present, obvious deviations exist in the school-running positioning of law majors in most local universities. They generally follow the talent-training modes of key universities, focusing on cultivating high-end judicial-practice and academic-research-oriented talents, and regard postgraduate admission and employment in judicial organs of large- and medium-sized cities as core training goals, while ignoring the demand characteristics of grassroots legal posts. Local universities fail to define the training orientation for application-oriented and localized legal talents in light of regional socioeconomic development and real-world grassroots law-based construction, leading to a severe disconnection between talent-training directions and grassroots talent demands. Different from high-end judicial posts, grassroots legal posts lay greater emphasis on practical and basic work, including dispute mediation, grassroots law-popularization, auxiliary administrative law-enforcement, and legal affairs for village-community governance, and impose higher requirements on talents' grassroots adaptability, practical-problem-solving competence, and mass-communication skills ^[2]. However, due to positioning deviations, legal teaching in local universities overemphasizes legal theories and high-end litigation practices, lacking targeted training for work scenarios and professional skills of grassroots legal work. A large number of law graduates possess solid theoretical knowledge yet cannot adapt to complicated and diversified grassroots legal work. They are unwilling to take grassroots jobs and are incompetent for grassroots legal practice, which ultimately leads to an insufficient effective supply of grassroots legal talent. Meanwhile, law graduates from local universities face narrow employment channels and low-quality jobs, bringing about two-way waste of resources in talent cultivation and post requirements.

2.2. Lack of grassroots adaptability in curriculum-system design

The curriculum system acts as the core carrier for talent cultivation, and a scientific and complete curriculum system is critical for guaranteeing the supply quality of grassroots legal talents. At this stage, law-major curriculum systems in local universities generally adopt traditional general-purpose curriculum frameworks with rigid and outdated course settings, showing extremely low adaptability to real-world grassroots legal-work demands. In terms of curriculum structure, most universities take core theoretical courses as the main body, with an excessive proportion of traditional theoretical courses such as civil and commercial law, criminal

law, and administrative law, while practical, local-condition-oriented, and hands-on courses urgently needed for grassroots legal work are seriously deficient. Grassroots legal work covers distinctive contents including people's mediation, grassroots law-popularization publicity, legal norms for rural-area governance, grassroots administrative law-enforcement, legal aid for vulnerable groups, and resolution of village-community conflicts. Nevertheless, few local universities have set up targeted special courses such as grassroots legal practice, local-condition-oriented law-based construction and grassroots dispute-mediation skills ^[3]. In terms of curriculum contents, existing teaching materials mostly focus on macro-legal systems and urban judicial scenarios, with scarce legal-application contents for rural and community grassroots governance. Practical topics commonly seen at the grassroots level, such as neighborhood disputes, land-ownership controversies, legal issues concerning rural-industry development, and compliance in grassroots law-enforcement, are barely covered, which greatly reduces the supply-adaptability of grassroots legal talents.

2.3. Formalistic practical-teaching system with insufficient practical effects

Law is a highly practical discipline. Grassroots legal posts set strict requirements for talents' practical-operation capabilities and on-site-disposal competence. Sound practical teaching serves as a vital link connecting campus training with grassroots post demands. Currently, the practical-teaching systems of law majors in local universities commonly suffer from formalism, fragmentation and superficiality, and fail to deliver effective cultivation of practical capabilities for grassroots legal work. From the perspective of practical-teaching modes, practical teaching in most universities still relies on in-class simulated cases, moot courts and on-campus training. Case materials are mostly typical, difficult and high-end cases, while practical cases concerning simple daily grassroots legal work, routine law-enforcement and grassroots mediation account for an extremely low proportion ^[4]. Off-campus practice links are highly perfunctory. Cooperation between universities and grassroots judicial offices, community legal-service centers and township law-enforcement units remains superficial, and the construction of internship bases lacks long-term cooperation mechanisms. Most students complete off-campus internships on a self-arranged basis, without two-way full-process guidance and assessment management from universities and internship institutions. During internships, most students merely perform trivial work such as file sorting and document entry, and cannot participate in core legal work including grassroots dispute mediation, law-popularization activities and case follow-up ^[5]. In terms of practical-teaching assessment, existing assessment systems focus on reviewing written documents such as internship reports and training summaries, while neglecting substantial evaluation of students' practical-operation competence and grassroots adaptability.

3. Reform paths for legal education in local universities from the perspective of grassroots legal-talent supply

3.1. Re-orient talent cultivation targeting grassroots demands

To resolve the core problem of disconnection between law-talent cultivation in local universities and grassroots talent supply, the primary task is to re-formulate precise, localized and application-oriented talent-training orientations based on real-world demands of regional grassroots law-based construction. Local universities must abandon the wrong tendency of unquestioningly emulating key universities and pursuing high-end school-running. Rooted in their regional school-running features and the mission of serving local communities, they shall take cultivating application-oriented, compound and localized legal talents adapted

to grassroots law-based construction as their core school-running goal. Universities shall set up special research teams to maintain regular communication with grassroots entities including local judicial bureaus, political-legal organs in towns and sub-districts, and legal-service stations in villages and communities. They shall conduct comprehensive research on talent shortages, post-ability requirements and work-content characteristics of regional grassroots legal posts, and refine talent-training objectives and specifications in combination with regional law-based development priorities such as law-based-village construction, grassroots social governance and public-legal-service-system development^[6]. In the top-level design of talent cultivation, three talent-training tracks shall be clearly distinguished: academic-research-oriented, high-end-judicial-practice-oriented and grassroots-application-oriented. Priority shall be given to the grassroots-application-oriented talent-training sector. Core competencies including grassroots dispute mediation, grassroots law-popularization services, auxiliary administrative law-enforcement, village-community law-based governance and grassroots legal aid shall be taken as core indicators for talent cultivation. Meanwhile, talent-training programs shall be optimized in response to grassroots legal-talent-supply demands. Training standards for grassroots adaptability, practical-operation capabilities and public-service competence shall be specified in talent-training objectives, graduation requirements and training specifications, so as to guide students to establish professional concepts of serving and taking root in grassroots communities^[7]. Through precise school-running positioning, deviations in talent cultivation shall be thoroughly corrected to realize accurate docking between law-talent cultivation and grassroots-legal-post demands, and improve both the quantity and quality of effective grassroots legal-talent supply from the source.

3.2. Optimize curriculum-system development based on grassroots scenarios

Optimization and upgrading of the curriculum system constitute the core carrier for precise cultivation of grassroots legal talents. Local universities shall reconstruct a curriculum system integrating theory and practice, and balancing general-purpose and characteristic courses based on real-world grassroots legal-work scenarios. First, optimize the proportional structure of courses. Appropriately reduce class hours for purely theoretical-research-oriented and high-end-judicial-practice-oriented courses, increase the proportion of courses related to grassroots legal practice, and add special core courses such as Introduction to Grassroots Legal Practice, Law-Based Rural-Area Construction, Grassroots Dispute-Mediation Practice, Norms for Grassroots Administrative Law-Enforcement, Community Legal Services and Legal Aid for Vulnerable Groups, so as to build a compound curriculum framework combining general legal courses and grassroots-featured courses^[8]. Second, iterate and update teaching contents. Optimize textbook contents and teaching materials with real-world grassroots legal-work cases and scenarios, abandon abstract theoretical lectures divorced from grassroots realities, and incorporate legal-application contents for grassroots land disputes, neighborhood conflicts, compliance of rural-industry development, governance over grassroots law-enforcement irregularities, and legal norms for village-community self-governance, so that curriculum contents can accurately match the job requirements of grassroots posts^[9]. Third, keep pace with new developments in grassroots law-based construction and add new curriculum modules such as digital law-based governance and smart law-popularization and compliance-building for grassroots governance to meet new talent demands for smart grassroots law-based construction. Meanwhile, implement modular teaching. Set up course modules for grassroots mediation, grassroots law-enforcement, grassroots law-popularization and village-community legal affairs according to subdivided demands of grassroots legal posts. Students may select modules according to their career plans to enhance post adaptability^[10].

3.3. Improve the practical-teaching system focusing on practical-operation competence

Targeting the formalism and insufficient effectiveness of current practical teaching, local universities shall focus on cultivating practical-operation capabilities for grassroots legal posts, build a full-coverage, in-depth and standardized practical-teaching system, and break down barriers between campus training and grassroots post requirements. First, reconstruct on-campus practical-teaching modes and optimize simulated-teaching scenarios. Move beyond mere simulation of high-end litigation cases, and add practical-training contents tailored for grassroots work such as simulation of grassroots dispute mediation, simulation of grassroots law-popularization lectures, administrative-law-enforcement-file compilation and legal-aid-document drafting. Build practical-training laboratories for grassroots legal practice to restore real-world grassroots legal-work scenarios and carry out regular targeted practical-skill drills ^[11]. Second, deepen the construction of off-campus practice bases. Establish long-term and stable university-local-government and university-enterprise cooperation mechanisms with local judicial offices, township people's governments, community-service centers, grassroots law firms and legal-aid centers. Build fixed practical-teaching bases for grassroots legal practice, clarify teaching obligations of cooperative institutions, and arrange students to take immersive internships in grassroots posts in batches. Students shall fully participate in core work, including grassroots law popularization, conflict mediation, file sorting, legal services, and auxiliary law enforcement, to accumulate practical grassroots work experience ^[12]. Third, improve practical-teaching assessment-management systems. Change the single written-examination mode and build a comprehensive-assessment system combining process assessment, practical-operation assessment and on-post assessment. Both university instructors and grassroots practical tutors shall jointly conduct a comprehensive evaluation of students' internship practical skills, post adaptability, and job performance to eliminate perfunctory internships. At the same time, regularly organize social-practice activities such as grassroots legal-work investigations, law-popularization volunteer services and law-based assistance for rural areas, to guide students to understand and serve grassroots communities, and enhance their problem-solving abilities and grassroots adaptability through practice. This will realize the talent-cultivation effect of "being competent immediately upon graduation and employment", and effectively improve the supply quality of grassroots legal talents ^[13].

3.4. Strengthen practical-oriented faculty building through two-way empowerment

Building a faculty team with solid theoretical attainments and rich grassroots practical experience is key to guaranteeing the implementation of legal-education reform and improving the quality of grassroots legal-talent cultivation. Local universities shall build a two-way faculty-building system featuring improvement for in-house teachers and empowerment by external practitioners in response to grassroots legal-talent-cultivation demands. On the one hand, enhance the practical competence of full-time in-house teachers. Establish a regular mechanism for teachers to take temporary grassroots posts for work-experience accumulation. Require law-major teachers to conduct temporary assignments, research and practical work in grassroots judicial offices, legal-service centers and township political-legal posts on a regular basis, so that they can accumulate grassroots legal-work experience and accurately grasp talent demands and work bottlenecks of grassroots posts ^[14]. Meanwhile, optimize teacher assessment-and-incentive mechanisms. Take grassroots-practice experience, practical-teaching outcomes and research achievements on grassroots law-based construction as core indicators for professional-title evaluation and performance appraisal, so as to fully mobilize teachers' enthusiasm for grassroots-oriented research and practical teaching. Encourage teachers to carry out project research and case compilation on grassroots law-based construction, and convert grassroots practical

experience into teaching resources to feed classroom teaching. On the other hand, vigorously introduce off-campus practical teachers and build a part-time-teacher talent pool. Select outstanding grassroots judges, prosecutors, backbone staff from judicial offices, senior grassroots mediators and front-line practicing lawyers as off-campus tutors. Invite them to campus regularly to deliver special lectures, practical-experience seminars, case discussions and practical-training guidance, focusing on explaining practical skills, common post-related problems and front-line work experience in grassroots legal work. This will make up for the practical-experience shortcomings of in-house faculty and provide solid faculty support for high-quality delivery of grassroots legal talents ^[15].

4. Conclusion

Accurate supply of grassroots legal talents serves as an important foundation for consolidating grassroots law-based construction and advancing comprehensive law-based governance. As a core carrier for cultivating grassroots legal talents, legal education in local universities must pursue reform and innovation. Currently, legal education in local universities suffers from multiple dilemmas, including deviated training orientations, insufficient curriculum adaptability, and weak practical teaching, which severely restrict the supply quality of grassroots legal talents. Local universities shall respond to the demands of grassroots law-based construction and actively address regional talent-supply shortages. They shall resolve the mismatch between talent cultivation and post demands through multi-dimensional reforms including re-setting training orientations, optimizing curriculum systems, improving practical teaching and strengthening faculty building. Universities shall continuously deepen connotative reform of legal education, form localized and application-oriented characteristics for legal education, steadily output high-quality and well-adapted grassroots legal talents, and consolidate the talent foundation for modernization of grassroots social governance and grassroots law-based construction.

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