

Article

A Study on the Challenges Facing Young Teachers of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions in Ethnic and Frontier Regions, and Pathways for Enhancing Their Teaching Capabilities

Aizaiemu Ablikemu^{1,*}
¹ School of Marxism, Hotan University, Hotan, China

* Correspondence: Aizaiemu Ablikemu, School of Marxism, Hotan University, Hotan, China

Abstract: Higher education institutions in ethnic and frontier regions bear the special mission of fostering virtue and nurturing talent, promoting social harmony, and strengthening the sense of a shared national community through their ideological and political education courses. Whilst the recruitment of highly qualified young lecturers has injected new vitality into these courses, there remains a structural gap between their teaching capabilities and the specific educational needs of these frontier regions. This paper focuses on this specific demographic, analysing the core challenges they face, which include a lack of localised adaptation in theoretical teaching and notable practical shortcomings in the design and implementation of practical teaching modules. The study elucidates the underlying causes of these multifaceted challenges from three distinct analytical levels: the individual teacher level, the institutional organisation level, and the broader socio-institutional environment level. Furthermore, it proposes a comprehensive, three-pronged improvement pathway comprising individual empowerment, targeted institutional support, and robust institutional safeguards. This strategic framework aims to forge a high-calibre team of ideological and political education teachers perfectly suited to the unique needs of frontier regions. Ultimately, these targeted interventions will significantly enhance the overall relevance, pedagogical effectiveness, and long-term societal impact of these crucial educational courses for students in the western regions of China.

Keywords: higher education; political education; teaching competence; regional adaptation; teacher development

Received: 19 July 2026

Revised: 29 August 2026

Accepted: 13 September 2026

Published: 20 September 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

National educational authorities have issued important instructions on the development of ideological and political education courses in schools, emphasising that on the new journey of the contemporary era, the development of these courses faces new circumstances and new tasks, and must therefore demonstrate a new spirit and achieve new results. It is evident that senior leadership has set high standards for ideological and political theory courses in higher education institutions; however, at the same time, it is widely recognized that the key to delivering high-quality ideological and political theory courses lies fundamentally with the teachers. Higher education institutions in culturally diverse and frontier regions are at the forefront of ideological work and education on social cohesion; the effectiveness of their ideological and political theory courses and the teaching capabilities of their teaching staff are directly linked to the depth with which the fundamental task of fostering virtue and nurturing talent is implemented in these specific geographic and cultural contexts. Educators delivering ideological and political theory courses in these regions not only undertake the important task of cultivating talent for society and serving the local economy, but also bear the historical responsibility of

promoting and preserving local cultural heritage. Recent national policy frameworks explicitly state that educational institutions must fully implement comprehensive educational policies, fulfil the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education, and cultivate future builders and successors who are well-rounded in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labour education. This policy direction explicitly emphasises the paramount importance of fostering virtue and nurturing talent across all levels of the educational system. In the multi-ethnic social context of the nation's frontier regions, ideological and political education courses in higher education institutions are entrusted with profoundly important political and strategic functions that significantly transcend the basic scope of general knowledge transfer. Teachers are widely regarded as the engineers of the human soul and the primary guides for students; they should, and indeed must, regard fostering virtue and nurturing talent as their core professional pursuit, uphold lofty professional ethics, and carefully nurture the future generations of the nation. As the backbone of higher education in frontier regions, universities in culturally diverse frontier areas play a pivotal role; the effectiveness of their ideological and political education directly influences the civic qualities and value orientations of future builders of these frontier regions, and underpins the ideological foundations of regional stability and social harmony. Whilst there is currently a considerable body of academic research on the teaching capabilities of young lecturers delivering ideological and political education courses in higher education institutions, systematic research specifically targeting culturally diverse and frontier regions remains relatively scarce. Specifically, scholarly investigations delving deeply into the intrinsic relationship between regional adaptability and pedagogical capabilities are notably lacking in the current literature. Existing research largely focuses on general teaching skills or macro-level educational policies, thereby leaving a significant gap in the literature [1, 2]. It lacks precise theoretical analysis of the unique challenges faced by young lecturers in multi-ethnic and multicultural environments. These challenges include the complex localisation and adaptation of abstract theory, the nuanced promotion of cross-cultural values, and the frequent lack of localized contextual knowledge among newly appointed faculty. Consequently, the current body of research is not adequately aligned with the strategic requirements for the comprehensive development of ideological and political education in frontier regions, necessitating a more focused and context-specific academic inquiry to address these critical pedagogical deficits and to provide actionable insights for institutional administrators and educational policymakers seeking to enhance instructional quality in these unique environments. Furthermore, understanding the specific pedagogical dynamics within these geographically and culturally distinct areas is essential for developing targeted professional development programs. By examining the intersection of regional cultural contexts and instructional methodologies, future studies can offer robust empirical evidence to support the continuous improvement of teaching practices. This comprehensive approach will ultimately ensure that educational initiatives are both culturally resonant and academically rigorous, thereby fulfilling the broader societal objectives of educational equity and regional development [3–5].

2. Key Characteristics of the Challenges Facing Young Teachers of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions in Ethnic and Frontier Regions

2.1. Theoretical Teaching Dimension

At the level of theoretical teaching, young lecturers at universities in multi-ethnic and frontier regions demonstrate a solid grounding in textual analysis and theoretical interpretation, possessing the fundamental academic competencies required for rigorous higher education instruction. However, their core pedagogical challenge lies in a generally weak capacity for localised adaptation and contextualized knowledge delivery. During the instructional process, whilst these educators are able to clearly map out the logical framework of the foundational theoretical systems and accurately convey the core tenets of state-level policy directives, they often fail to successfully and creatively transform

these universal academic principles into concrete, relatable narratives. Specifically, they struggle to link abstract concepts to the unique regional context of multi-ethnic and peripheral areas and the distinct lived experiences of their students. This profound disconnect between abstract theory and local practice results in teaching content that lacks a down-to-earth quality and a sense of real-world relevance, ultimately making it exceedingly difficult to evoke deep cognitive resonance and a sense of shared values among the student body [6, 7]. Furthermore, this pedagogical gap often leads to reduced student engagement, increases cognitive load, and severely limits the internalization of core academic values. At the same time, there is a marked tendency towards an unstructured, take-it-as-it-comes approach in the selection and application of instructional case studies. Instructors exhibit a persistent habit of citing generic examples directly from standard textbooks or utilizing typical cases from developed interior provinces, whilst failing to sufficiently explore or effectively utilise vivid, localized stories that have occurred within the community and reflect the historic, socio-economic transformations of diverse ethnic frontier areas. This methodological oversight results in a severe disconnect between the chosen case studies and the underlying theory, thereby significantly weakening the penetrating power, analytical depth, and overall persuasiveness of theoretical teaching [8–10]. When students cannot see their own cultural and regional realities reflected in the curriculum, the educational impact is substantially diminished, leading to superficial learning outcomes. Overall, theoretical teaching in these specific contexts has, to a certain extent, become detached from the learners' realities, characterized by being high in intellect but low in warmth, and highly logical but lacking in emotional resonance. This structural imbalance severely hinders the full realisation of the theoretical appeal and transformative potential that ideological and political education courses ought to possess, highlighting an urgent need for targeted pedagogical training focused on culturally responsive teaching methodologies, narrative pedagogy, and localized curriculum development to bridge the existing educational divide and foster a more inclusive academic environment that truly resonates with the diverse student demographics present in these unique geographical and cultural settings. Such comprehensive instructional reforms are essential for ensuring that theoretical frameworks are not merely memorized, but are deeply integrated into the students' worldview and practical understanding.

2.2. Practical Teaching Dimension

Ideological and political education courses emphasize the integration of theoretical instruction with real-world application to foster holistic student development. This pedagogical approach seeks to deepen learners' understanding of societal structures, historical trajectories, and contemporary developmental patterns through experiential learning modalities [6, 11]. Practical teaching encompasses a range of structured activities—including field investigations, community engagement projects, simulation-based exercises, case study analyses, and collaborative problem-solving tasks—that collectively bridge abstract concepts with observable social phenomena. Such methods enable students to critically examine national conditions, assess regional developmental disparities, reflect on institutional mechanisms, and develop socially responsible perspectives. In particular, hands-on experiences in diverse socioeconomic contexts help cultivate empathy, ethical reasoning, civic awareness, and professional readiness. However, empirical observations indicate that university instructors—especially early-career faculty in ethnic minority regions and geographically remote frontier areas—face systemic constraints in designing and implementing high-quality practical instruction. These challenges stem from multiple interrelated factors: limited access to standardized pedagogical training in experiential learning methodologies; insufficient institutional support for curriculum innovation and resource allocation; logistical difficulties in organizing off-campus activities due to geographic isolation or infrastructural limitations; and gaps in mentorship networks that could facilitate knowledge transfer across generations of educators. Furthermore, assessment frameworks often prioritize

traditional written outputs over process-oriented competencies, discouraging sustained investment in practice-integrated course design. Addressing these shortcomings requires coordinated efforts—including targeted professional development programs, modular teaching toolkits adaptable to local contexts, inter-institutional collaboration platforms, and revised evaluation criteria that recognize the complexity and value of applied learning. Strengthening this dimension is essential not only for enhancing pedagogical effectiveness but also for nurturing well-rounded graduates equipped with analytical rigor, contextual sensitivity, and constructive social agency.

2.3. At the Institutional Level

At a broader institutional and environmental level, systemic factors shape the professional practice and developmental trajectories of young faculty members in higher education institutions. Among these, the design and implementation of evaluation and incentive mechanisms exert profound influence on academic behavior and pedagogical priorities. Contemporary faculty evaluation and academic promotion frameworks across many universities continue to emphasize research output—such as publications in indexed journals, research grants secured, and disciplinary recognitions—while assigning comparatively limited weight to core teaching competencies, including instructional design proficiency, classroom facilitation effectiveness, student engagement strategies, and evidence-based assessment practices. Concurrently, early-career academics routinely shoulder substantial teaching responsibilities, often delivering multiple courses per semester across diverse student cohorts; their daily schedules are densely structured, leaving minimal discretionary time for scholarly inquiry or reflective pedagogical development [10, 12]. As a result, they face persistent trade-offs: insufficient time to conceptualize, execute, and disseminate original research; limited opportunity to revise curricula in response to evolving disciplinary knowledge or student learning analytics; and scarce capacity to engage in sustained professional learning related to innovative teaching methodologies. This dynamic reinforces a self-perpetuating pattern wherein high teaching loads constrain research productivity, which in turn limits eligibility for advancement under current promotion criteria, further discouraging investment in long-term pedagogical growth. Within such an evaluation paradigm that disproportionately privileges research achievement, some junior lecturers feel compelled to reallocate effort away from thorough lesson preparation and classroom refinement toward activities with clearer advancement utility. Consequently, instruction may become procedural rather than transformative: syllabi remain static across semesters, teaching materials lack contextual adaptation, and classroom discourse seldom integrates regionally grounded examples or locally resonant case studies. Ideological and political education—when delivered without deliberate linkage to the lived experiences, cultural traditions, and socioeconomic realities of students in western regions of China—risks becoming abstract, decontextualized, and pedagogically inert. Such delivery fails to foster critical reflection, diminishes student motivation, and undermines the integrative mission of holistic education. From a wider ecosystem perspective, structural linkages between universities and their surrounding communities remain underdeveloped. Institutions in frontier and western regions have not yet institutionalized stable, reciprocal, and mutually accountable partnerships with local Party and government agencies, industry stakeholders, cultural heritage organizations, grassroots civil society groups, and nationally designated patriotic education venues. The establishment of experiential learning sites tends to occur on an ad hoc basis, lacking longitudinal planning, shared governance models, or standardized quality assurance protocols. Mechanisms for systematically identifying, evaluating, and integrating high-caliber community-based educational assets—such as oral histories, archival collections, fieldwork opportunities, or practitioner expertise—into formal curricula remain fragmented and under-resourced. Young lecturers frequently encounter resource scarcity not due to institutional neglect, but because systemic pathways for accessing, adapting, and sustaining external educational inputs have not been codified. Furthermore, discipline-specific scholarly

communities focused on ideological and political education—particularly those oriented toward regional differentiation, multilingual pedagogy, or intercultural curriculum design—remain nascent. Opportunities for sustained, peer-led dialogue among early-career educators across western and ethnic minority regions are infrequent, and national-level forums for sharing context-sensitive innovations in teaching practice are underutilized. This absence of robust professional networks constrains collective sense-making, impedes cross-institutional learning, and limits exposure to alternative pedagogical paradigms, ultimately narrowing the scope of instructional imagination and reducing the likelihood of scalable, evidence-informed teaching reform.

3. An Integrated Approach to Enhancing the Teaching Capabilities of Young Ideological and Political Education Lecturers at Universities in Ethnic and Frontier Regions

3.1. Strengthening Individual Self-Empowerment to Lay a Solid Foundation for the Teaching Capabilities of Early-Career Lecturers

Early-career academics must proactively break free from the traditional confines of established academic habitus, moving beyond a purely theoretical research mindset to embrace a more applied and contextually grounded pedagogical approach. It is essential for these educators to deeply integrate fundamental theoretical frameworks with the specific, localized practices found in ethnic and frontier regions. By adopting this integrated methodology, they can effectively overcome the persistent dilemma of academic theory becoming detached from practical reality. To achieve this, educators must actively engage with frontier societies and conduct regular, immersive field research. This involves delving directly into local villages, diverse communities, regional enterprises, and historical education centers to gather empirical insights [13]. Furthermore, they must systematically study the rich historical context of diverse cultural frontier regions, examining the historical facts of cultural interaction, exchange, and integration among various populations. This comprehensive investigation should also encompass local development achievements, traditional folk culture, and the specific contextual realities of their students' daily lives. By embedding these localized narratives and empirical observations into their curriculum, early-career lecturers can significantly enhance the relevance and impact of their teaching. This approach not only bridges the gap between abstract concepts and tangible societal developments but also fosters a deeper, more empathetic understanding among students. Ultimately, such a robust, field-oriented strategy empowers educators to cultivate a highly responsive and dynamic learning environment, ensuring that their instructional methods are continuously refined by the authentic socio-cultural and economic dynamics of the regions they serve, thereby elevating the overall quality and effectiveness of higher education in these unique geographical contexts. Additionally, this immersive pedagogical model encourages continuous professional reflection, allowing instructors to adapt their instructional strategies in real-time based on direct community feedback. By prioritizing experiential learning and community engagement, educators can transform abstract academic principles into actionable knowledge that resonates profoundly with the lived experiences of their student body. This holistic integration of field-based research and classroom instruction ultimately cultivates a more inclusive, culturally responsive, and academically rigorous educational ecosystem, which is indispensable for the sustained intellectual and professional growth of both the teaching faculty and the diverse student populations they are dedicated to serving.

3.2. Optimising the School's Training System and Establishing a Support Platform for the Professional Development of Young Teachers

Firstly, pre-service training is systematically redesigned to reflect the unique socio-educational landscape of frontier regions, with deliberate integration of foundational content areas including national ethnic policies, regional historical narratives, cross-cultural pedagogical strategies, and contextually grounded case studies derived from

local educational practice. This orientation ensures that incoming teachers develop both conceptual understanding and practical familiarity with the sociocultural dimensions of teaching in diverse, often multilingual and multiethnic communities. Senior practitioners with extensive experience in ideological and political education within frontier contexts—particularly those who have demonstrated sustained effectiveness in classroom implementation—are regularly engaged as master trainers [1]. Their contributions include interactive workshops, reflective debriefings, and scenario-based simulations, all aimed at accelerating professional socialisation and reducing the initial adaptation period for novice educators. Secondly, in-service professional development adopts a diagnostic and responsive approach, beginning with structured capability assessments to identify discipline-specific and context-specific gaps in instructional design, classroom management, values-integrated pedagogy, and intergroup communication competence. Based on these findings, targeted training modules are delivered through sustained, cyclical cycles rather than one-off workshops; topics encompass localized curriculum adaptation, experiential learning design for rural and border-area schools, evidence-informed value-guidance methodologies, and pedagogical approaches that foster mutual understanding and cohesion among students from varied ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Delivery modalities prioritise active learning: lesson study protocols, co-teaching triads, video-based microteaching analysis, and collaborative action research projects conducted within participants' own school settings. Thirdly, a dynamic, multi-tiered platform for professional exchange and mentorship has been institutionalised. Selected young teachers participate in structured immersion programmes at leading universities in central and eastern provinces, where they observe curriculum development processes, engage in peer-led pedagogical seminars, and analyse institutional support mechanisms for teacher growth. Concurrently, a formalised paired mentoring system connects each participant with both nationally recognised scholars in ideological and political education and exemplary local practitioners whose work exemplifies culturally responsive, place-based excellence. This dual-mentor model facilitates triangulated feedback, encourages critical reflection on theory–practice alignment, and cultivates a sustainable professional learning community anchored in both national educational standards and regional educational wisdom.

4. Conclusion

Enhancing the teaching capabilities of young lecturers in ideological and political education at higher education institutions located in ethnic and frontier regions constitutes a strategic priority with far-reaching implications for institutional pedagogical quality, curricular responsiveness, and long-term educational sustainability. This study systematically investigates the multifaceted dimensions of teaching capability—encompassing subject-matter mastery, pedagogical adaptability, intercultural communicative competence, contextual awareness of regional sociolinguistic environments, and reflective instructional practice. The analysis identifies persistent structural constraints, including limited access to discipline-specific professional development opportunities, insufficient mentorship infrastructure tailored to frontier contexts, disparities in digital pedagogical resources, and challenges in aligning standardized curricular frameworks with locally grounded epistemologies and lived student experiences. Furthermore, the transition from theoretical academic preparation to effective classroom enactment is shown to involve not only skill acquisition but also identity reconfiguration—where lecturers must integrate scholarly knowledge with place-based pedagogical judgment, ethical responsiveness, and sustained engagement with community-anchored learning ecologies. The developmental trajectory examined here moves beyond generic teacher training models to foreground context-sensitive scaffolding mechanisms: iterative co-teaching arrangements, longitudinal peer observation cycles supported by calibrated feedback protocols, curriculum co-design initiatives involving local educators and community stakeholders, and sustained reflective practice communities grounded in action research principles. Future efforts

must prioritize longitudinal capacity-building architectures rather than episodic interventions, embedding evaluation not solely in output metrics but in qualitative indicators of pedagogical agency, relational trust, and adaptive curriculum implementation. As higher education systems continue evolving, the refinement of such contextually embedded, empirically informed, and ethically grounded approaches will be essential—not only for strengthening ideological and political education as an academic domain but more broadly for advancing equitable, inclusive, and resilient teaching practices across diverse geographical and cultural settings.

References

1. J. P. Euben, *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
2. D. Sunshine Hillygus, "The missing link: Exploring the relationship between higher education and political engagement," *Political Behavior*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 25–47, 2005.
3. M. Persson, "Education and political participation," *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 689–703, 2015.
4. A. J. Perrin and A. Gillis, "How college makes citizens: Higher education experiences and political engagement," *Socius*, vol. 5, p. 2378023119859708, 2019.
5. N. Emler and E. Frazer, "Politics: The education effect," *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 25, no. 1–2, pp. 251–273, 1999.
6. D. Bromwich, *Politics by Other Means: Higher Education and Group Thinking*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.
7. S. M. Lipset and P. G. Altbach, "Student politics and higher education in the United States," *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 320–349, 1966.
8. P. G. Altbach, P. J. Gumpert, and R. O. Berdahl, Eds., *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges**. Baltimore, MD: JHU Press, 2011.
9. C. D. Kam and C. L. Palmer, "Reconsidering the effects of education on political participation," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 70, no. 3, pp. 612–631, 2008.
10. C. Martin, *The Right to Higher Education: A Political Theory*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2022.
11. C. P. Loss, *Between Citizens and the State: The Politics of American Higher Education in the 20th Century**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011.
12. G. Rhoades, "Political competition and differentiation in higher education," in *Differentiation Theory and Social Change*, pp. 187–221, 1990.
13. S. Marginson, "Public/private in higher education: A synthesis of economic and political approaches," *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 43, no. 2, pp. 322–337, 2018.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of Publisher and/or the editor(s). Publisher and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.