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Exploring the construction of a professionalized teaching workforce

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Abstract

To realize an education-powered nation, enhancing teachers' professional competence is imperative. This study proposed a framework for teacher professionalization centered on three dimensions:

- Strengthening professional ethics and conduct,
- Advancing pedagogical expertise , and
- Improving social status and welfare safeguards.

Furthermore, we introduce a closed-loop management mechanism (CLMM) for teacher competency development, comprising five interconnected systems: selection-training-monitoring-assessment-feedback. This integrated approach aims to systematically cultivate a highly professionalized teaching workforce.

Teachers, as the primary practitioners of education and the cornerstone of pedagogical work, constitute the fundamental determinant of educational quality. Only with high-caliber educators can high-quality education be realized. The *Outline for Building a Strong Education Nation (2024-2035)* has prioritized the "enhancement of teachers professional competencies"as a crucial mandate, thereby establishing new missions, tasks, and requirements for teacher workforce development. Guided by practical needs and existing challenges in teacher development, this initiative aims to cultivate a highly qualified and professional teaching force, thereby providing substantial support for the construction of an education-powered nation. (The author considers this section to be background information and recommends its deletion.)

Keywords: Teacher workforce development; Professionalization; Education-powered nation;Teacher Development Strategy; management mechanism

1. Introduction

Teachers, as the primary practitioners of education and the cornerstone of pedagogical work, constitute the fundamental determinant of educational quality. Only with high-caliber educators can high-quality education be realized. The *Outline for Building a Strong Education Nation (2024-2035)（State Council of China, 2024）* has prioritized the "enhancement of teachers' professional competencies" as a crucial mandate, thereby establishing new missions, tasks, and requirements for teacher workforce development. Guided by practical needs and existing challenges in teacher development, this initiative aims to cultivate a highly qualified and professional teaching force, thereby providing substantial support for the construction of an education-powered nation. This paper will conduct an in-depth investigation into the requirements for professionalizing the teaching workforce. Building upon this foundation, it will elaborate in detail on methods for developing a professionalized teaching corps, aiming to provide insights for enhancing teacher competency and ultimately achieving the goals of high-quality educational development.

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2. Requirements for the Professionalization of the Teaching Workforce

2.1. Upholding Exemplary Professional Ethics to Reinforce Educators' Accountability

Teacher ethics refers to educators' moral character, while professional conduct encompasses their behavioral demeanor in pedagogical practice. Together, they constitute the fundamental professional standards and primary criteria for assessing teacher quality.An exemplary educator must possess three essential attributes:(1)Firm Ideals and Convictions.A teacher's correct ideals and beliefs serve as guiding beacons for educating students and shaping the future. Educators must maintain strong national consciousness and clearly recognize their state-mandated mission and social responsibilities. (2) Exemplary Moral Integrity.Outstanding teachers should epitomize moral education and ethical behavior. This requires wholehearted dedication to the teaching profession, serving as role models who lead by example to guide students in navigating life's directions.(3)Profound Compassion.Educator's love should encompass passion for teaching, care for students, and appreciation for all virtuous matters. Teachers must invest genuine warmth and emotional commitment into every student, fulfilling their dual responsibility of knowledge transmission and moral cultivation through respectful understanding and tolerant mentorship (People's Daily Onlin, 2014).

Teachers' fundamental duty and mission lie in fostering students' holistic growth. Every educator must undertake the critical responsibility of moral education, aligning their professional roles with students' developmental stages. This involves cultivating students' ideals and convictions, patriotic values, moral character, perseverance, physical well-being, aesthetic literacy, and practical skills.Regardless of their position, rank, or specific duties, teachers must demonstrate genuine care, emotional warmth, and transformative guidance—core tenets of professional ethics and indispensable obligations. The intellectual and emotional maturation of students emerges through educators' unwavering dedication, selfless mentorship, and patient nurturing, ultimately enabling them to shine with excellence.

2.2. Strengthening Teaching Competence and Enhancing Professional Value

A distinguished educator must possess qualifications and professional capabilities that align with the demands of their role. As the saying goes, "To forge iron, one must be strong." An excellent teacher requires profound subject-matter expertise—a fundamental prerequisite for effective instruction. If educators lack sufficient knowledge breadth and depth, their teaching will inevitably fall short, let alone achieve mastery. Teachers must boldly innovate in educational philosophy, instructional models, and pedagogical methods to ensure continuous professional growth(People's Daily Online,2016).

Different teaching roles demand distinct competencies. Every educator should clarify their responsibilities, setting clear goals for systematic skill enhancement. However, some teachers still fall short of contemporary talent-development objectives, particularly in creating individualized growth platforms for students—a critical expectation in modern education(wang,2025).

2.3. Enhancing Teachers' Social Status and Welfare to Promote Professional Well-being

Teachers' social status can be analyzed through four dimensions: professional standing, economic status, political influence, and occupational prestige. As professionals dedicated to pedagogical duties, teachers' economic status is reflected in their salary and benefits, while their societal impact and political standing derive from public perception of their social value. Occupational prestige stems from widespread recognition of the profession's worth. Elevating teachers' status requires a systematic approach, demanding national strategies that acknowledge education's role in economic development and national prosperity.

Teachers' social status and welfare benefits are intrinsically linked to their professional well-being. In recent years, China has implemented comprehensive reforms to enhance teachers' overall conditions: Economically, sustained national investment has significantly improved teacher compensation packages. Professionally, the education system has strengthened the integration between pre-service training and in-service development, particularly elevating the competencies of primary/secondary educators, with special emphasis on rural teaching staff. Regarding social standing, policymakers have established parity between teachers and civil servants through comparable management policies, while continuously refining the scientific rigor and fairness of teacher certification systems. Notable initiatives include the creation of national teaching honors, prioritized healthcare access, sabbatical leave provisions, and cultural campaigns promoting respect for educators. These coordinated policy measures collectively form a robust support system that ensures teachers' quality of life while fostering their career fulfillment, personal happiness, and societal recognition.

3. Strengthening Teacher Professionalization in Alignment with Educational Principles

Education serves as the fundamental catalyst for the continuity and advancement of human society, while teachers constitute the vital nexus bridging cultural inheritance and civilizational progress. As the principal agents of education, teachers represent the foremost resource in educational reform and development. It is therefore imperative to prioritize teacher workforce development as a foundational undertaking in building robust education systems.

The advent of artificial intelligence has precipitated a sophisticated reconfiguration of teacher roles through technological augmentation. Digital competence has emerged as an indispensable core literacy for contemporary educators, significantly influencing both the scope of professional development and—more crucially—the cultivation of students' digital literacy and future societal adaptability (ZhangandLi,2025). Whereas teachers traditionally served as omnipresent orchestrators of the entire pedagogical process (designing curricula, delivering instruction, creating assessments, and evaluating outcomes), AI and multimedia technologies now permit the delegation of certain functions to automated systems. This shift has refined educators' primary focus to strategic planning and knowledge mediation, while allowing specialized technologies to assume more standardized operational roles. Nevertheless, teachers' fundamental importance remains unshaken: Irreplaceable Mentorship: No technology can replicate teachers' profound influence on students' spiritual and intellectual development. Cognitive Cultivation Gap: AI's capabilities are restricted to basic pattern recognition and task execution, proving inadequate for nurturing critical thinking ,solving ill-structured real-world problems,developing collaborative interpersonal skills,facilitating nuanced understanding of societal complexities,require human guidance.

4. Multi-pronged Strategies for Achieving Professionalization of the Teaching Workforce

Teacher professionalization refers to the process through which the teaching profession progressively meets established professional standards, evolves into a specialized occupation, and attains recognized professional status. As one of the most prominent topics in global education discourse, enhancing teacher professionalism has been universally adopted as a fundamental objective in teacher education policies worldwide. This professionalization is primarily manifested through the development of advanced professional competencies, encompassing professional commitment (dedication to educational ideals), specialized knowledge (disciplinary mastery and pedagogical expertise), and professional skills (instructional capabilities and reflective practice). From an administrative perspective, establishing a professionalized teaching workforce requires implementing a closed-loop management system comprising five key mechanisms: rigorous selection criteria, comprehensive training programs, continuous monitoring processes, performance evaluation systems, and feedback-driven improvement cycles, forming an integrated professional development ecosystem.

4.1. Strengthen entry requirements for the teaching workforce and enhance the teacher recruitment mechanism

Teacher recruitment serves as the critical entry point to the teaching profession and is a central mechanism for building and optimizing the teaching workforce. Its primary function is to select qualified candidates capable of fulfilling the responsibilities of teaching positions. In China, teacher recruitment standards and requirements vary significantly across different educational levels, including preschool, primary/secondary schools, and higher education institutions.

Preschool and primary/secondary school teachers are selected through open public recruitment, adhering to the principles of "integrating moral integrity and professional competence" as well as "openness, equality, competition, and merit-based selection." Candidates are not limited to graduates from teacher-training programs; non-teacher-training graduates who meet the eligibility criteria compete on an equal footing. Recruitment is typically organized by government bodies such as the Education Bureau and the Bureau of Human Resources and Social Security. Basic requirements generally include a teaching qualification certificate and a Mandarin proficiency certification.

Since the year 2000, China's higher education institutions have gradually implemented reforms in faculty appointment systems, abolishing lifelong tenure and triggering significant institutional changes. Universities themselves act as the organizers and implementers of faculty recruitment, primarily targeting teaching and research positions. Faculty members are expected not only to teach but also to engage in academic research, embodying dual roles as both "academic professionals" and "social contributors." Their work encompasses both general labor and specialized academic labor. Consequently, the selection of university faculty involves evaluating both teaching competence and research capabilities, reflecting a multifaceted decision-making process. Compared to other professions, faculty appointment systems have more diverse expected outcomes.

Despite differences in recruitment systems across educational levels, there is a shared criterion: selecting candidates with teacher professional competence. This concept refers to a teacher's moral and ideological standards, as well as their proficiency in key skills essential to fulfilling education's societal functions—such as teaching, research, innovation, and community service. Scholars have developed various competency evaluation frameworks, constructing context-specific models for different educational levels and disciplines. These models assess both explicit and implicit indicators, including:

Personality traits and moral character,Educational background and research experience,Mastery of professional knowledge and skills,Communication and interpersonal abilities.In recent years, greater emphasis has been placed on evaluating candidates' professional ethics and teaching practicum experience during recruitment.

4.2. Enhancing the Educational Competence of Teachers and Improving Teacher Training Mechanisms

Teacher selection serves as the critical entry point for building a high-quality teaching workforce, while teacher training acts as the primary mechanism for enhancing its overall competence. As a vital form of professional learning, teacher training facilitates both the specialization and professionalization of educators, thereby elevating the comprehensive quality of the teaching force.

Since 2010, China has implemented the "National Training Program for Primary and Secondary School Teachers" on a nationwide scale. This initiative has established a five-tier training system encompassing national, provincial, municipal, county (district), and school-level programs. It has significantly strengthened the multifaceted competencies of primary and secondary school teachers, with particular emphasis on supporting educators in rural areas, as well as those in compulsory education schools and kindergartens located in remote and impoverished regions of central and western China.

For higher education faculty, training is typically organized by entities such as professional degree education steering committees and individual universities. Steering committee-led training often focuses on discipline-specific pedagogical methods, while university-organized programs cover a broader spectrum, including:Comprehensive training (e.g., orientation for new faculty, mentor certification programs),Specialized training (e.g., teaching and research skills, academic development, student advising),Notably, the content, scope, and effectiveness of such training vary considerably across institutions.

The training content for teaching staff across different educational levels primarily encompasses the interpretation of key policy documents, the cultivation of professional ethics and conduct, pedagogical competencies, and management communication methods—all closely aligned with teachers' career development. However, traditional teacher training systems face multiple challenges, including: vague profiling of trainees, generalized needs analysis, inappropriate training objectives, lack of precision in content matching, misaligned training scenarios, and diminishing effectiveness in practical application transfer(WangandLi,2022).With the advancement of internet technologies and instructional methods, teacher training has evolved from solely offline in-person instruction to a diverse array of formats combining online and offline approaches, including case study seminars, group interactions, and academic lectures. During China's 14th Five-Year Plan period, precision training has been proposed as a crucial innovative approach for teacher development. This involves utilizing software tools to generate professional self-portraits for teachers, based on which targeted training programs are developed according to the self-portrait indicator system (Yan,2025).

4.3. Strengthening Supervision and Management of Teacher Work Processes: Implementing Teacher Accountability Mechanisms

The primary role of teachers is to educate and nurture students through classroom instruction. Course teaching involves curriculum plans, standards, and teaching materials, which are further implemented through detailed syllabic and lesson designs. Effective teaching requires not only thorough preparation but also careful management of the instructional process to ensure the realization of pedagogical objectives. Educational supervision, as a specialized teaching practice and instructional management activity, has always been valued by universities. In many developed countries, the evaluation results of educational supervision are directly used as the primary basis for school funding allocation (Zhang,Wu,Yan,2020).

At the preschool and primary/secondary levels, children's moral character, values, and behavioral habits are highly susceptible to external influences. Teachers, as the figures with the most prolonged contact and highest authority in students' lives, exert significant influence. This necessitates that educators not only deliver subject knowledge effectively but also consistently model appropriate behavior, guiding students through both instruction and personal example.

For university faculty, who balance both teaching and research responsibilities, the faculty appointment system should strike a measured balance in its regulatory approach. It should provide sufficient academic freedom to stimulate professional engagement while establishing clear teaching requirements and objectives, granting appropriate autonomy within defined parameters.

Current educational management systems have incorporated classroom observation mechanisms to evaluate and ensure teaching quality. This facilitates timely identification and resolution of issues in instruction and student development, thereby enhancing teaching effectiveness while safeguarding curricular values and direction.

4.4. Enhancing Teacher Evaluation and Incentive Systems: Diversifying Assessment Mechanisms

Existing appointment systems include clear provisions regarding faculty ranks and promotion criteria. Scientific and reasonable advancement mechanisms can motivate teachers to achieve higher instructional and academic accomplishments. To prevent complacency and "collective mediocrity," periodic review systems should be implemented, allowing underperforming teachers to transition to more suitable career paths. A positive work environment and comprehensive incentive systems for professional development should be established.

Significant disparities exist in turnover rates and teaching quality among preschool and primary/secondary teachers across different Chinese regions, closely tied to variations in appointment and evaluation systems. While demand for preschool teachers remains high, turnover rates are elevated. For primary/secondary teachers, substantial regional differences in compensation have led to severe shortages and attrition of young teachers in economically disadvantaged rural areas, resulting in workforce aging and structural imbalances (Pang et al., 2020).

Recent years have witnessed substantial reforms in higher education faculty appointment systems, including the implementation of "annual salary systems," "up-or-out policies," and "tenure-track arrangements" for newly hired teaching-research faculty. These policies provide probationary periods for junior faculty to adapt to teaching and research responsibilities while enabling institutions to assess faculty suitability, benefiting both parties by preventing chronic under-performance.

4.5. Establishing Teacher Feedback Mechanisms: Enhancing Support Systems Based on Identified Needs

Teacher motivation correlates strongly with self-efficacy, which requires objective self-reflection for proper development. Therefore, all educational levels should implement bidirectional feedback mechanisms: enabling teachers to receive student and peer evaluations to assess instructional effectiveness, while providing accessible channels for teachers to report professional challenges without undue burden.

Regarding compensation, multifaceted approaches should address not only salary levels but also social security, housing, and dependents' education policies. Comprehensive support systems that alleviate personal and familial concerns would significantly enhance the profession's appeal and teachers' overall well-being

5. Conclusion

This study investigates the critical factors in constructing a professionalized teaching workforce. The findings demonstrate that implementing a closed-loop management mechanism comprising five core modules - "selection, training, supervision, assessment, and feedback" - can effectively enhance teachers' professional competencies and improve educational quality. The research provides practical guidance for educational policymakers, while suggesting future exploration of teacher professionalization pathways across diverse cultural contexts.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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