

# Research on the Current Situation, Problems and Countermeasures of the Construction of University Teacher Development Centers

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**Abstract:** With the rapid development of higher education, teacher professional development has become a key factor in improving education quality. Over the past decade, China's university teachers' development center in the promotion of teacher professional development has achieved a certain result, but there are still problems such as the positioning is not clear, the service system is not perfect, the professional level is not high, the service effect is not obvious. This study takes 15 colleges and universities in China as examples, uses questionnaires and interviews to carry out investigation and research, and puts forward countermeasures and suggestions on strengthening the teacher development center to clarify its functional positioning, improve its organizational structure, strengthen resource construction, and establish an evaluation mechanism.

**Keywords:** Teacher development center; Role orientation; Teacher professional development; Countermeasure research

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## 1. Introduction

The core of higher education quality construction lies in teaching reform, innovation and improvement. University teachers are the main force of teaching reform, and the development of university teachers is the foundation of university quality construction<sup>[1]</sup>. As an important platform to support the professional growth of teachers, the teacher development center plays an increasingly important role in colleges and universities.

## 2. Achievements in the construction of teacher development centers in colleges and universities in China

In China, the background of the establishment of teacher development centers is closely related to national education reform and development. Since 2011, China's Ministry of Education has promoted the establishment of teacher-teaching development centers in universities to improve the quality of education and teaching and promote the professional development of teachers. In 2012, the Ministry of Education approved 30 university

centers as national demonstration centers for teacher-teaching development during the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan Period. It provided central financial support to guide colleges and universities in establishing teacher development centers that suit their characteristics <sup>[2]</sup>. Since then, the construction of university teacher development centers has gradually matured and begun to develop in the direction of specialization, institutionalization and scale.

Over the past ten years, the construction of several teacher development centers has achieved some results. For example, the Teacher Development Center of Xiamen University has built a “six-link” teacher development guarantee system with the guidance of high-level teaching and research and Central China Normal University Teacher Teaching Development Center case “dandelion-style” teacher teaching innovation support model. The Teacher Development Center of Wuhan Light Industry University “strives to build a new model of ‘12345’ teacher training and development”, and improves the professional development of teachers by innovating the teacher training model <sup>[3]</sup>. The Teacher Development Center of Xi’an Eurasia University builds a hierarchical and classified training system for teachers by constructing a model of “three-level training and certification based on student-centered,” and achieves the training effect through certification and inspection. These cases demonstrate the innovative practices of the University Teacher Development Center in enhancing teacher professional development, including new training models, international certification, teaching diagnostic tools, and the construction of teacher development support systems. Through these innovative practices, the University Teacher Development Center can better meet the diversified professional development needs of teachers and promote the improvement of teachers’ teaching ability.

### **3. Analysis of problems and causes in the construction of teachers’ development centers in domestic colleges and universities**

Although the teacher development work has achieved certain results, due to the short construction time and other factors, there are still problems such as imperfect institutional setup, single activity content and form, insufficient pertinence and individuation of services, insufficient specialization and academics, and imperfect evaluation mechanism. The specific problems and reasons are as follows.

#### **3.1. The institutional setup is not perfect**

Most school teacher development centers cannot operate independently as units directly under the school. According to the data from the survey of 15 university teacher development centers, only 5 are independently set up, the other 9 are affiliated with the academic affairs office or personnel office, and 1 is affiliated with the teacher work department of the Party Committee. The lack of clear policy guidance and support in the establishment of institutions leads to the lack of clarity in the organizational structure and functional positioning of the centers and the marginalization of departmental work. Chen *et al.* (2016) summarized the difficulties faced by the University Teacher Development Center as the constraints of the administrative university organization, the resistance of the research-based teacher evaluation system, the constraints of the silent teaching expertise, and the constraints of the small teaching and research department at the grass-roots level <sup>[4]</sup>.

#### **3.2. The content and form of activities are single**

Teacher training lacks systematic design, activity content is more traditional, cannot meet the needs of teachers, and training content is out of line with the actual needs of teachers. The forms are mainly training and lectures, lack diversification and interaction, do not meet the characteristics of adult learning, teachers passively accept,

and the effect is not good. Due to the lack of a professional training team, most of the training experts hired by other schools, do not know the actual situation of the school, teachers, and students, all these limit the depth and breadth of teacher professional development, affect the enthusiasm of teachers to participate in teaching and training effect.

### **3.3. Insufficient pertinence and individuation of service**

The service content of the teacher development center lacks pertinency and personalization, and cannot well meet the specific needs of different teacher groups. According to the seven application-oriented colleges and universities surveyed, teachers from the industry account for about 30%, and some of them come from other colleges and universities or training institutions. However, there is no personalized training for these teachers, and they are still unified into the general teacher training system. As the motivation and background differences of teachers involved in training are not fully considered, the teacher development services cannot meet the needs of specific groups.

### **3.4. Members are not professionalized and academic enough**

The professional and academic nature of the teacher development center is its core task, but at present, most of the teacher development centers are not outstanding in this aspect. From the 15 universities surveyed, most of the members of the teacher development center are administrative posts, with relatively few senior titles, and the center lacks professionals with related professional backgrounds such as pedagogy and psychology. In particular, in the 7 application-oriented colleges and universities, less than 30% of them are associate professors or above. The academic atmosphere for teacher development research and practice is not strong, and the culture of continuous professional development is lacking.

## **4. Reference to the teacher development experience of the University of Michigan and University of Oxford**

The construction and achievements of the teacher development Centers in Britain and the United States occupy an important position in the field of higher education. These centers have not only promoted the improvement of teachers' teaching ability but also promoted the overall improvement of education quality. Since the 1960s, the United Kingdom and the United States have established relatively scientific and complete systems and working systems for teacher development, providing teachers with rich learning resources, personalized services and professional research on teaching development by providing teaching training, seminars, consultation, guidance and evaluation and other supportive services.

### **4.1. Oxford Centre for Teacher Development: To promote excellence in learning, teaching and research at Oxford University**

The mission of the Oxford Centre for Teacher Development is to promote the University of Oxford to achieve excellence in learning, teaching and research through professional and professional management and policy development <sup>[5]</sup>.

#### **4.1.1. Clarity of purpose**

The development objectives of the Centre for Teacher Development of the University of Oxford are to achieve

the University of Oxford's goal of pursuing excellence in teaching, ensuring the quality of students' learning and education, and enhancing the teaching, scientific research level and strength of the University of Oxford through promoting the development of teachers' policies, the improvement of school management, professional advancement and scientific decision-making. To further consolidate the leading position of the University of Oxford in the field of world higher education <sup>[6]</sup>.

#### **4.1.2. The team members are professional and diverse**

Oxford University Teacher Development Center includes more than 20 full-time teachers, half of whom have a doctorate. The team members graduated from different universities, have different academic backgrounds and subject knowledge, and have rich experience in teaching and teaching management. They are respectively responsible for course training, project management operation and evaluation, and course plan management.

#### **4.1.3. Improve the training system**

At the teacher level, the center conducts systematic training for teachers at different stages of their personal career development; At the team level, the center provides teaching ability for the team through customized courses and follow-up consultation.

#### **4.1.4. Training to meet the needs of teachers**

Teaching ability training is carried out from the perspective of teachers' needs and difficulties. The center has both a systematic training system and training content for teachers at different stages of development. The training methods are flexible and combine online and offline. A learning community platform is built to promote teachers' mutual learning and communication, share teaching experiences, explore practical methods, and refine academic achievements <sup>[7]</sup>.

### **4.2. Center for Teacher Development at the University of Michigan: Promoting excellence and innovation in teaching**

In 1962, the University of Michigan took the lead in establishing the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), which became the earliest university teacher development institution in the United States <sup>[7]</sup>. CRLT puts learning in front of teaching, which also reflects an important development orientation of the University of Michigan's teaching, exerting great importance to students and placing students' learning in the scope of teachers' teaching <sup>[8]</sup>.

#### **4.2.1. Clear mission orientation**

CRLT was established to promote the teaching ability of university teachers and the implementation of effective teaching through the teaching and learning research teacher development project, and to promote programmed teaching <sup>[9]</sup>. After more than 60 years of development, the mission of the CRLT is to promote excellence and innovation in undergraduate teaching at the University of Michigan Secondary Colleges, to provide professional support to all members of the teaching community, to help them improve their teaching practice, and to build the teaching culture of the University of Michigan <sup>[10]</sup>.

#### **4.2.2. The institution is clearly defined**

CRLT belongs to the Office of the Provost, and the Teaching Advisory Committee directs the program activities,

resource allocation, research priorities, etc. carried out by the center, and directs and coordinates the contact with other departments and departments of the university. The CRLT has more than 10 full-time staff and more than 20 part-time staff, all of whom are experts from various disciplines and generally have doctoral degrees.

#### **4.2.3. Diversified program contents and forms**

CRLT has new teacher induction training, graduate assistant induction training, teacher seminars and workshops, teaching consultation, teaching evaluation, a teaching reform fund, and other programs. The programs serve a wide range of subjects, clearly classified, covering all kinds of groups related to teaching in the school, and diversified in content and form, taking into account the needs of different groups and teachers.

#### **4.2.4. The guarantee mechanism is perfect**

CRLT establishes a good communication and coordination mechanism with various departments of the school in the process of project design and implementation to ensure the smooth implementation of the project. The project design phase fully communicates with the school and department management to understand the specific needs of the school and department. During the project implementation phase, a resource bank of famous teachers and experts from all directions was established, which provided a guarantee for carrying out high-quality training.

### **5. Countermeasures and suggestions for the construction of China's teacher development center**

British and American universities have a long history, perfect teaching system, and relatively mature teacher development theories and institutions, combined with British and American experience and the current situation of teacher development centers in China, this paper puts forward the following countermeasures and suggestions to provide a reference for the construction of teacher development centers.

#### **5.1. Define the functional orientation**

What role the teacher development center plays in the promotion of teaching reform and innovation in colleges and universities determines what the teacher development center "should do," that is, how to position itself and what business it covers <sup>[11]</sup>. Through the word frequency analysis of 15 colleges and universities, the service probably involves teaching training, consulting, research, resource sharing, demonstration radiation, humanistic care, quality assessment, and policy suggestions of 8 types. Colleges and universities should clarify the positioning of teacher development centers, which are service support departments, functional management departments, or research departments. The positioning determines the service content and effect of teacher development.

#### **5.2. Design a systematic training system**

Because of the current situation that the training content is not rich, it cannot meet the needs of teachers, and teachers' participation is low, a comprehensive and systematic training system should be designed and linked with other departments in the school, such as training and teacher title evaluation and evaluation to enhance the enthusiasm of teachers' participation. Because young teachers in colleges and universities are generally faced with the pressure of "no scientific research and no professional title," it is difficult to devote themselves to teaching due to the limitation of time and energy <sup>[12]</sup>.

### **5.3. Improve the organization**

Perfect and sound organizational structure is the prerequisite and guarantee for the smooth development of teachers. Schools should be equipped with all professional teachers, and the center should have a clear and specific division of responsibilities to ensure that each staff gives full play to their professional strengths. The well-developed British and American teacher development center should have at least 10 members and some 20 members. Only when the members are professional can the activities be carried out effectively.

### **5.4. Develop different special projects**

Each college teacher development center should develop its unique programs to meet the needs of different groups. Both general training for teachers at different stages of development and advice and guidance for teachers with different interests, experiences and qualifications. Given the large number of female staff in universities, programs to help women gain access to senior positions and courses specifically for those with management needs could also be drawn from the experience of teacher development centers in the UK and the US <sup>[13]</sup>.

### **5.5. Strengthen teaching resources**

The establishment and improvement of the teaching resource library make full use of technology to enable education, mobilize the enthusiasm of teachers in the whole school, actively explore and apply information technology, provide rich teaching resources (including course evaluation, grading rules, interactive teaching and active learning, exercise learning, etc.) <sup>[14]</sup>, and improve teachers' information technology application ability.

### **5.6. Establishment of evaluation mechanism**

One is to adjust teacher evaluation methods at the school level and increase the proportion of teaching indicators. Almost all literatures on teacher motivation at home and abroad show that one of the main obstacles preventing teachers from actively participating in teaching is the tendency of “value scientific research over teaching” in teacher job evaluation <sup>[15]</sup>. Second, the teacher development center tracks the training effect in time to understand the application of teachers in teaching after they participate in learning and training. The third is to establish a set of scientific evaluation systems to evaluate and feedback the work of the center regularly to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the work of the center.

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## **Disclosure statement**

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