

# Professional Development of College English Teachers from the Perspective of Self-Education

Daoping Xu\*

Qingdao Huanghai University, Qingdao 266427, China

\*Corresponding author: Daoping Xu, 1012225721@qq.com

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**Abstract:** The English proficiency of college students is correlated with the professional development of college teachers. Self-education is a fundamental element of the professional development of college English teachers. The article describes the connotation, characteristics, and significance of self-education for the professional development of teachers. Besides, it describes effective strategies for the professional development of college English teachers under the threshold of self-education.

**Keywords:** Self-education; College English teachers; Professional development

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## 1. Introduction

The “Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teacher Team Construction in the New Era” stresses the need to “vigorously revitalize teacher education and continuously improve teachers’ competency.” While there are many forms of teacher education, its effectiveness highly depends on the teachers’ proactivity, i.e., self-education. This paper discusses in depth the professional development strategies of college English teachers from the perspective of self-education and provides new research ideas and research directions for teachers’ professional development.

## 2. Connotation and characteristics of self-education

### 2.1. Connotation of self-education

Essentially, self-education boils down to the act of educating oneself. The internal impetus serves as the foundational catalyst for change, forming the philosophical underpinning of self-education, while the subjective agency within human consciousness constitutes its psychological basis.

The concepts of education and self-learning have fundamental differences. The fundamental characteristic of education lies in its teacher-led and externally controlled nature in the process of cultural transmission and inheritance; whereas self-education, in contrast, is fundamentally characterized by self-control and self-

guidance in the absorption and inheritance of knowledge and culture. The former starts from the perspective of society as a whole, while the latter focuses on the individual within society <sup>[1]</sup>. Ye also believes that self-education is a conscious activity of individuals. Through self-education, individuals not only gain understanding and mastery of the external world but also of their internal world, becoming truly self-reliant individuals <sup>[2]</sup>. Dewey believes that the educational process has two aspects: one psychological and one sociological. They are equally important, and neither aspect should be neglected. Similarly, the same holds for self-education <sup>[3]</sup>.

Self-education is a dynamic structure consisting of four stages. Building upon self-awareness, one sets self-demands. Guided by these self-demands, one continuously engages in self-supervision, self-control, and self-adjustment throughout the process of practice, striving to achieve certain expected outcomes. Subsequently, one evaluates oneself based on one's own recognized values, forming a new understanding of oneself through this evaluation. Upon this new foundation, a new cycle of self-education begins, continuing the upward progression <sup>[4]</sup>.

## **2.2. Characteristics of self-education**

### **2.2.1. Initiative**

The primary characteristic of self-education is its initiative, manifested by a strong motivation for development. Developmental motivation is the fundamental driving force for individuals to actively pursue self-development and self-improvement, ultimately achieving developmental goals. At the same time, developmental motivation serves as a supportive condition for the smooth progress of self-education activities. It plays a role in initiating, directing, and sustaining the self-education process, while also enhancing and facilitating educational outcomes.

### **2.2.2. Subjectivity**

It is generally believed that the basic elements of education include the educator, the learner, and the educational influence. The educator is the subject of educational activities, while the learner is the object of educational practices. In self-education, the educational influence comes from oneself and is directed towards oneself. The individual is both the learner and the educator, possessing identity as both the subject and object of education. Based on self-awareness and autonomous thinking, individuals autonomously choose development goals, educational content, and learning strategies, manage the educational process independently, and ultimately achieve self-development. In the process of self-education, individuals' subjectivity and creativity are fully realized.

Educational activities consist of the bilateral process of teaching by the educator and self-learning by the learner. When the learner actively engages in their own education, it constitutes self-education <sup>[5]</sup>. Some scholars have proposed a composite subject theory, suggesting that the comprehensive internal relationship between educators and learners should involve mutual subject-object roles and conditions. It should not emphasize solely one party's influence over the other, avoiding rigid and absolute categorizations. As the learner's level of development increases, their agency increasingly manifests in self-education.

### **2.2.3. Self-control**

Self-education entails individuals educating themselves without external constraints or supervision. Compared to other forms of education, it emphasizes self-regulation. Self-regulation refers to the proactive adjustment and control of one's thoughts and behaviors by individuals to conform to social norms or achieve established goals. In the process of self-education, individuals, based on self-awareness and self-experience, effectively regulate their activities according to their needs and changes in the external environment, ultimately achieving the goals of self-education.

#### **2.2.4. Fundamental**

When it comes to individual development, external influences set the stage, but it is the internal drive that truly propels development forward. External education plays a crucial role in nurturing individuals, yet it's self-education that is essential for shaping one's identity. With an awareness of self-education, individuals actively seek out influences that foster their personal growth. Equipped with the ability to self-educate, individuals lay the foundation for their own development and refinement from within.

#### **2.2.5. Lifelong**

The lifelong nature of self-education is evident in its endurance and permanence compared to other forms of education, especially school education. Self-education, unlike formal schooling, persists and remains relevant throughout one's life. This lifelong aspect of self-education stems from two main factors. Firstly, the perpetual nature of individual development necessitates lifelong self-education. Secondly, while school, family, and societal education are constrained by time and location, self-education is not bound by such limitations. As long as individuals possess the capacity for self-education, the possibility of lifelong learning remains open regardless of time or place.

### **3. Significance of self-education for teachers' professional development**

#### **3.1. Self-education is the ideal state of teacher education**

Sukhomlinsky proposed that only education that can inspire students to engage in self-education is genuine education <sup>[7]</sup>. As for teacher education, we can think of this way: only education that can stimulate teachers to engage in self-education constitutes true teacher education. Moreover, the emphasis on student-centered education, individualized education, and constructivist education ideals reflects the ideal state of teacher education, where self-education is paramount. Understanding self-education scientifically holds both theoretical and practical significance, offering new directions for current reforms in teacher education.

#### **3.2. Self-education being the fundamental driving force for teachers' professional development**

Teacher education takes various forms and pathways, but for any form of teacher education to be effective, it fundamentally relies on teachers' proactive self-development and self-improvement—what we term as teachers' self-education. Only when teachers possess awareness and capability for self-education can they achieve genuine professional development. Therefore, the fundamental task of modern teacher education is to stimulate teachers' awareness of self-education and cultivate their ability for self-education. In today's era, individual self-education is particularly crucial. As stated, "self-education ability is the core of self-education" <sup>[8]</sup>, constituting a comprehensive combination of abilities necessary for effective self-education activities. Schools bear significant responsibility for nurturing individuals' self-education abilities. As the 19th-century British philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer remarked, "Remember that the proper aim of education is to cultivate an autonomous individual, not one who is dependent on others for direction" <sup>[9]</sup>.

#### **3.3. Self-education as a path to lifelong teacher education**

In the 1960s, French thinker Paul-Langevin proposed the idea of lifelong education, arguing that an individual's education should not be confined to formal schooling alone. Rather, it should be a continuous process of acquiring knowledge and skills throughout one's life. School education falls under the category of externally

controlled education, subject to constraints imposed by objective conditions. In contrast, self-education is internally driven, allowing individuals to engage in autonomous learning activities. This enables lifelong education for individuals. Therefore, to achieve lifelong education for teachers, it is essential to cultivate their ability for self-education. Lifelong education embodies the concept of self-learning and self-education. Its primary mission is to prepare future adults to engage in various forms of self-governance and self-learning. Moving forward, education should not be limited to fixed content that must be absorbed; instead, it should be seen as a human process. Within this process, individuals learn how to express themselves, communicate with others, explore the world, and continuously refine themselves throughout their lives <sup>[10]</sup>.

## **4. Professional development strategies for college English teachers under the threshold of self-education**

### **4.1. Establishing self-development awareness**

When it comes to the professional development of teachers, self-development awareness refers to the conscious planning of anticipated development goals by teachers due to their inherent need for professional growth. While teachers' development requires various avenues and forms of external education, it ultimately necessitates self-education to accomplish their own professional construction. Therefore, fostering self-development awareness is crucial for promoting teachers' professional development. University English teachers should cultivate self-development awareness and actively pursue their own professional growth.

### **4.2. Attaching importance to self-reflection**

Reflection is a vital process for teachers striving to reach higher developmental goals, involving active, thorough, and profound contemplation and assessment of their teaching, research, and overall well-being. For university English teachers, as they gain experience and update their knowledge throughout their teaching careers, ongoing reflection is crucial for achieving professional maturity. Through continuous reflection, English teachers can identify strengths and weaknesses in their teaching, analyze the underlying reasons, draw timely conclusions from their experiences, address shortcomings, refine teaching philosophies, improve classroom practices, and enhance the effectiveness of English teaching. In essence, teacher professional development is an ongoing cycle of teaching practice and reflection.

### **4.3. Self-improvement of professionalism**

Based on self-reflection, university English teachers can engage in autonomous development, including self-learning and independent research. Teachers can consciously plan their own development trajectory based on the general path of teacher development and their current developmental conditions, aiming for maximal self-development. Teachers should continuously enhance their learning, acquiring not only expertise in English language and teaching methods but also staying updated on new educational concepts and teaching strategies. Furthermore, teachers should strengthen their awareness of autonomous reflection and research, improving their research capabilities. They should learn to keenly identify research topics within their daily teaching practices, actively conduct research, and apply their research findings to English teaching, thereby promoting the simultaneous enhancement of both their English teaching and research capabilities.

### **4.4. Active borrowing**

Firstly, teachers must learn to tap into resources to enhance their teaching. University English educators should keep abreast of educational developments, continuously explore new teaching philosophies, and learn

from the advanced pedagogical methods and experiences of others. First off, observing classes is a potent method for English teachers, especially newcomers, to swiftly improve. Engaging in observation and sharing insights can effectively elevate teaching standards. Secondly, organizing regular teaching workshops for English faculty to exchange experiences, analyze and troubleshoot issues, and devise more effective teaching strategies can mutually enhance everyone's teaching prowess and professional growth. Furthermore, teachers should learn to leverage resources for research. The professional growth of university English instructors, particularly newcomers, heavily relies on the guidance of seasoned colleagues. These mentors, with higher levels of knowledge, extensive teaching experiences, and robust research capabilities—especially professors and experts—serve as invaluable guides. They possess deep insights into the intricacies of university English instruction, boast rich research backgrounds, and grasp cutting-edge theories. Teachers should actively seek guidance from these experts to swiftly grasp research methodologies and bolster their research acumen. Establishing research teams can foster the exchange of ideas among team members, leading to the discovery of new research pathways and continuous improvement in research capabilities. Moreover, English teachers should seize opportunities to participate in domestic and international academic conferences to stay abreast of the latest research findings and broaden their research horizons.

#### **4.5. Self-adjustment**

It is crucial for teachers to understand their role. University English teachers bear the responsibility of enhancing the English proficiency of various professionals, playing a vital role in cultivating well-rounded, outgoing, and practical talents. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate a strong sense of professional identity and pride. Secondly, university English teachers should strive to become practical, innovative, and research-oriented educators. Additionally, maintaining a positive and healthy psychological state is imperative. University English instructors should be passionate in teaching, contribute to talent development, and strive for professional growth. They should approach challenges with optimism, flexibility, and resilience, while effectively managing stress, overcoming professional burnout, and actively seeking self-adjustment

### **5. Conclusion**

This article elaborates on the essence, characteristics, and significance of self-education for the professional development of teachers. From the perspective of self-education, targeted strategies for the professional development of university English teachers are proposed. Only when English teachers achieve significant professional development can universities cultivate well-rounded, outgoing, and practical talents with both professional skills and excellent communication abilities.

#### **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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