

THE POLICY OF STRENGTHENING TEACHER FORCE IN BASIC EDUCATION IN THE NEW ERA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THREE-CIRCLE THEORY

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Abstract: "Strengthening Teacher force Plan" is a policy to strengthen teacher education for basic education in the new era. In the history of teacher education in China, the Strengthening Teacher Force Plan is a policy that attaches great importance to the quality of teacher education and the balanced development of teacher resources, emphasizing the balance of the quality of teacher education. According to the theory of three circles, the paper first analyzes the value of "Strengthening Teacher force Plan", including proportionality, high-quality and innovativeness. Secondly, it analyzes the support ability of the policy, from three aspects: human resources, financial resources and material resources. Finally, the support circle of the policy is analyzed from the local government, universities, schools and the public.

Keywords: Three-Circle Theory; Strengthening Teacher Force Plan; Teacher Education

Introduction

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the construction of our country's teaching staff has gone through five stages: the transformation of "Soviet-style teachers," difficulties and setbacks, restoration and adjustment, legal standardization, and targeted policies. Despite the twists and turns, under the leadership of Marxist ideology and in conjunction with the actual social development of China, our country has explored a distinctive path of teacher education. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, remarkable achievements have been made in teacher education: the scale of the teaching staff has been significantly expanded; the shortage of teachers in remote and poor areas has been effectively addressed; the educational attainment levels of teachers have been universally raised; and efforts have been made to cultivate educational leaders among teachers. Although these achievements in teacher education are fruitful, building a high-quality teaching staff that leads globally requires even greater efforts. Currently, as China marches toward its second centenary goal, Chairman Xi has emphasized that "strengthening the nation begins with strengthening education, and strengthening education must prioritize strengthening teachers." Strengthening teachers

means emphasizing the improvement of quality in teacher team construction and gradually shifting from extensive development to intensive development. Therefore, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China attaches great importance to the role of teachers in strengthening education. In recent years, China has issued a series of policies to promote the development of the teacher workforce. Among them, the "Strengthening Teacher Force in Basic Education in The New Era" (referred to as the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan") is an important policy jointly issued by eight departments including the Ministry of Education. It holds profound values and rich connotations, serving as a favorable lever for developing basic education in the new era. The "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" is a guiding document that answers how to construct a high-quality, professional, innovative teaching staff for primary and secondary schools in the new era. It has set a broad direction for regions and schools and outlined a new blueprint. Therefore, a deep understanding of the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" is an important step towards building a high-quality teaching staff for primary and secondary schools. The plan is guided by two-phase objectives and fifteen specific measures, aiming for both vertical developments to achieve high standards and horizontal development to achieve overall improvement of the teaching workforce. Since its issuance, analyzing the current status of implementation and identifying factors affecting its impact, as well as pinpointing problems in the implementation process, are crucial for ensuring the smooth implementation of the plan and its alignment with the established direction. Thus, this article adopts the Three-Stream Theory to analyze the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" which is a significant step in analyzing public policies.

Research Objectives

- (1) To analyze the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" from the perspective of three-circle theory.
- (2) To explore how a public policy is understood by society.
- (3) To explain the current situation of teachers' education in China.

Literature Review

Review of construction of teaching staff

Wang (2023) reviewed the development of teacher education in China, dividing its over 120-year history into four periods. The period from 1897 to 1921 was the Enlightenment Era of normal education, primarily modeled after Japan's initial normal education system. From 1922 to 1949 was the period of learning from the United States. During these first two periods, teacher education, like the entire educational system, developed amidst wars and turbulence, viewed as crucial for national survival rather than following internal developmental norms of normal education. From the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1950 until 1995, the country's normal education system exhibited

characteristics of turmoil and development. During this stage, China established a normal education system with Chinese characteristics. From 1996 to the present day, China's teacher education system has undergone transformation, successfully evolving from a relatively closed system to an open one, while simultaneously facing new opportunities and challenges.

Yu (2019) analyzed the 70-year history of China's teacher workforce construction, categorizing its evolution into five periods: "Soviet-style teachers" transformation, difficulties and setbacks, restoration and adjustment, legal standardization, and targeted policies. He pointed out issues in China's teacher workforce construction policies and regulations, including insufficient foresight and weak implementation. Rao (2023) divided the teacher education reforms since the mid-1990s into three periods: the "system reconstruction" period (early to mid-1990s - around 2005), the "content development" period (around 2005-2016), and the "revitalization and development" period (2017 to the present). He noted that after the "system reconstruction" and "content development" phases, China established a flexible and open teacher education system. However, reforms in teacher education did not effectively translate into improvements in quality until the revitalization phase, which primarily focuses on enhancing educational quality. Huang (2023) analyzed the policy texts of teacher workforce construction since the 21st century, finding that policy concepts evolved from role execution to responsibility undertakings, and from government oversight to network governance. Policy objectives shifted from constructing a high-quality professional team to enhancing the prestige and image of teachers. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the development of China's distinctive teacher education has entered a new pattern, shifting from extensive to intensive development.

In summary, the process of constructing China's teacher workforce has been quite tortuous. The Party, government, experts, and educators have gradually explored paths suitable for the development of China's teacher workforce based on practical circumstances. Currently, amidst unprecedented changes in a century, teacher education shoulders the arduous responsibility of strengthening the nation. Issues such as improving the quality of the teacher workforce, narrowing the urban-rural gap in teacher resources, and enhancing the prestige and status of teachers are all pressing concerns.

Policy interpretation on "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan"

Liu (2022) proposed that the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" encompasses three key dimensions: ensuring a high-quality teacher workforce system, promoting more equitable distribution of teacher resources, and fostering a dynamic teacher governance mechanism. He also emphasized the pivotal role of teacher education institutions (normal universities) as the main engine for teacher training under this plan, asserting their leadership in the teacher education system. Normal universities are expected to focus efforts on student development models, academic research, and community service. The government is positioned as the primary driver of building an exemplary teacher workforce, serving

as the cornerstone and bedrock. It is tasked with responsibly allocating resources to prioritize teacher education, guiding policies to facilitate cooperative teacher training for excellence, and coordinating efforts to enhance the quality of normal universities.

The "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" represents a shift in the development philosophy of teacher education in basic education. It advocates for teachers to embrace values of excellence, collaboration, equity, and innovation. (Fan, 2022). Utilizing the paradigm of educational policy value analysis, Zhu (2023) examines the policy values of the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan," including core values, instrumental values, and developmental values. Xia (2023) asserted that the plan is a distinctive and innovative policy with significant practical and historical importance for advancing teacher training in impoverished and border areas and elevating overall teacher education standards in China. However, the implementation of the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" faces several challenges, particularly in restructuring and upgrading teacher education systems, cultivating high-quality talent, constructing a robust teacher education framework, ensuring equitable distribution of skilled educators for basic education, and fostering educational leadership. Rao (2023) proposes addressing four key areas to establish a high-caliber teacher education system: instituting institutional safeguards to elevate the status of teachers and teacher education, creating a hybrid teacher education model aligned with China's educational development needs, enhancing professional standards in teacher education, and promoting evidence-based teaching practices. Wang (2022) advocates for the transformation and enhancement of the teacher education system through comprehensive improvements aimed at quality growth and sustainability. The Ministry of Education's Teacher Work Department outlines strategies for nurturing top-tier educators in the modern era, emphasizing innovation in institutional mechanisms to integrate teacher education, refining teacher professional development with precision, and leveraging "Internet Plus" initiatives to reshape teacher training models.

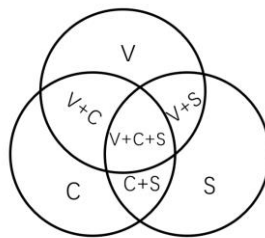
While the academic community has extensively discussed the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan," the application of the three-circle theory in analyzing this policy has been notably absent. This theory, renowned for its efficacy in public policy analysis, aligns well with the inherently public nature of the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan." Thus, building on previous scholarship, this study endeavors to apply the three-circle theory to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted impacts of the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan."

Methodology

In the 1990s, the Three Circles Theory was proposed by American scholar Mark Moore, an expert in public policy. Moore (1994) believed that the goal of private sector management is to maximize shareholder interests, whereas the goal of public sector management is to create public value. This viewpoint, although now widely accepted, challenged mainstream views at the time because the

U.S. government was often seen merely as a regulator and facilitator to ensure smooth operation of the private economy in civilized society.

According to Moore, the government's role in society is not only as a rule-maker, service provider, and safety net, but also as a potential creator of public value and an active shaper of the public policy domain (Benington & Moore, 2011). Based on this perspective, Moore introduced a strategic triangle to achieve policy public value, which forms the analytical framework of the Three Circles Theory. The strategic triangle consists of three main components: Value, Capacity, and Support, which correspond to the three circles of the theory. The Value Circle emphasizes that public policies should have public value, maximizing benefits for the public and aligning with public interests to ensure policy success. The Capacity Circle focuses on the effective implementation of policies with support from financial, human, technical, and other resources, serving as a critical factor for policy success. The Support Circle necessitates gaining broad support from stakeholders throughout the policy implementation process, which is crucial for ensuring successful policy execution.



Picture 1: Three-Circle Theory

Each of these three elements holds significant strategic importance. Successful public policy requires these elements to work together and complement each other to ensure maximum effectiveness. Any deficiency in one element can lead to significant losses and immeasurable harm to the country, society, and people. The three circles must intersect and interact, creating seven regions in the process. Among these, the ideal outcome for public policy is found only in the region where all three circles overlap.

As shown in Figure 1 of the framework diagram, "V" represents the Dream Zone, indicating policies with value constraints but lacking actionable measures. "C" is the Fantasy Zone, representing capability without value. "S" is the Others' Dream Zone, where there is support from stakeholders but lacks intrinsic value. "V+C" is the Dream Project Zone, where policies have public value and capability but lack support from stakeholders, making implementation difficult. "V+S" is the Risky Project Zone, where policies have public value and stakeholder support but lack implementation capability, resulting in challenging execution. "C+S" is the Nightmare Zone, where policies have capability and stakeholder support but lack intrinsic value, leading to significant losses—a nightmare for decision-makers. The strategic intersection of the three elements, "V+C+S", is the Nike Zone, representing the ideal area

where policies achieve maximum efficiency. Here, policies align with public value, are supported by stakeholders, and have the capability for effective formulation and implementation (Chen & Wang, 2023).

This research framework is based on Mark Moore's theory of public policy—the Three Circles Theory which analyzes policies from the perspectives of the Value Circle, Capacity Circle, and Support Circle. The Value Circle primarily examines the balanced value, high-quality value, and innovative value of the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan". The Capacity Circle focuses on the human, financial, and material resources required for policy implementation. The Support Circle analyzes the support for the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" from local governments, schools of all levels, and the general public.

Results

Under the leadership of the Party, China has achieved the first centenary goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and is now striving towards the goal of building a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful. To achieve this goal, education can provide significant talent reinforcement and intellectual support. Education not only enhances the country's cultural soft power but also strengthens its cultural hard power. Therefore, in this competitive international society, many countries attach great importance to education, and China is no exception. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out the coordinated planning of education, science and technology, and talent as a "three-pronged" approach, placing it prominently after elaborating on "high-quality development," emphasizing that "education, science and technology, and talent" are the fundamental and strategic supports for building a modern socialist country comprehensively.

It is evident that education is a powerful driving force for China's development. Chairman Xi pointed out: "Education is fundamental to our nation's success; teachers are fundamental to education." Teachers are the backbone of educational vision development. In April 2022, the Ministry of Education and eight other departments jointly issued the "New Era Basic Education Strengthening Teacher Force Plan," marking a new chapter in revitalizing the development of the basic education teacher workforce and enhancing the competitive advantage of basic education. Upon its release, the policy received positive responses from several provinces, which formulated implementation plans tailored to local realities. However, due to the complexity of the teacher system, multiple governance entities involved, and significant differences in stakeholder interests, a series of pressing issues emerged that urgently need resolution.

The Three Circles Theory prominently emphasizes the coordinated planning of policy value, execution capability, and support, serving as a commonly used analytical model in the field of public

policy. Building upon the Three Circles Theory, constructing an analytical model for the New Era Basic Education Strengthening Teacher Force Plan explores the current status and issues in policy implementation, strengthens optimization strategies for the Nike Zone of policy execution, aiming to provide insights and references for the smooth advancement of the Strengthening Teacher Force Plan.

Discussion

Clarify public values and build a solid policy foundation

The concept of public value was first proposed by Mark Moore, who argued that the most important task for public managers is to create public value, just as the private sector spares no effort in pursuing private value. Public value is a prerequisite for the success of public policies. Therefore, it is crucial to clarify the public value of public policies to ensure their successful implementation. In the 'Strong Teachers Plan,' public value is prominently reflected in the balance, quality, and innovation of policies.

Proportionality

"China's allocation of primary and secondary school teachers has gone through different phases: a period of teacher shortage from 1949 to 1977, a rapid development phase from 1987 to 2000, and since 2001, a period of overall improvement in teacher resources (Wen & Feng, 2022). Over these more than 70 years, both the quantity and quality of teachers have seen significant improvements. However, there has always been a huge gap between urban, county, and rural areas. After achieving universal compulsory education in China, the vast geographical size and economic disparities among regions have led to serious unevenness in educational development. Uneven allocation of teacher resources is one manifestation of this uneven development in education. He pointed out that balanced development is a process, not about absolute equality or eliminating differences (Zhao, 2023). Therefore, the erroneous view of "leveling peaks and filling valleys" should be abandoned, and achieving true balance requires more scientific methods.

Since the 21st century, China has started to address the issue of educational imbalance. From the 'Twelfth Five-Year Plan' to the 'Thirteenth Five-Year Plan' period, the government has issued a series of policy documents to strengthen the construction of the teacher workforce, many of which emphasize enhancing the allocation of teacher resources and promoting balanced development of compulsory education. For instance, the 'Opinions of the State Council on Strengthening the Construction of the Teacher Workforce' issued during the 'Twelfth Five-Year Plan' period proposed that by 2020, the age, education level, professional titles, subject structure, as well as the structure of urban-rural distribution of the teacher workforce should be coordinated with the development of the education sector, necessitating strengthened management of teacher resource allocation. During the same period, the Ministry of Education also issued 'Opinions on Vigorously Promoting the Construction of Rural

Compulsory Education Teacher Workforce.'

In the 'Thirteenth Five-Year Plan' period, the Chinese government issued the 'Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Comprehensive Deepening Reform of Teacher Team Construction in the New Era,' proposing to optimize the allocation of teachers in compulsory education. Through continuous governance and management, by the end of the 'Thirteenth Five-Year Plan' period, the goal of basic balance in compulsory education in western China has been achieved (Lin, 2022). Although there has been a significant improvement in both the quality and quantity of rural teachers, this represents a low-level balance. The 'Strong Teachers Plan' was launched against this backdrop. It proposes to implement targeted training plans for outstanding teachers in underdeveloped areas in central and western China, optimize the allocation of teachers in compulsory education, and optimize the staffing structure of educational workers. It emphasizes not only balance in quantity but also balance in quality."

High-quality

In 1996, China's teacher education shifted from a focus on quantity and scale to emphasizing both quantity and quality, while considering scale and effectiveness. Three years later, the innovative reform of China's teacher education system encouraged other universities to participate in training basic education teachers. The teacher education system gradually diversified, expanded widely, and became more flexible, fostering an open environment conducive to improving teacher quality.

After 2012, the development of the teacher workforce formally shifted towards emphasizing depth and quality. Over the course of a decade, significant improvements in teacher quality transformed from merely having quantity to having quality. A comprehensive and sound teacher education system was established, continuously upgrading teacher training models. This included policies such as funding for teacher education students, outstanding teacher programs, special assignment programs, national training programs, and prestigious lecture programs—all aimed at enhancing the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher education.

Despite these advancements over more than a decade, achieving the requirements set by the new era for the teacher workforce requires further efforts to address the pain points and challenges in teacher education. To realize the role of the teacher workforce in advancing educational modernization, it is imperative to promote the "high-quality development" of China's teacher workforce. This development not only supports the transition of China's education from "having quality" to "high quality" but also constitutes the core attribute of the goals of teacher education development.

"High quality" is a major feature of the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan". Firstly, improving the quality and efficiency of normal education. Establishing national education bases and collaborative innovation platforms for teacher education sets higher requirements for normal universities, comprehensive universities, primary and secondary schools, and society, ensuring the high quality of

normal students is a prerequisite for building a high-quality teacher workforce. By 2020, 61% of primary school teachers in China held bachelor's degrees, compared to over 90% in countries such as the UK, France, and Japan. At the secondary school level, 14.1% of teachers in China had graduate degrees, while in the EU and OECD member countries, the percentages were 57% and 45.5% respectively for secondary school teachers (Ming & Yang, 2023).

Addressing the current low educational attainment of basic education teachers in China, the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" proposes implementing high-quality teacher talent development plans, promoting reform in teacher training models at undergraduate and master's levels, and expanding enrollment plans for education master's and doctoral programs. Therefore, it is foreseeable that a large number of master's and even doctoral degree holders will enter primary and secondary school teaching in the future. Secondly, the teacher qualification admission system is also an important factor influencing teacher quality. The "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" has made the teacher qualification examination and the quality of teacher training at normal universities stricter to ensure that teachers reach high-level professional competence before entering the profession. Finally, strengthening post-employment training and deepening precise training reforms.

Innovativeness

Innovation and development are interconnected, with innovation being an essential element for development. The development of the basic education teacher workforce also requires continuous innovation to overcome difficulties, problems, and deficiencies along the path of progress. The "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" policy embodies several points of innovation. Firstly, the greatest innovation of the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" lies in the innovation of the teacher education system. Internationally, there are two main models of teacher education systems. One is the specialized teacher education model represented by countries like France and Germany, where teacher education is a separate system emphasizing independence and closedness in teacher training. The other is the open teacher education model represented by the United States, where teacher education is affiliated with comprehensive universities, enhancing the professionalism, competitiveness, and openness of teacher education.

China's teacher education system innovates based on these two models. It incorporates a specialized teacher education system with teacher training colleges and universities as the main body, while also involving high-level comprehensive universities for professional development. Additionally, teacher development institutions and high-quality primary and secondary schools contribute to this system, reflecting the characteristics of China's teacher education.

Secondly, there is innovation in pre-service teacher training models, specifically the reform towards integrated training of undergraduate and master's level teacher candidates. Previously, undergraduate and master's level teacher training were separate. In recent years, some teacher training

colleges have explored integrated models such as "3+1+2", where students study professional courses for the first three years, enter the teacher education college in the fourth year, and commence education master's training in the fifth year. This innovative model aligns with the advocacy of the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan".

Thirdly, there is innovation in teacher development and the institutional mechanisms of teacher management. Teacher development encompasses in-service training, title evaluation, and allocation. The "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" proposes reforms in precision training, continuing to advance the "National Training Program", optimizing the allocation of teaching positions, and deepening teacher support reforms.

Lastly, in modern society, the level of informatization reflects the level of modernization. The "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" proposes to conduct pilot projects for "AI-supported teacher workforce construction", promoting innovation in teacher management and teaching models, and stimulating the vitality of grassroots teaching staff.

Conclusions

Teacher education is the "source" of basic education, and its quality directly affects the success of basic education and its overall development. In the history of teacher education in China, quantity and quality are interdependent: quantity forms the foundation while quality ensures its effectiveness. Therefore, after meeting quantity needs, the country has focused on enhancing the quality of the teacher workforce. After a period of development, there has been noticeable improvement in teacher quality. However, issues such as inadequate and uneven distribution of teacher resources have emerged. Thus, the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" emphasizes both balanced quantity and high quality, demonstrating strong innovation. In terms of implementation capacity, China has now met the manpower, financial, and material requirements for implementing the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" policies. Public support is essential for the execution of public policies. Analyzing the situation reveals strong support from local governments, schools of all levels, and the public for the "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan". Many institutions and organizations have deeply understood the policy's essence and implemented corresponding measures. The "Strengthening Teacher Force Plan" enjoys broad support from multiple sectors. To expand its effectiveness, it is necessary to enhance both policy promotion and execution efforts.

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