

From Goals to Action: Interpreting Aims and Proposing Strategies for In-Service Teachers Training Policies

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Abstract: Teacher quality and professional competence is one of the crucial topics in the research on teachers' training. The researcher has found that in-service teachers' training, which was primarily influenced by policies, plays an important role in the sustainable development of teachers. However, there is a scarcity of research on systematic analyses of aims and implementation of in-service teachers' training policies from the perspective of teachers' professional development. Therefore, this article, based on policy documents from the past five years, adopts a multidimensional model of teachers' professional competence to investigate the impact of the policies on teachers' professional development. The study finds that while policy aims to align with the model of teachers' professional competence, shortcomings persist in practical implementation, such as insufficient practices, low efficiency and a lack of personalized guidance. In conclusion, the article offers some specific recommendations to address these issues, primarily analyzing from three dimensions: educational policies related to in-service teachers' training, school management, and public awareness.

Keywords: Educational policy, in-service teachers training, teachers' professional competence

1. Introduction

Teacher quality is a critical factor influencing the quality of education. Governments often enhance the teaching force through dual paths: teacher education, which particularly represents pre-service teacher education in normal universities, and in-service training. As teaching careers are characterized by persistence, addressing how to maintain instructional standards in an era of continuous evolution and facilitating teachers in navigating professional burnout as well as continually engaging in self-improvement, all of them are influenced by in-service training, which is essential for the sustainable development of educators. Concurrently, primary education, serving as the initiation part within the entire educational system, significantly impacts the subsequent educational quality in middle and high schools, and even at the university level. Consequently, in-service training for primary school teachers holds particular importance.

With the implementation of the Chinese double reduction policy, there has been a huge reform in the primary education as well as higher requirements for classroom teachers. As the Chinese State Council indicated teachers should guide students to think critically, ask questions actively, and explore independently [1]. Meanwhile, teachers need to value contextual teaching and explore

subject-integrated curriculum teaching, engage in research-based, project-based, and collaborative learning with integrating traditional and modern technologies in classroom. Aforementioned statements reflected the student-centered educational concept strongly advocated in practice, which meant high expectations for the teaching approach, curriculum design and teachers' quality, especially their professional competencies. While the enhancement of the abilities requires the accumulation of long-term practical experience and reflections derived from interactions with students as a foundation, the teachers' belief is another essential factor in the sustainable development of teacher competence. These factors will be shaped directly and effectively by in-service training for classroom teachers.

However, current research is primarily focused on promoting the development of pre-service teacher education in colleges, especially in normal universities, with a relative scarcity of studies on researching policies that are concerned about in-service teacher training. Hence it is essential to research policy documents on in-service teachers' training for the continuous enhancement of teachers' professional growth.

This paper is built upon the relevant literatures focused on the in-service teachers training in primary schools and centers on the pertinent official policies in China as the research subject. It employed the theoretical framework of teachers' quality, analyzed whether the current policies for in-service training of primary school teachers in China can meet the professional development demands of teachers from three aspects: the bright person, the knowledgeable teacher and the competent teacher [2]. Interpreting policies' aims and analyzing the issues in implementation would be regarded as the focal points. Furthermore, it can provide some suggestions for further policies and research.

2. The Multidimensional model of Teachers' Professional Competence

First of all, it is crucial to clarify from which dimensions this article assesses teachers' professional competence. Based on previous researches on teacher quality, Kunter and his team summarized a multidimensional model of teachers' professional competence that includes bright and knowledgeable, teachers' belief related to learning, and competence such as motivation and self-regulation, which is the foundation of this article to analysis the policies about in-service teaching training [2]. The theoretical foundation of this multidimensional model primarily derives from two hypothesis, the bright person hypothesis and the knowledgeable teacher hypothesis, and the concept of professional competence [2]. While the two hypothesis highlights the knowledge and cognitive abilities teachers have, the concept of professional competence put more emphasis on the subjective stuff like beliefs and motivation.

2.1. The Bright Person Hypothesis (BPH) and Knowledgeable Teacher Hypothesis (KTH)

The Bright Person Hypothesis (BPH) suggested by Kennedy argued that brilliant educators are expected to possess advanced cognitive abilities along with a strong educational background [3]. These attributes enable them to discern nuances during the teaching process and promptly address each problems that arises [3]. Meanwhile, the Knowledgeable Teacher Hypothesis (KTH) puts emphasis on profession-specific knowledge, which is acquired in formal, professional-specific learning environments and refined in discourse with other experts[2]. And refer to Shulman's typology of teacher knowledge, three distinct dimensions of the profession-specific knowledge influence teaching, namely 'general pedagogical knowledge (GPK)', 'pedagogical content knowledge(PCK)' and 'knowledge of subject' [4].

Knowledge of the subject, as the name suggests, refers to the need for teachers to possess expertise in the subject they teach. PCK is conceptualized as a form of knowledge that assists teachers in effectively applying information, such as students' exam results and progress [5]. Meanwhile, it is teaching techniques adopted based on characteristics of knowledge of subjects. While both

knowledge of the subject and pedagogical content knowledge are vital for high-quality teaching, there exists a more fundamental knowledge essential for acquiring both: 'general pedagogical knowledge.' This knowledge is mastery of the entire teaching process, requiring a clear understanding of each step. Whereas 'pedagogical content knowledge' pertains to how to teach a specific subject area, 'general pedagogical knowledge' is concerned with the broader aspects of teaching. The conceptualization of general pedagogical knowledge has its roots in the intricate demands of teaching practice.

Based on the analysis of teachers' professional knowledge outlined above, it can be inferred that teachers must not only possess practical knowledge of managing the classroom but also understand the individual characteristics of students and the specific challenges they face in the learning process.

2.2. The Concept of Professional Competence

The professional competence involves the application of the concepts to working life. In context of teaching, the professional competence refers to the qualities to utilize specific knowledge, leverage cognitive abilities, and apply them in educational practice, encompassing aspects such as beliefs, motivation and self-regulation [2].

Regarding teachers' belief, as Muzakkir & Rafiza's study said, humankind have beliefs as the basis for choices that they make whether explicit or implicit, teachers are no exception [6]. Teacher beliefs related to learning matters that influence their perceptions of environment and their behaviors [7]. Specifically, teachers' beliefs about what they have to do in terms of teaching, such as the teaching methods and pedagogical philosophies, can influence the extent and effectiveness of their implementation. However, there is a limitation of its influence on the practice. For example, Orrell did a study regarding the degree of congruence between teachers' beliefs and practices in terms of the ideal practice of feedback and student learning outcomes [8]. He found that the summative purpose often dominated the written responses given by the participants although they may have espoused beliefs about using feedback to facilitate students' learning. Despite this, a teacher's beliefs significantly influence the content they teach, the selection of classroom topics, and the adoption of instructional methods, which also play a pivotal role on motivating students' engagement and improving learning outcomes [6].

Furthermore, teachers' motivation and self-regulation are also important parts that affect the sustainable professional development of in-service teachers. Motivational research has identified inter-individual differences are manifested in the quality and persistence of behavior [9]. The professional characteristics of teaching involve high levels of stress, repetitive work tasks, intense communication demands, and the need for sustained output. Hence, not only do teachers require adaptive motivational orientations for long-term success in their profession, but they also need to cultivate self-regulation skills to mitigate adverse factors such as pressures from the communication with parents, student academic performance and their academic outcome, finding adaptive strategies to overcome these [10,11].

3. Interpretation Aims of Current Policies Related to In-Service Teachers Training

In 2021, the implementation of the 'double reduction' policy brought about substantial changes within the realm of primary education. The reduction in off-campus training emerged as a challenge, raising concerns about the overall quality of the public school education. Given the pivotal role of teachers, the professional quality of in-service teachers are currently subject to scrutiny from various segments of society. Consequently, there is an imperative need for the continual development of in-service teachers. According to the policy documents spanning the last five years, this chapter delineates the policy objectives by three dimensions mentioned: cognitive aspects characterized by brightness and

knowledge, teachers' beliefs concerning learning, and competencies encompassing motivational and self-regulatory variables.

Since 2018, China's in-service teacher training policies have prominently prioritized the establishment of a highly-qualified and professional teaching workforce. The policy objectives emphasize the enhancement of teachers' holistic competencies and focus on ensuring the quality of training initiatives. Subsequent analysis will scrutinize whether the directions for enhancing teacher quality, as delineated in the prevailing policies, align with the three dimensions of the multidimensional model of teachers' professional competence.

3.1. Emphasis on Teachers' Professional Knowledge

Firstly, the policy documents during this period emphasized the significance attributed to teachers' professional knowledge. It is reflected by the elevated academic qualification requirements and stringent oversight of teacher certification. Refer to academic qualifications, the policies advocated the imperative of fostering teachers who are comprehensively qualified and professionally proficient, holding undergraduate degrees, to work in primary schools. Simultaneously, there is a strong emphasis on advancing teacher development at the postgraduate level, particularly in disciplines related to pedagogy. This entails expanding enrollment plans for education master's programs, accompanied by a measured increase in the cultivation of education doctoral candidates. Undoubtedly, the subjects covered during the undergraduate phase of teacher training significantly contribute to the accumulation of teachers' professional knowledge. For instance, subjects such as modern educational technology and database applied techniques are instrumental in accumulating professional content knowledge. Similarly, subjects like sociology of education, education statistics, and developmental psychology contribute to the development of teachers' general pedagogical knowledge.

Furthermore, the aim to fostering teachers who possess subject-specific expertise is reflected by the teacher qualification examination. The policy has undergone progressive refinement, emphasizing the mandatory inclusion of 'specific knowledge of subject' for obtaining subject-specific teacher certification. Concurrently, the policy text emphasizes a practice-oriented optimization of teacher education curriculum, reinforcing fundamental teaching skills such as cursive writing, calligraphy, chalk writing, and Mandarin. Additionally, teacher education practicum, lasting no less than six months, has been reinforced. The requirement for teaching practice as a prerequisite for obtaining teacher qualifications, which showed the expectations for teachers to fully grasp pedagogical content knowledge.

However, the acquisition of academic credentials and qualifications primarily occurs during the pre-service education phase for teachers and there seems to be less learning opportunities for in-service teachers to develop their relevant knowledge. It is generally assumed that teachers gradually deepen their understanding of existing professional knowledge through practical experience after entering the workforce. Nevertheless, with the continuous development in fields such as big data and artificial intelligence, teaching methods and pedagogical philosophies undergo constant updates and iterations. Even for experienced educators, timely updating of their knowledge base becomes imperative to stay abreast of cutting-edge educational research, thereby maintaining high-level teaching quality and improving student learning outcomes. Despite policy encouragement to establish a 'bridge' between teacher in-service training and academic education, facilitating classroom teachers to pursue further education and elevate their academic qualifications, such opportunities are primarily extended to outstanding special post teachers. For the whole teacher group, these opportunities are limited and often demand substantial efforts.

3.2. Enhancing Teachers' Belief by Increasing Professional Status

The policies articulate a strategic focus on bolstering teachers' belief primarily through efforts aimed at elevating the social status of educators. The policy explicitly states that by promoting exemplary teacher achievements, conducting teaching outcome evaluations and commendations, and providing targeted rewards to outstanding contributors, efforts will be made to intensify teacher recognition and enhance their social standing. The policy underscores that local governments need to implement relevant preferential policies to foster a societal atmosphere that respects and values educators. These measures are designed to instill a sense of accomplishment and professional satisfaction in teachers, fostering a greater passion and dedication to their work, thereby strengthening teachers' belief.

Furthermore, the initiative aims of policies is also to standardize the moral baseline for educators. The policy texts underscore the promotion of ethical evaluations, the establishment of personal credit records, and the refinement of reward and punishment measures to address academic misconduct and deviations in professional ethics. These measures aim to standardize the ethical conduct of teachers, serve as a reminder for educators to exemplify leadership within the educational domain, and encourage teachers to maintain a rigorous self-discipline.

3.3. Promoting Motivation and Self-regulation of Teachers

The policies outlines various methods to reward teachers actively participating in and completing in-service training, aiming to boost teachers' proactive engagement in such programs. These incentive mechanisms mainly fall into two categories: salary benefits and assessment mechanisms. Regarding occupational salary benefits, the policy underscores that there will be more positions of authorized personnel for teachers, indicating potential improvements in teachers' welfare and job stability. The policy also highlights the need to optimize the incentive mechanism for income distribution, effectively reflecting teachers' workload and performance. In other words, teachers who take on additional responsibilities, such as being a class supervisor, ought to receive additional income. So it can directly incentivize teachers through material rewards to enhance their commitment to work and elevate their motivation. Furthermore, while determining the total amount of performance-based pay, local civil servant income levels are taken into account. The policy specifically stipulates that the average salary of teachers should not fall below the average salary of local civil servants, which suggests that the basic remuneration for the teaching team is relatively competitive and makes it attractive to talent with undergraduate qualifications.

To enhance the enthusiasm of outstanding teachers, the implementation of the assessment mechanism is manifested through the establishment of intermediate and senior teaching positions. Additionally, a competitive assessment system is introduced to standardize the professional baseline for teachers, ensure the average competence of the teaching team, and stimulate the improvement and development of teachers with weaker professional capabilities.

In conclusion, a comprehensive review of important teacher training policies from 2018 to the present reveals that the policy framework aligns with China's current requirements for elevating the quality of educators in its role as a powerful developing country. The policy objectives are lucid, specific, and consistent, displaying strong continuity and stability. Moreover, the 'New Era Strong Teacher Plan' outlines target tasks for 2025 and 2035, providing a gradual and transparent roadmap for future development [12]. Therefore, the policies during this period play a crucial guiding role in the in-service training of primary school teachers in China.

4. Implementation Analysis of Current Policies

The efficacy of educational policies is realized through effective implementation. A noteworthy initiative by the Ministry of Education, the 'National Training Program', aims to enhance the

professional qualities of in-service primary school teachers. Despite continuous refinement and improvement in the implementation process of in-service teacher policies over the past five years, there are still some shortcomings. Building on existing researches and literatures on the 'National Training Program', this article offers a comprehensive overview of the implementation of in-service teacher training policies since 2018, focusing on the executing entity, target group, and implementation context. Additionally, it analyzes the deficiencies in promoting teachers' quality from the perspective of A Multidimensional Model of Teachers' Professional Competence.

4.1. The Executing Entity and Target Group of the Policies

The executing entity of a policy, comprised of implementation organizations and personnel, plays a pivotal role in policy realization. In the case of China's in-service teacher training policy, the main organizers are the Ministry of Education and local education departments, exhibiting clear roles, well-established systems, and providing a solid organizational foundation for policy implementation. The personnel involved include educational administrators, researchers, university faculty, as well as school management and exemplary frontline teachers who possess substantial knowledge and strong professional capabilities to effectively propel policy execution.

However, practical implementation faces constraints such as funding, geographic considerations, and scheduling conflicts, making it challenging for policies to be effectively implemented. For instance, the ratio of frontline exemplary teachers leading training falls significantly below the demand. According to Li & Xiao's study, the actual proportion of experienced frontline teachers serving as trainers was 16.3%, distinctively lower than the 51.7% demand from the trainees [13].

The target group of the policy is similarly constrained by financial and resource limitations. It should comprise all educators in elementary education. Notably, although the policies outlines different training plans for teachers of varying ages groups and professional levels, within the advocated 'National Training Program', the emphasis is primarily on training brilliant teachers, aiming to leverage limited resources to cultivate a cohort of high-quality educators to drive overall teaching force development. A potential issue arising from this approach is the limited opportunities for genuinely weak teachers in need of improvement, as this elite education model may not meet the broader needs of the extensive teacher community [14]. Meanwhile, in implementation process, most courses were designed without a consideration about the specific traits of these brilliant teachers, and the majority are delivered in a remote format. A teacher-centered approach has to be adopted so that the individuality of teachers hardly get attention.

4.2. The Context of Implementing the Policies

The execution of any policy occurs within a specific environment, and the effectiveness of policy implementation is inevitably constrained and influenced by this context. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the specific environment in which a policy operates is crucial for overcoming potential obstacles and enhancing the efficiency and stability of policy execution. Currently, the policy environment for teachers training in China is situated against the backdrop of the 'double reduction' reform, and the execution of policies is inevitably influenced by the changes brought about by this reform. For example, due to the reduction of off-campus training, the expectation to higher-quality education from parents and teachers moves on teachers working in public primary schools. Meanwhile, because of the time and quality of after-school service increasing required from 'double reduction' policy, the teachers' working hours and workload are gradually raising. Swamped with more tasks and responsibilities than before, teachers are too busy to pay attention on their own professional development, influencing the teachers' belief and motivation not only to in-service training but also to teaching [15].

4.3. Insufficient Focus on Teachers' Cognitive Aspects

Regarding the enhancement of teachers' cognitive aspects, due to the accumulation of the professional knowledge mainly to teachers' pre-service education and academic qualifications, there is lack of attention to the professional knowledge training of in-service frontline teachers. As a teachers working in a Beijing public primary school said, when implemented in various schools, training content related to professional knowledge is often delivered through online video viewing and offline lectures, characterized by a predominance of theory over practice. This uniform procedural training leads to a formalistic approach in in-service training, neglecting individual teacher needs. As a result, teachers tend to receive more theoretical knowledge than practical skills, which is not conducive to their precise and targeted improvement [16].

In terms of teachers' beliefs, less specific guidance is also the problem making it challenging for implementers during the execution process. A new classroom teacher acknowledges that beliefs about teaching mainly stem from students' learning outcomes and recognition from students and parents, factors challenging to enhance through in-service training. Therefore, a shift in policy thinking is suggested, incorporating factors influencing teaching beliefs, such as effective communication skills with parents, timely identification of student issues, and handling negative emotions conveyed by parents and students, into in-service training content. Policymakers can indirectly guide teachers to efficiently communicate, gaining recognition from parents and students, thus enhancing teachers' beliefs.

4.4. Eroding Motivation: Increased Pressure on Teachers

Concerning motivation and self-regulation, the general lack of enthusiasm among teachers towards in-service training is a significant issue that urgently needs to be addressed. From the policy perspective, taking the 'National Training Program' as example, the mandatory and directive nature becomes a prominent feature, resulting in a lack of initiative at the grassroots level during policy implementation [16]. Moreover, in terms of salary benefits, the policy only mentions average income and minimum standards, lacking specific expressions for rewarding and recognizing the efforts and performance of ordinary frontline teachers, which is not conducive to teachers actively pursuing professional development.

Additionally, scholars have expressed disdain for teachers' utilitarian motives, suggesting that most teachers participate in training for task completion or promotion requirements. The researchers, ideally, hope teachers can activate their subjectivity and actively engage in in-service training [14]. However, based on the researchers' professional experience and widespread feedback from teachers working in classrooms, the considerable invisible workload, such as communication with parents, student relationship management, handling colleague relationships, and fulfilling party-building tasks, already creates stress for teachers. In this context, 'formalism' of in-service training undoubtedly exacerbates their challenges. Therefore, it is necessary from a policy perspective to alleviate teaching pressure for frontline teachers, reduce psychological burdens, elevate teachers' social status, and ensure they have the energy for self-improvement, thus providing favorable conditions for teachers to participate in in-service training [14].

5. Coping Strategies to Develop In-Service Teachers' Quality

The development of educational quality can not be stimulated without growth of teachers' quality. Hence, it is necessary to consider how to promote the development of teachers' professional quality. The following analysis will be based on the mentioned issues, mainly analyzing from three aspects: the educational policy related to in-service teachers training, school management, and public awareness.

5.1. The Educational Policies: Playing a guiding role

The educational policies related to in-service teachers training plays a guiding role to actual implementation and future development. Firstly, in terms of the sustainable development of teachers' professional knowledge, it is necessary to articulate more specific requirements for in-service teachers. This includes standardizing assessment criteria, precisely defining the range of training content, and enhancing the proportion of components of teaching practice. In parallel, schools and relevant authorities should minimize assigning tasks to teachers that are unrelated to educational instruction. The evaluation of schools and teachers should not be only based on measures like enrollment rates or admission index. This shift in focus will release the extra pressure but improve the training quality for teachers.

Additionally, it is essential to guide the social awareness of respecting teachers and valuing education by policies. The double reduction policy emphasized the key functions of public educational system and teachers working in it. The relevant departments are responsible to utilize social media, commendations and audiovisual promotion, guiding the power of public opinion to popularize the significant value of teachers' professional development for social progress and national construction, so as to enhance the social status of teachers.

Furthermore, it can encourage innovation on forms and content of in-service teachers training as well as emphasize the individuality and autonomy of teachers from policy perspective. For instance, in improving teachers' belief, it is necessary to deeply insight classroom teachers, understand the changes they currently face, identify the specific sources of teachers' belief. And then it should encourage each region and school to provide detailed and accurate solutions based on actual problems and conditions.

5.2. The School Management: Enhancing Implementation According to the Reality

The guiding policies will leverage positive effects to teachers through effective and reasonable implementation by the school management. Therefore, the school administration ought to develop specific rules and regulations for in-service teachers training based on a comprehensive understanding of policy aims and considering the actual conditions of each school. Firstly, as the enhancement of teachers' professional knowledge and competence, schools can design regular assessments or tasks aligned with local curriculum criteria. Additionally, the bonus and penalty regulations can be established based on test outcomes, which may stimulate teachers' internal motivation and self-regulation by establishing external motivation for teachers.

Furthermore, schools should make reasonable use of the funding from government and attract invest from social channels to ensure financial investment in the in-service teachers' training. With sufficient funds, schools can make full use of the benefits brought about by emerging technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence. Meanwhile it should pay attention on actual outcomes as well as strengthened supervision to guarantee the efficient achievement of training goals, avoiding falling value of training processes and outcomes due to online training.

Moreover, the school administration determines teachers' working hours and workload. It is worth to ensure that teachers have adequate rest time, avoiding phenomena such as overwork, excessive burden, and excessive stress through making plans of the teaching tasks of both new and experienced teachers reasonably. This approach safeguards teachers' physical and mental health, allowing them to have the energy and time to enhance their professional competences, creating a virtuous circle of teaching and training.

5.3. The Public Awareness: Increasing Social Recognition and Respect

Social recognition as a low-cost and non-monetary rewards for teachers can be used to improve teachers' qualities by stimulating their internal drive so that to have the potential of being effective in improving student performance [17]. First of all, parents and students are the groups which have the most frequent contact with teachers hence their attitudes tend to have a profound impact on teachers' belief. Some parents may need to change their perception of teachers, shifting from treating them as staffs in a service industry to respecting their role, while actively having communication with teachers to collectively contribute to the child's development. The positive attitude of parents not only service as an example for children, building teacher authority, but also reducing unnecessary complications like dealing with family school relationship. Consequently, teachers can concentrate more on developing their own professional quality.

Secondly, the utilitarianism of teachers can be leveraged fully rather than be criticized and repressed. It can be achieved by stimulating teachers' intrinsic motivation through external incentive mechanisms such as increased salary levels, promotion opportunities, diverse future career paths, and various avenues for professional advancement. These measures aim to attract exceptional talent to the field of education and motivate in-service teachers to continually enhance their professional capabilities.

6. Conclusion

This study comprehensively analyzes the current in-service teachers training policies from a multidimensional model of teachers' professional competence, specifically focusing on the development of teachers' professional knowledge, teachers' belief, as well as motivation and self-regulation. It reveals that some unresolved issues persist in the implementation process of in-service teacher policies, which slowed the pace of the development of teachers' professional competence. Firstly, limited by conditions such as funding and teachers' resources, there is a shortage of personnel as trainers, resulting in the inability to meet teachers' personalized needs. Secondly, excessive teaching workload, coupled with the lack of effective incentives, has led to teachers either lacking the energy to engaging in professional development. At the third part of the paper,

This article aims to offer insights for policymakers and implementers of in-service teacher training policies. However, the classroom teachers' opinions and their actual feelings in training should be paid more attention. Future research can further explore how to enhance in-service teaching training from the perspective of teachers by employing case studies and conducting interviews with frontline teachers, ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of teachers.

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