

Instructional Leadership of College Teachers: Influencing Factors and Improvement Paths

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Abstract: Higher education serves as a critical indicator of a nation's and society's international competitiveness. As the first resource for the development of higher education, the instructional leadership of college teachers is an important factor and an important force to improve the quality of higher education teaching and to promote the reform and innovation of higher education teaching, as well as an important driving force to promote the process of modernization of education. There are three main levels of factors affecting the instructional leadership of college teachers: The college level, the teacher level and the social level. Taking the analysis of the factors affecting teachers' instructional leadership as a logic, we put forward the paths to improve teachers' instructional leadership in colleges: Reshaping the college's leadership culture, improving the management system, and optimizing the organizational structure; shaping good education and teaching concepts, continuously improving professional knowledge, and innovating education and teaching methods; and establishing a good social and educational value orientation, reinforcing the synergy of the stakeholders, and strengthening the support of education policies.

Keywords: College Teachers; Instructional Leadership; Influencing Factors; Pathways

1 Introduction

Instructional leadership, as an emerging concept, originated from a series of educational reforms in the United States during the 1980s. Initial research on instructional leadership primarily focused on principals' instructional leadership (Wang et al., 2014). After the 1990s, research began to shift towards teachers' instructional leadership (Liu & Chang, 2023). Chinese scholars started researching instructional leadership in the early 21st century. Since 2007, research on teacher instructional leadership has begun to attract widespread attention from researchers in the Chinese education field and has gradually become a hot topic in educational research.

The improvement of teaching quality depends on the effectiveness of classroom teaching (Liu & Xu, 2015), which in turn depends on the enhancement of teachers' instructional leadership. It is evident that teachers' instructional leadership is an important factor and force for enhancing the quality of higher education teaching and promoting its reform and innovation. The instructional leadership of college teachers is manifested under the guidance and influence of specific educational philosophies and college cultures. Through sound personal professional knowledge, scientific teaching methods, and collaboration with various educational stakeholders, with the teacher as the guide and students as the main actors aimed at achieving learning objectives, teachers effectively lead individual students and groups. This creates teaching affinity, attraction, inspiration, and influence, thereby enhancing the quality of college teaching and learning and promoting the all-round and free development of college students. At present, in China, academic research on teachers' instructional leadership is still in the exploratory and developmental stage, particularly for college teachers, where research is burgeoning.

2 Factors Influencing Instructional Leadership of College teachers

2.1 College-level Factors

(1)College Leadership Culture.The college leadership culture is the guide for cultivating instructional leadership. Relying solely on the principal's "heroic" individual strength is insufficient to promote the sustainable development of the college. Only by constructing a cultural atmosphere conducive to the growth and development of leadership, forming an college organizational culture ecology where "everyone has leadership," can the high-quality and sustainable development of institutional education and teaching be effectively promoted (Wu & Zhu, 2015).

(2)College Management Systems.

Firstly, the participation system of teachers' instructional leadership. Under a scientific institutional framework, whether teachers can be effectively empowered, the responsibilities of teachers' instructional leadership can be clarified, and the boundaries between formal and informal positions of teachers' instructional leadership can be defined, can provide an effective institutional guarantee for the improvement of the leadership of college teachers. Secondly, the assessment and accountability system. A scientific assessment system can enable college principals, management personnel and teachers to each take on their responsibilities and perform their duties. A scientific accountability system plays a certain regulatory and restrictive role for college principals, management personnel and teachers.

(3)College Organizational Structure. The organizational structure of a college determines its organizational functions. The organizational structure of a college is a key factor in cultivating and developing teachers' instructional leadership. The transformation of organizational structure from a vertical multi-level chain to a flat or networked one provides a solid organizational foundation for teachers' instructional leadership.

2.2 Teachers-level Factors

(1)Teacher's Educational Philosophy. A teacher's educational philosophy is a crucial aspect of their professional development and plays an extremely important guiding role in enhancing instructional leadership. Whether an individual teacher can play a leadership role in curriculum and instruction, and whether college teachers possess the concept and awareness of instructional leadership, are intrinsic key factors affecting its enhancement.

(2)Professional Knowledge and Literacy. As organizers and guides of teaching activities, and the main implementers of educational philosophies and teaching processes, teachers hold a dominant position in instructional leadership relationship (Yang & Chen, 2020). Therefore, the professional knowledge and literacy of college teachers are important manifestations of their professional authority and the foundation and prerequisite for enhancing instructional leadership.

(3)Teaching Methods. Teaching methods are crucial pathways for achieving teaching objectives and an important mechanism for enhancing instructional leadership. In the era of "Internet+Education", the demonstration of instructional leadership is reflected not only in the application of digital outcomes and information technology but also in the innovation of teaching content and methods.

2.3 Social-level Factors

(1)Social Educational Value Orientation. Social education influences or promotes the individual learning and all-round free development of college students through various channels and forms. The correct educational value orientation of society serves as a guiding beacon for the reform and development of higher education teaching. The organic integration of education and society provides a favorable environment for enhancing teachers' instructional leadership.

(2)Collaboration among Educational Stakeholders.Collaboration among stakeholders is a significant driving force for enhancing teachers' instructional leadership. The development of teacher instructional leadership relies on the synergy among government, society, college administrators, external partners, and other educational stakeholders. From the perspective of distributed leadership theory, building the synergy among educational stakeholders will undoubtedly help promote the improvement of teachers' instructional leadership.

(3)Government Education Policies. As behavioral norms, guidelines and measures for regulating and guiding education, government education policies undoubtedly have a powerful incentive and restraint function on the practice and improvement of instructional leadership of college teachers. The imbalance such as insufficient or excessive supply of educational policies will disrupt or restrict the healthy development of educational practice, and further affect the improvement of instructional leadership of college teachers.

3 Pathways to Enhance the Instructional Leadership of College Teachers

3.1 College Level

(1)Reshape the College Leadership Culture.Reshaping the college leadership culture requires a "psychological revolution" between college management and teachers. Management needs to delegate teaching-related authority to teachers. Reshaping the leadership culture

requires strengthening trust and cooperation among the principal, administrators, and teachers. Based on distributed leadership theory, assigning certain leadership responsibilities to teachers enhances their identification with the college's teaching philosophy and development vision, thereby building a positive college leadership culture.

(2)Improve the Institutional Management System.

First of all, improve the participation system for enhancing teachers' instructional leadership. Clarify the boundaries of teachers' instructional leadership responsibilities, expand the scope of their duties, and provide opportunities for teachers to display their instructional leadership talents. Secondly, establish and improve the assessment and accountability system. Make the assessment and accountability of teachers' instructional leadership a regular system in college teacher management, formulate scientific standards for instructional leadership, clarify the assessment mechanism and reward and punishment system for teachers' leadership, and give teachers full trust in self-assessment. Taking the development of teachers' instructional leadership as an important reference for their promotion, fully mobilizing the enthusiasm of teachers' instructional leadership, and thereby better promoting the orderly development of teachers' instructional leadership (Li, 2023). Thirdly, optimize the teacher leadership training system. Colleges need to fully provide teachers with opportunities to cultivate and develop leadership knowledge and skills, so as to ensure that teachers can obtain better incentives from the training and development and apply the content of the training and development to the actual teaching and educational process.

(3)Innovate the College Organizational Structure.Enhancing instructional leadership requires institutions to adjust and optimize their organizational structure, creating an atmosphere of empowerment and equal dialogue, and establishing scientific, feasible, and effective contexts for instructional leadership practice. Simultaneously, building a flatter organizational structure, making the college an open and equal system, allows teachers to exercise leadership power, participate in institutional teaching decisions and teaching team building, continually enhancing their leadership skills.

3.2 Individual Teachers Level

(1)Shape a Sound Educational Philosophy. Teachers should actively change their perspectives, strengthen their awareness of their role as leaders, and transition from simply being "passive executors" or "recipients" to "active guides" in the educational process (Qi, 2015). College teachers should establish a concept of lifelong learning and continuously improve their teaching capabilities. Enhancing instructional leadership requires teachers to shape a sound educational philosophy and adhere to lifelong learning.

(2)Continuously Enhance Professional Knowledge and Literacy. College teachers should have a clear orientation for professional development, constantly enriching their professional knowledge and teaching "reserves". Simultaneously, they need reflective ability, acting as reflective practitioners, conducting in-depth inquiry and critical analysis of their teaching to enhance their professional knowledge and literacy.

(3)Innovate the Content and Methods of Education and Teaching. The core of a teacher's instructional leadership lies in forming a two-way interactive relationship between the teacher's leadership over the student and the student's positive response to the teacher, making the teacher's academic pursuit vision and academic beliefs match the type of student following ability, achieving the following of an academic vision beyond knowledge, and forming a leading and following teacher-student relationship. By effectively utilizing modern digital technologies and resources, organically integrating "humanistic concepts" with "digital empowerment", as well as organically aligning teachers' teaching designs with students' individualized needs, strengthening humanized interaction with students, and constantly innovating educational and teaching content and methods.

3.3 Social Level

(1)Establish a Sound Value Orientation for Social Education. The organic integration of education and society is a favorable environment for enhancing teachers' instructional leadership. To enhance teachers' instructional leadership, it is necessary for the whole society to actively foster a favorable atmosphere that respects knowledge, talents and innovation. The consistency between educational concepts and practices, as well as the integration of education and society, requires that under the correct educational value orientation of society, multiple

social entities such as society, the government, schools, and families reach a consensus and form a systematic synergy, gradually enhancing the instructional leadership of college teachers.

(2)Strengthen the Collaboration among Educational Stakeholders. Education is the cause of the whole society. Educational synergy emphasizes the coordination of multiple stakeholders. In educational collaboration, the forces of teachers, educational administrators, colleges, the government and society are all indispensable. Strengthen the construction of a multi-dimensional cooperative culture among the government, society, enterprises, colleges, teachers, etc., to create a favorable climate of educational collaboration, and build a positive climate of mutual trust among multiple subjects, enabling them to share rights and responsibilities in the process of pursuing a common vision.

(3)Strengthen Government Policy Support for Education. Firstly, incorporate teachers' instructional leadership into educational policies (Wang & Zhu, 2020), decentralize decision-making power, empower teachers, and provide them with opportunities to offer suggestions for college decision-making, curriculum design, and professional development. Secondly, the government's education administrative department should actively promote the application of digital technology in education and teaching, and provide necessary resources and policy support for college teachers. Secondly, the government's education department needs to reform the ways and methods of evaluating and appointing teachers' professional titles, establish a more scientific, reasonable and effective evaluation system, ensure that all teachers can receive fair and impartial treatment, and encourage lifelong teaching.

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