

# A Study on the Professional Development of College English Teachers

—Taking an Art College as an Example

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**Abstract:** In China's higher education system, College English, a compulsory public course, plays an indispensable role in the training of applied talents. The key to whether students' comprehensive English language skills can be effectively improved through College English lies in whether English teachers' professional development can keep pace with the development of the times. Based on this, this paper takes an art college as an example to explore the connotation, current situation and challenges of professional development of college English teachers, and to explore their path of professional development.

## 1. Introduction

During the development of China's college English teaching in more than 30 years, teaching concepts, teaching methods and teaching modes have made obvious progress. However, it is still in the predicament of "long hours and low efficiency". One of the important reasons is that the professional development of college English teachers is inadequate, and the advanced teaching philosophy and teaching methods are not effectively applied to teaching practice, which makes it difficult to improve teaching quality.

## 2. The Connotation of Teachers' Professional Development

In the late 1980s, researchers began to focus on the education and development of second language teachers, with research covering topics such as professional knowledge, practical knowledge, teaching behaviors, teacher learning, and professional development of second language teachers. Shulman stated that teachers' intellectual competencies should encompass seven categories of knowledge: subject knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of subject teaching, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational context, knowledge of educational aims, objectives, values and philosophical and historical context of education [1] [2]. Among these seven types of knowledge, knowledge of subject teaching is the most characteristic of a teacher's profession. It is the ability of teachers to translate the subject knowledge they have into the application of effective teaching for students of different abilities and backgrounds.

In 2001, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) International English Teacher Credentialing Standards, approved by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCTE) in the United States, clearly stated that the professional development of English teachers includes the five dimensions of "language, culture, teaching, assessment and professionalism". It is also pointed out that "professionalism" is the core of teacher development [3]. This requires English teachers to be able to grasp the latest developments in English-related fields and to recognize the intrinsic laws of language teaching, and to use the latest research results to guide classroom teaching practice, on the basis of solid language skills.

In the Tenth Five-Year Plan of the China Foreign Language Education Research Center [4], the roles of second language teachers in teaching are discussed in detail, including the roles of needs analyst, textbook writer, curriculum developer, teaching organizer, courseware creator, tutor, and researcher. Teachers must be adept at adjusting their roles in a timely manner during different teaching activities. This places high demands on the depth and breadth of English teachers' professionalism.

Based on previous research, the author categorized English teachers' professional development

into three areas: professional knowledge (knowledge of the subject taught, knowledge of the educational subject, and related subject knowledge), professional skills (teaching ability, research ability, ability to apply theory, and ability to manage and evaluate the class), and professional emotions (professional beliefs, professional attitudes, and professional self).

### **3. The Current Status of Professional Development for College English Teachers**

Taking the foreign language department of the case college as an example (all teachers in this department are college English teachers), the current situation of the professional development of college English teachers was investigated by means of a questionnaire and analyzed as follows:

#### **3.1 Teachers' professional knowledge**

Teachers' professional knowledge is a high level of knowledge that can serve high-quality teaching and learning, acquired through specialized education and training [5]. The education of teachers also influences the application and enhancement of their expertise in teaching. According to the questionnaire, there are 48 full-time English teachers in the foreign language department of this case college, including 5 who have obtained a bachelor's degree, 43 who have obtained a master's degree, and 0 who have obtained a doctoral degree. The education level of English teachers is reasonable. However, there is a lack of teachers with higher education levels. 47 teachers out of 48 have first degrees in English, except for one teacher who majored in psychology. Among the 43 teachers who obtained master's degrees, 37 (86.05%) majored in English-related majors, such as Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, English Language and Literature and Translation; 3 (6.98%) majored in education-related majors, such as Pedagogy, Principles of Education and Chinese International Education; and 3 other teachers majored in Accounting, Human Resource Management and Intercultural Communication and International Relations as their graduate majors.

It can be seen from the above that college English teachers in the case colleges as a whole have professional knowledge of the English subject, while 83.33% of them have further enhanced their professional knowledge by enriching their English subject expertise and education subject knowledge during their graduate studies. However, these English teachers' graduate studies are mainly literature theory courses, and rarely involve knowledge related to pedagogical technology, which also reflects the weak information technology skills of the college's English teachers.

#### **3.2 Teachers' professional skills**

Teachers' professional skills is the ability of teachers to use their professional knowledge to analyze and solve teaching problems, to conduct scientific research on teaching problems, to write papers, and then to apply the results of their research to teaching practice [6]. In practical teaching, teachers' professional skills are closely linked to teaching experience and research, etc.

The 48 English teachers in the department of foreign languages in the case college have 6 teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience, 6 teachers with 5-10 years (excluding 10 years), 34 teachers with 10-20 years (excluding 20 years), and 2 teachers with more than 20 years, with a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience, which means that the overall teachers have more practical teaching experience. However, 70.8% of the teachers have been at the college for more than 10 years, which has caused some teachers to have problems with solidified teaching styles and methods. At the same time, 27.1% of the department's university English teachers have intermediate and senior titles (including senior and associate titles), which is a relatively small percentage; except for the five new teachers who have not been rated, 62.5% of them have intermediate titles. The title evaluation document of the case college clearly stipulates that in addition to meeting the teaching hours and quality requirements in the past 3 years, the applicant must preside over and participate in scientific research projects and rank high, as well as publish no less than 4 academic papers, including no less than 2 academic papers in core journals and no less than 2 papers on educational reform. 87.5% of the teachers in the foreign language department of the case college have been teaching for more than 5 years, but only 27.1% of them have obtained the titles of professor and associate professor, which shows that the research atmosphere is not strong and the teachers' investment in research is

insufficient. Therefore, the teaching experience and research investment of the teachers in the case study restricted the development of teachers' professional skills.

### 3.3 Teachers' professional emotions

Teachers' professional emotions are the subjective reflection of teachers' value judgments about the teaching subject and the conformity of teaching work to their own, including teachers' moral, rational, and aesthetic senses [7]. These emotional experiences of teachers are closely related to interpersonal relationships, school culture, school training and evaluation system, and teaching environment. Teachers' professional emotions are the driving force for their overall physical and psychological development and play a non-negligible role in their professional development. According to the questionnaire, the "factors that teachers think affect teachers' professional development" were counted, and those related to teachers' professional emotions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Factors Affecting Teachers' Professional Emotional Development

Serial number	Influencing Factors
1	Lack of resources in the school's academic journals on English teaching and research at home and abroad
2	Few opportunities for in-depth discussion among teachers and lack of collegial collaboration
3	Lack of research methods and theoretical knowledge, limited professional development
4	Low sense of achievement in teaching
5	Low priority for the department
6	Few opportunities to participate in further training and seminars at home and abroad

As can be seen in Table 1, English teachers in the foreign language department of the case college are still neglected in their professional emotions, which can result in a lack of intrinsic motivation for teachers to improve their professional knowledge and skills.

## 4. The challenges of professional development for college English teachers

Based on the basic investigation and analysis, this paper summarized the challenges facing the professional development of college English teachers in art colleges as follows:

### 4.1 Challenges to the level of information technology in education

The Education Informatization 2.0 Initiative has put forward requirements for the overall improvement of education informatization. Information literacy has become a necessary condition for English teachers' professional development and a basis for lifelong learning [8]. Information knowledge is the key to English teachers' teaching and research. However, from the distribution of English teachers' majors in the case college, although 83.33% of them were closely related to English and education, none of them were involved in educational technology. Even though some teachers have taken courses related to educational technology, they are not skilled in technology mastery. Most English teachers in colleges and universities first came into contact with online teaching platforms after the full-scale outbreak of the epidemic in 2020. The main feature of the university English reform in the 21st century is to promote the informatization of education, advocate the widespread use of Internet technology in teaching, and encourage teachers to actively explore mixed online and offline teaching modes based on computer networks. This requires college English teachers to update their knowledge base and improve their information literacy.

### 4.2 Challenges to academic research

Professional development of teachers means that they can innovate their knowledge, keep abreast

of the frontier development of their disciplines, and promote the improvement of their teaching ability while improving their academic research. However, the degree of college English teachers in most colleges and universities is master, and the proportion of senior professional title is small. For example, there are 0 teachers with doctor's degree and 2 teachers with professor's title in the case college. Most English teachers have not received systematic, rigorous, and professional academic training during their graduate studies, and thus lack a solid theoretical foundation and a systematic, solid and powerful research system. This makes it difficult for college English teachers to link teaching and research. They are clueless about applying for research projects. The improvement of teaching ability and research ability faces a bottleneck.

### **4.3 Challenges to individual teacher capacity development**

The development of teachers' personal competence is the ability to maintain motivated and dynamic output throughout their careers. The state of teachers' personal competence development affects teachers' professional emotions, which in turn affects their professional development. Currently, College English, as a public basic course in China's colleges and universities, is not valued by students. Teachers' salaries are not high, resulting in a low sense of professional identity among college English teachers. The lack of creativity and uniqueness of scientific research results in English with Chinese characteristics makes academic research difficult and career development limited. This results in low professional satisfaction and denial of self-worth among college English teachers. Teachers' denial of self-worth can prevent teachers from exploring ways to resolve educational dilemmas and affect the advancement of their professional development.

## **5. The Professional Development Path for College English Teachers**

The process of teacher professional development is the process of continuous development and progress of teachers' professional knowledge, skills, and emotions through self-directed learning or participation in professional groups to identify, study, and solve problems during their careers [9]. The improvement of teachers' self-expertise, reflection in the teaching process and teachers' planning for personal development can effectively lead teachers to promote their inner professional development.

### **5.1 The improvement of English teachers' professional knowledge literacy**

English teaching is a process of language acquisition. It must conform to the internal laws and learning mechanisms of language acquisition development. As language develops with society, English teachers must continue to learn new theories, new teaching methods, and new teaching skills to improve their professional knowledge in order to be better equipped to meet the requirements of teaching English at colleges in the context of information technology. In the era of information technology, English teachers' professional knowledge mainly includes the knowledge of English language, the knowledge of education teaching and the knowledge of education information technology application ability. Teachers should establish the concept of lifelong learning, and can improve their professional skills through further study, short-term training, taking the old with the new, and online learning. The school should encourage teachers to actively participate in educational competitions at all levels inside and outside the school, cultivate their teaching ability through multiple channels. At the same time, they should organize training and competitions related to information-based education to guide teachers to carry out active investigation of online teaching methods and improve teaching effectiveness and teaching efficiency.

### **5.2 English teachers' enhanced sense of self-reflection**

The theory of practice-reflective teacher professional development suggests that practice and reflection are the core of teachers' professional development [10]. Through the continuous cycle of teaching practice and teaching reflection, English teachers eventually have professional qualities and obtain professional development. The validity of practicing reflective teacher professional development theory is also further argued in the empirical studies of Shenghua Chu, Weidong Zhang

[11] and Jianna Wang [12]. English teachers should strengthen their sense of self-reflection. Through the six-step cycle of discovering problems in classroom teaching and writing a reflective journal, exploring the theoretical basis behind the problems, reflecting on their teaching philosophy, self-reflecting on the contradictions between teaching behaviors and teaching philosophy, finding new ways to solve problems, practicing new methods and recording reflections, teachers' professional knowledge is developed, their teaching level is improved, and their teaching effectiveness is enhanced.

### **5.3 English teachers create personal development plans**

Personal development planning helps to keep English teachers motivated, energized, and productive throughout their careers. Contemporary college English teachers should have a clear orientation for themselves and strive to be scholarly English teachers who can polish their teaching ability and improve teaching quality through teaching practice and reflection, as well as improve their research ability and update their teaching philosophy and teaching mode through theoretical research and scientific study. Teachers should conduct self-monitoring, self-evaluation and self-regulation in the process of personal development, so that the development of professional knowledge can be strengthened and the development of teaching practice can be innovated effectively.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the context of education in the new era, improving the quality of college English teaching has put forward higher requirements for English teachers. College English teachers should make clear personal development plans, keep learning, actively explore, and effectively combine theoretical research, teaching practice with reflection and scientific innovation to promote their own long-term effective professional development.

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