

# Research on Professional Development of Vocational Teachers Based on Distributed Leadership Theory

Siyuan Guo

Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, Hainan 571126, China

---

**Abstract:** With the deepening of educational reforms and the rapid development of higher vocational education, the professional growth of vocational college teachers has become crucial for enhancing educational quality. Distributed Leadership Theory, as an emerging educational leadership framework, emphasizes the decentralized nature of leadership roles within organizations, offering new perspectives and pathways for teachers' professional development. This paper explores the application of Distributed Leadership Theory in vocational teacher development, analyzes its impact on professional advancement, and proposes corresponding strategic recommendations.

**Keywords:** Distributed leadership; Vocational teachers; Development path

---

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research background

In the knowledge economy era, vocational education serves as a crucial platform for cultivating high-quality technical and skilled talents, where educational quality is closely tied to teachers' professional competence. However, traditional leadership models in vocational colleges often remain overly centralized, overlooking the diverse leadership potential within faculty teams and limiting both the depth and breadth of educators' professional development. The emergence of distributed leadership theory offers a fresh perspective to break through this bottleneck.

### 1.2 Research Significance

**Theoretical significance:** This study is helpful to enrich and perfect the application research of distributed leadership theory in the field of education, especially for the professional development of vocational teachers, and provide new empirical support and theoretical supplement for the development of distributed leadership theory.

**Practical significance:** Through discussing the application of distributed leadership theory in the professional development of vocational teachers, it can provide specific strategies and suggestions for vocational colleges to promote the improvement of teachers' professional quality, and then promote the overall improvement of vocational education quality.

## 2. Overview of distributed leadership theory

### 2.1 Origin and development of distributed leadership theory

The theory of Distributed Leadership originated in the 1990s, first proposed by Australian psychologist Cecil Gibb. However, it wasn't until the emergence and development of learning theories and moral leadership theories that concepts like "decentralized leaders" and "leadership by leaders" gained significant traction. This led to widespread attention for Distributed Leadership in the 1990s, followed by rapid growth in the 21st century. While there's no unified definition of Distributed Leadership today, most scholars agree it emphasizes the decentralized nature of leadership within organizations. Rather than being a singular, fixed individual act, leadership is shared responsibilities and roles among multiple members across different contexts.

### 2.2 Core elements of distributed leadership theory

In distributed leadership theory, the roles of leaders and followers are not static but dynamically adapt to specific contexts and task requirements. This dynamic interplay means every team member can potentially transition between leadership and follower roles. The theory emphasizes the critical role of situational factors in leadership practice, highlighting that different contexts and tasks demand distinct leadership approaches and strategies. Consequently, leaders must continuously refine their leadership behaviors according to evolving circumstances.

Collective leadership and collaborative cooperation. The distributed leadership theory advocates collective leadership and collaborative

cooperation, believing that better leadership outcomes can be achieved through the joint efforts and collaboration of organizational members. This requires establishing good communication and trust relationships among organizational members to jointly contribute to the realization of organizational goals.

### **3. The status quo and challenges of professional development of vocational teachers**

#### **3.1 The status quo of professional development of vocational teachers**

With the continuous development of higher vocational education, teachers in this sector have achieved remarkable progress in both professional knowledge and technical skills. Through participating in training programs, advanced studies, academic exchanges, and other initiatives, they continuously update their knowledge frameworks and skill sets to meet the evolving demands of vocational education development.

The transformation of educational philosophy has seen vocational college teachers gradually shift from the traditional "teacher-centered" approach to a student-focused methodology. They now emphasize cultivating students' practical skills and innovative thinking while paying attention to individual differences and holistic development. In terms of research capabilities, these educators have achieved notable progress. By participating in academic projects and publishing scholarly papers, they continuously enhance their research competencies and academic standards, providing robust theoretical support and practical guidance for the advancement of vocational education.

#### **3.2 Challenges to the professional development of vocational teachers**

The leadership model in traditional vocational colleges tends to be overly centralized, with power concentrated in the hands of a few leaders. This results in other teachers lacking opportunities to participate in leadership and decision-making processes. Such a leadership approach limits the depth and breadth of teachers' professional development, hindering the overall improvement of their collective quality.

Teachers' engagement remains low due to overly centralized leadership models, resulting in generally insufficient participation in professional development among vocational college faculty. They often passively accept training and learning tasks without initiative or creativity, leading to suboptimal outcomes in their professional growth. Uneven resource allocation further exacerbates this issue, as teachers in strong disciplines and popular majors receive more training opportunities compared to those in weaker fields and less-demanding specialties.

### **4. Application of distributed leadership theory in professional development of vocational teachers**

#### **4.1 Promoting dynamic shifts in leadership roles**

Distributed leadership theory emphasizes the dynamic relationship between leaders and followers, offering new perspectives for the professional development of vocational college teachers. In vocational education, teachers can gradually assume leadership roles by participating in various teaching projects, research activities, and management tasks. Simultaneously, they can become followers under the guidance of other faculty members while learning leadership skills. This dynamic transition between leadership roles helps stimulate teachers' enthusiasm and creativity, thereby promoting their professional growth.

#### **4.2 Focus on the role of contextual factors**

Distributed leadership theory emphasizes the crucial role of situational factors in leadership practices. In the professional development of vocational college teachers, situational factors should not be overlooked. Different teaching programs, research activities, and management tasks require distinct leadership approaches and strategies. Therefore, vocational college teachers need to flexibly adjust their leadership behaviors according to specific contexts and task requirements. For instance, in teaching projects, instructors can employ guided instructional methods to stimulate students' learning interest and initiative; in research activities, they may adopt team collaboration to jointly tackle scientific challenges; in management tasks, democratic decision-making approaches can enhance both efficiency and effectiveness.

#### **4.3 Promote collective leadership and collaboration**

Distributed leadership theory emphasizes collective governance and collaborative cooperation, which provides robust support for the professional development of vocational college teachers. In vocational education, educators can establish teaching teams, research groups, and administrative teams to achieve collective leadership and coordinated efforts. This collaborative approach helps integrate teachers' professional resources and strengths, thereby enhancing the overall quality and effectiveness of teaching, research, and management. Furthermore, through such collective leadership and collaboration, teachers can exchange experiences and learn from each other, fostering their professional growth.

### **5. The influence of distributed leadership theory on the professional development of vocational teachers**

#### **5.1 Improve teachers' leadership and management ability**

Distributed leadership theory emphasizes the decentralized nature of leadership roles within organizations, which helps enhance voca-

tional college teachers' leadership and management capabilities. By engaging in various leadership roles and tasks, educators can gradually accumulate leadership experience and managerial skills, thereby improving their overall competence and competitiveness. Moreover, the development of leadership proficiency enables teachers to play a more significant role in teaching, research, and administrative duties, ultimately driving the advancement of vocational education.

### **5.2 Promoting the professional growth and career development of teachers**

Distributed leadership theory offers vocational college teachers a new pathway for professional growth and career development. By engaging in diverse leadership roles and tasks, educators can continuously expand their professional expertise and broaden their perspectives, thereby enhancing both their specialized skills and comprehensive capabilities. Moreover, the accumulation of leadership experience helps teachers gain more opportunities and advantages in their career advancement, enabling them to achieve their professional goals and realize their personal value.

### **5.3 Enhance teachers' sense of belonging and cohesion**

Distributed leadership theory emphasizes collective leadership and collaborative cooperation, which helps enhance the sense of belonging and cohesion among vocational college teachers. By forming teaching teams, research teams, and management teams, educators can establish shared goals and values, fostering mutual trust and collaboration. This strengthened sense of community enables teachers to engage more actively in their work, contributing their expertise to advance the development of vocational education.

## **6. Professional development strategies for vocational teachers based on distributed leadership theory**

### **6.1 Optimize the organizational structure and management system**

Implementing flat management systems addresses the issue of excessive power centralization in traditional hierarchical structures, which often limits faculty participation in leadership and decision-making. Vocational colleges can adopt this approach by streamlining management hierarchies and decision-making processes, enabling teachers to engage more directly in institutional governance. Establishing a multidisciplinary leadership team composed of faculty members from diverse academic backgrounds and professional fields helps consolidate expertise and resources, thereby enhancing leadership effectiveness and management efficiency.

### **6.2 Improve the teacher training and development system**

Vocational colleges should develop diverse training programs tailored to faculty members' specific needs and interests. These courses may include teaching methodologies, research methodologies, and management knowledge, helping educators enhance their professional expertise and comprehensive capabilities. Institutions are encouraged to promote academic exchanges and collaborations, such as organizing participation in conferences, publishing research papers, and engaging in collaborative projects. Such activities help faculty members expand their professional horizons, improve academic standards, and strengthen their competitiveness in the field.

### **6.3 Establish an effective incentive mechanism and evaluation system**

Vocational colleges can establish scientific incentive mechanisms by creating teaching awards, research grants, and administrative honors to motivate faculty members in academic, research, and management fields. Additionally, offering career advancement opportunities and competitive compensation packages can further stimulate teachers' work enthusiasm and creativity. Furthermore, developing a comprehensive evaluation system that assesses faculty performance across teaching, research, and administrative dimensions will help objectively reflect their contributions. This holistic approach enables targeted guidance and support tailored to individual educators' strengths.

### **6.4 Create a good campus cultural atmosphere**

To foster an open and inclusive campus culture, vocational colleges should cultivate an environment where faculty members feel empowered to voice their perspectives and ideas while respecting diverse opinions. This approach helps stimulate teachers' innovative thinking and creativity, thereby advancing their professional growth. By organizing diverse communication activities and seminars, institutions can enhance collaboration among faculty through structured exchanges, enabling mutual learning and experience sharing. Such strengthened collaboration fosters shared goals and values, ultimately boosting staff cohesion and a sense of belonging within the academic community.

## **7. Conclusion**

With the deepening implementation of the "Vocational Education Quality Enhancement Action Plan (2025-2030)", distributed leadership theory will demonstrate greater value in three key areas. First, adapting to technological transformation: In emerging fields like artificial intelligence and industrial internet, distributed leadership can accelerate teachers' knowledge renewal and drive the transition from "dual-qualified" teachers to "innovation-oriented" educators. Second, serving regional economies: By establishing "regional vocational education alliances",

this approach facilitates inter-school resource sharing and enhances vocational education's capacity to serve industrial clusters. Third, deepening industry-education integration: In building mixed-ownership industrial colleges, distributed leadership coordinates the responsibilities between corporate mentors and school faculty, forming a collaborative educational synergy between both parties.

Distributed leadership theory provides a systematic solution for the professional development of vocational college teachers through "organizational empowerment, individual activation, and ecosystem optimization". Its implementation must adhere to the principles of "value guidance, competency-based orientation, and ecological symbiosis", achieving high-quality development in vocational education and teachers' professional growth through institutional innovation, cultural transformation, and technological empowerment.

---

## References

- [1] Wang Hui and Chen Huiying. A Study on Teachers' Professional Development Pathways Based on Distributed Leadership Theory——Taking the Affiliated Experimental School of the National Academy of Educational Administration as a Case [J]. *Journal of Primary and Secondary School Principals*, 2022, (09):39-41.
- [2] Zhang Libo. Exploring Rural Teachers' Professional Development Based on Distributed Leadership Theory [J]. *Journal of Hebei Open University*, 2024, 29(01):77-80. DOI:10.13559/j.cnki.hbgd.2024.01.002.
- [3] Ma Liping, Tan Jianchuan. Research on the Enhancement of Digital Leadership in Higher Education Institutions under Distributed Leadership Theory [J]. *Heilongjiang Higher Education Research*, 2025, 43(05):140-147. DOI:10.19903/j.cnki.cn23-1074/g.2025.05.020.
- [4] Zhou Jingyi. Enhancing Principal and Teacher Leadership in School Improvement from the Perspective of Distributed Leadership Theory [J]. *Writer's World*, 2024(23):171-174.

---

**Fund:** 2024 Scientific Research Project of Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology (No. HKKY2024-76 Research on the Path of Promoting Teachers' Professional Development by Dual-qualified Master Workshops in Vocational Colleges).