

Teacher Leadership Development in Exam-Oriented Education Under Multicultural Contexts-- -A Comparative Study between China and Malaysia with Systemic Implications

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Abstract

This study investigates the status and challenges of teacher leadership development in China's exam-oriented education system under a centralized governance framework, comparing it with the non-Western theoretical perspective of teacher leadership practices in Malaysia's multicultural context. Through literature analysis and comparative research method, four major problems faced by the teacher leadership development in China have been revealed: (1) conceptual misinterpretation, (2) constrained authority, (3) insufficient role awareness, and (4) an underdeveloped training system. In contrast, Malaysia has institutionalized teacher leadership as its national strategy via its 'Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025', implementing innovative practices such as the 'Chief Teacher' (Guru Cemerlang) system, professional learning communities (PLCs), and distributed leadership models. Based on comparative analysis, this study proposes systemic implications for China, including policy transformation, institutional innovation, and gradual assessment reforms. The findings provide cross-cultural policy recommendations to enhance teacher leadership development in China, suggesting a potential pathway for cultivating a special, contextually appropriate model of teacher leadership.

Keywords: Teacher Leadership, Exam-Oriented Education, Multiculturalism, China-Malaysia Comparison, Educational Reform

Against the backdrop of global educational reform, teacher leadership plays an important role in improving educational quality. As the primary implementer of school education, the development of teachers' leadership not only affects the success of educational reform but also directly impacts students' learning outcomes. Notably, the developmental paths of teacher leadership in different countries and regions are profoundly influenced by their own socio-cultural contexts and educational systems. In today's era, under the background of the typical exam-oriented education system with centralized management

in China, the "Double Reduction" policy and the reform of quality-oriented education are being carried out with great difficulty. One of the main reasons is that the examination culture centered on the college entrance examination in China still profoundly reflects the role of teachers. Detailly, the teachers are squeezed by both administrative departments and the "teach to the test" pressure in schools, and their leadership space is very limited. They are unable to break through the standardized teaching model and are also unable to respond to students' various development needs. Meanwhile, Malaysia, as a multicultural country, has accumulated numerous valuable experiences in the practice of teacher leadership.

The study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of teacher leadership development between China and Malaysia, to thoroughly investigate the limiting factors of teacher leadership development in China under the context of examination-oriented education. By drawing on the successful experiences of Malaysia, the study provides operational reform paths for policymakers, school administrators at all levels, and front-line teachers, and thereby demonstrating a teacher leadership development model that contains both efficiency and fairness in the context of the entire Chinese culture. This study not only enriches the cross-cultural perspectives on teacher leadership studies but also offers practical references for teacher professional development under China's 'Double Reduction' policy framework.

Theoretical Framework of Teacher Leadership

Definition and Evolution of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership refers to the capacity of teachers to positively influence school development, teacher teams, and student learning through their professional expertise, interpersonal influence, and leadership behaviors in educational practice (Zheng & Yin, 2024; Heck & Hallinger, 2009). Originating from the educational reforms in the United States in the 1980s, this concept has gradually evolved into a global focus in educational research. Contemporary leadership theories have shifted from a "power-center" model to a "relational process" model, emphasizing the distribution of influence that is not based on position or authority (Sun, 2024). At its core, teacher leadership aims to awaken the "sleeping giant" within schools through professional authority and moral responsibility.

The connotation of teacher leadership has undergone three significant developmental stages. The first stage (1980s–1990s), focused on the role of teachers as 'change agents'; The second stage (1990s–2000s), emphasized the leadership role of teachers in instructional improvement; The third stage (from 2000 to the present) has expanded to the broader educational influence of teachers, including curriculum development, school governance, and policy-making (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). This evolution reflects a paradigm shift in educational leadership from 'heroic leadership' to 'distributed leadership'.

The Multidimensional Structure of Teacher Leadership

Teacher leadership includes four main elements: (1) Personal Leadership—the capacity for self-development and motivation; (2) Instructional Leadership—the guiding role in teaching practice; (3) Cultural Leadership—the influence in shaping school culture and values; and (4) Team Leadership—the leadership competence within collaborative teams (Harris & Muijs, 2005). These interconnected dimensions collectively form the foundation for teachers' influence both within and beyond the classroom.

Theoretical Foundations of Teacher Leadership

The distributed leadership theory provides significant theoretical support for teacher leadership, positing that leadership should be dispersed among organizational members rather than concentrated in individual positions (Spillane, 2006). This theory challenges the traditional 'heroic leadership' paradigm and emphasizes that leadership practice is the result of the interaction among leaders, followers, and situational context. In the field of education, distributed leadership is manifested in the shared leadership responsibilities between principals and teachers, working collaboratively to promote school improvement.

Within the parallel leadership theoretical framework, it is further proposed that teacher leadership and principal leadership should collaborate with each other. Their relationship is not hierarchical but rather a professional respect-based partnership (Sun, 2024). Teacher leaders and administrative leaders each play distinct yet equally important roles in school leadership, forming a 'parallel' rather than a 'vertical' leadership structure.

The Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) also offers a lens for understanding teacher leadership, emphasizing that teachers develop leadership competencies through observation, imitation, and mutual learning. The development of teacher leadership is essentially a socialization process, requiring continuous growth through practice and reflection within professional community.

These theories challenge the traditional bureaucratic management model, providing a theoretical foundation for teacher participation in school decision-making. While establishing an analytical framework for subsequent China- Malaysia comparative study.

Current Status and Challenges of Teacher Leadership Development in China*Developmental Background Under Exam-Oriented Education and Centralized Governance*

The Chinese education system is characterized by its exam-oriented features and centralized governance. The imperial examination system (Keju) in China, which lasted from 605 AD to 1905AD, spanned over 1,300 years. While the modern National College Entrance Examination system (Gaokao), established in 1952, has lasted for more than 70 years. From the ancient Keju to modern Gaokao, this score-driven selective examination model has become deeply ingrained, exerting a profound influence on China's educational thoughts and practices.

Under this background, the allocation of educational resources shows significant regional disparities. According to 2021 statistics from the Ministry of Education, the number of key secondary schools in the eastern China is 3.2 times greater than in western regions with a similar uneven distribution observed among 'Double First-Class' universities. This uneven distribution of resources further reinforces the school evaluation system centered on enrollment rates. A rigid bureaucratic structure characterizes school management, where administrative directives flow through a vertical chain from educational administrative departments to school administration, grade-level departments, teaching-research groups, and finally to classroom teachers (China Institute for Educational Finance Research, 2021).

The 'Double Reduction' policy (2021) while attempting to reform this system, has left teachers still facing three layers of structural dilemma: the intense expectations of score success from grassroots parents, the rigid performance assessment requirements from

middle-level schools, and the practical considerations of employment competitiveness from the upper-level society. These multidimensional pressures trap teachers in the exam-oriented education and quality-oriented education, severely constraining their leadership development space.

The Main Existing Problems

Conceptual Misinterpretation and Cultural Cognitive Barriers

In the Chinese linguistic context, the term "leadership" is often equated with positional authority, leading to a deviation in the understanding of teacher leadership from its professional essence (Wang & Zhu, 2020). This semantic bias results in the misconception of teacher leadership as an administrative position rather than a form of professional influence, thereby causing conceptual confusion at the practical level. The 'differential mode of association' in traditional Chinese culture, as described by Fei (1948), further reinforces hierarchical concepts, acculturating teachers to accept a role positioning of being led. While the Confucian notion of 'respect for teachers and valuing education' has elevated the social status of teachers, it has also solidified the singular expectation of teachers as knowledge transmitters rather than leaders. This cultural cognitive barrier severely restricts teachers' awareness and development of their own leadership potential.

Power Structure and Institutional Constraints

China's highly centralized education system marginalizes teachers in decision-making processes. Ordinary teachers rarely participate in significant school decisions, while even curriculum-related authority primarily resides with teaching-research group leaders and school administrators. Excessive administrative intervention in schools has created an imbalanced power dynamic where 'bureaucratic authority > teaching authority' (Yan et al., 2025).

The institutional constraints are manifested in multiple dimensions: First, rigid curriculum standards and a unified textbook system limit teachers' curricular autonomy. Second, score-center evaluation mechanisms primarily based on student examination results, severely compresses teachers' space for teaching innovation. Third, excessive non-teaching workloads, such as various inspections, assessments, and administrative reporting, consume the time and energy that teachers could otherwise devote to developing their leadership development (China Academy of Educational Sciences Teacher Development Institute & Guang ming Daily Joint Research Group, 2023).

Deficient Role Perception and Insufficient Professional Identity

The long-term exam-oriented environment has led teachers to develop a mindset of 'separation between teaching and administration'. This cognitive constraint results in most teachers lacking the awareness to actively participate in school improvement. The 'reinforced technical rationality' orientation in teacher professional development has also exacerbated this problem. Current teacher training overly emphasizes teaching skills and exam strategies, neglecting the cultivation of teachers' leadership awareness and capabilities in curriculum development, school governance, and policymaking. This training model reinforces teachers' self-perception as "technical implementer" rather than "professional leaders."

Deficiencies in Training Systems and Evaluation Mechanisms

Current teacher training programs have systemic deficiencies in the cultivation of leadership skills. In terms of content, there is an overemphasis on theoretical instruction while neglecting practical guidance. Regarding methodology, the predominant reliance on lecture-based formats lacks interactive and experiential elements. In terms of assessment, there is a focus on attendance rates while actual effectiveness is overlooked (Liu & Chen, 2019).

In terms of the evaluation mechanism, teacher performance assessment remains predominantly driven by students' grade, which typically accounts for more than 60% of the assessment criteria, while contributions to leadership are not incorporated into the evaluation system (Gao, 2020). Although the professional title evaluation includes requirements such as "mentoring young teachers," in practice, the form outplays the substance. This evaluative orientation results in a lack of intrinsic motivation for teachers to develop leadership skills, fostering a utilitarian tendency of 'emphasizing teaching outcomes while neglecting the leadership process'.

Current Reform Attempts and Limitations

In recent years, China has undertaken several beneficial explorations in teacher leadership development. Prestigious universities such as Beijing Normal University and East China Normal University have introduced courses on teacher leadership and established specialized research groups. These theoretical explorations have laid a solid academic foundation for teacher leadership development. At the practical level, some regions have piloted innovative institutional arrangements such as 'Master Teachers' Studios' and 'Principal and Teacher Rotation'. For example, since 2015, Shanghai has established "Peak Plan" 'Master Teachers' Studios covering various disciplines, which leverage core teachers to lead the development of their subjects (Hu, 2021). Zhejiang Province, on the other hand, has implemented a "Teacher Mobility" system to promote the flow and sharing of high-quality teaching resources.

Nevertheless, these reform attempts still face numerous limitations. First, there is a significant disconnection between theoretical research and practice, making it difficult to translate academic achievements into practical outcomes. Second, innovative measures are often confined to localized pilot projects, lacking systematic implementation. Third, the inertia of the traditional management system is strong, posing evident obstacles to reform. Overall, the development of teacher leadership in China remains trapped in a predicament characterized by a lack of top-level design, inadequate implementation at the middle level, and insufficient awareness at the grassroots level, urgently requiring breakthrough changes (Tang, 2020).

The Malaysian Experience in Teacher Leadership Development

Multicultural Contexts and Policy Frameworks

Malaysia, as a typical example of a multicultural nation, its population composition is characterized by distinct diversity: Malays (69.4%), Chinese (23.2%), Indians (6.7%), and other ethnic groups (0.7%) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). This multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious social context presents unique integration challenges to the Malaysian education system and, in turn, provides a special context for the development of teacher leadership.

The 'Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025' has established teacher leadership as one of the core elements of the national education development strategy, identifying it as a key reform direction and proposing the Guru Cemerlang system, which enables outstanding teachers to undertake the roles as subject leaders, mentors, and curriculum developers (Ministry of Education in Malaysia, 2012). To achieve this goal, the Blueprint designs a systematic reform path: the first stage (2013-2015) focuses on establishing a foundational framework; the second stage (2016-2020) promotes full implementation; and the third stage (2021-2025) aims to fulfill the outstanding development.

Notably, the Blueprint places particular emphasis on creating a supportive environment for teacher leadership through curriculum and assessment reforms. In terms of Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), the proportion of HOTS questions in the Malaysian Certificate of Education Examination (SPM) has significantly increased, with some science subjects reaching 40% in 2023 (Malaysian Examinations Council, 2023). The school-Based Assessment (PBS) system has also been progressively introduced to replace some standardized examinations, and it has now been fully implemented in primary schools and is being gradually extended to secondary schools. These structural reforms have alleviated the pressure of examination orientation, thereby creating space for the practice of teacher leadership.

Innovative Practices and Successful Models

The Guru Cemerlang (Chief Teacher) System

The 'Chief Teacher' system in Malaysia is a highly developed framework for teacher professional development, characterized by strict selection criteria, a clear career progression ladder, well-defined job responsibilities, and effective incentive mechanisms. This system employs a two-tier review process, which includes document review, interviews, and teaching demonstrations, to identify teachers who excel in professional contributions and leadership (Saidin, 2012). Compared with the selection of 'backbone teachers' in China, the Malaysian model pays more attention to leadership indicators such as 'mentoring other teachers' and 'curriculum development', avoiding a sole focus on papers and awards. Chief Teachers not only have clear responsibilities but also enjoy corresponding economic incentives, thereby establishing a more mature career development path.

Distributed Leadership and Professional Learning Communities

In Malaysia, schools actively promote the distributed leadership model, distributing leadership power among teachers of diverse ethnic backgrounds through three pathways, which has demonstrated special value in multicultural schools. First, the decentralization of curriculum decision-making empowers subject leaders to independently determine a considerable proportion of the curriculum content and teaching methods. Second, the establishment of interdisciplinary teaching teams allows key teachers to take turns to serve as leaders. Third, the establishment of inter-school collaboration networks facilitates resource sharing (Ministry of Education in Malaysia, 2012). This leadership model enhances teachers' inclusive and supportive behaviors toward multiculturalism, promotes cultural exchange and integration within schools, and enables students to better understand the cultural characteristics of different ethnic groups in a multicultural environment, thereby improving their cross-cultural understanding (Bush & Ashley, 2019).

Meanwhile, the establishment and in-depth development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Malaysia have enabled teachers of Malay, Chinese, and Indian descent to jointly participate in curriculum development, integrating their respective ethnic cultural groups into teaching content. This cross-ethnic collaboration not only enriches the curriculum system but also enhances teachers' cross-cultural communication skills and teaching innovation capabilities (Mohd et al., 2024).

Teacher Union Involvement in Policymaking

The National Teachers' Union (NUTP) plays a unique role in the formulation of educational policies in Malaysia. The successful experience of the NUTP lies in achieving of three main balances: the balance between professionalism and representativeness, the balance between criticism and constructiveness, and the balance between autonomy and collaboration. Specifically, it is reflected in the following aspects: First, the organization actively puts forward suggestions and feedback, participates in discussions on educational reform, and emphasizes the necessity of professional teaching reforms. Particularly in the aspect of teaching professionalism, it is necessary to reduce teachers' workload, improve teaching quality and classroom attendance rate. In addition, the NUTP is committed to safeguarding the rights and interests of teachers, emphasizing the importance of teachers in educational decision-making, calling for a reduction in the pressure and burden on teachers when implementing decisions and promoting the professional and competence development of teachers. Second, NUTP not only raises questions but also provides solutions. For example, in response to the shortage of teachers, the NUTP also suggests increasing recruitment efforts (Halid, 2023). Third, while maintaining its own independence, the NUTP also actively collaborates with other organizations. Such as launching a medical security plan in cooperation with Zurich Malaysia to provide better benefits for teachers.

This "bottom-up" participation mechanism enhances the dominant position of teachers in educational reform and provides organizational support for the development of teacher leadership. In contrast, China Education Trade union primarily fulfills welfare and protection functions, with limited influence in the formulation of professional policies.

Progressive Assessment Reform

Malaysia has adopted a 'dual track' assessment reform strategy. On one hand, it is gradually reducing its reliance on centralized standardized examinations, with the number of subjects in the national examinations being gradually decreased since 2013. On the other hand, the school-Based Assessment (Pentaksiran Berasaskan Sekolah, PBS) has been implemented and strengthened since 2011, with its weight of its grades in graduation evaluations gradually increasing (Malaysian Examinations Board, 2023).

The reform of the teacher evaluation system also reflects a step-by-step approach. The new Teacher Performance Appraisal Standard (TPAS) explicitly lists leadership contributions as one of the four major dimensions, with specific indicators including mentoring novice teachers, curriculum development, professional sharing, and school improvement projects. The appraisal outcomes directly affect teachers' promotion and professional development opportunities. This gradual reform has effectively reduced the resistance to change (Yang & Hong, 2018).

Cross-cultural Leadership and Technology Integration

The multicultural background of Malaysia has given rise to a unique cross-cultural model of teacher leadership. In different educational institutions such as Islamic religious schools, Chinese independent secondary schools, and Tamil primary schools, teacher leaders have developed professional practices that are adapted to their own cultural background. Take Islamic schools as an example, teacher leadership integrates religious values with modern educational concepts, forming a dual model of 'spiritual guidance and professional guidance.'

Digital leadership is an emerging field in the development of teacher leadership in Malaysia. The Malaysia Digital Education Plan (MDEP) provides systematic training in digital competencies for teachers. Teacher digital leaders have promoted the wide application of blended learning, leading to notable advancements in digital teaching, digital competence improvement, and the popularization of blended learning in primary and secondary schools across the country.

It is particularly worth noting Malaysia's 'Digital Mentor Programme.' The Ministry of Education in Malaysia (MOE) explicitly mentioned the 'Digital Mentor Programme' in the 'Digital Education Strategy 2021-2025'. With teachers who have obtained advanced certifications serving as regional digital education leaders. Each mentor is responsible for guiding 5 to 8 schools, supporting the simultaneous development of digital teaching capabilities through workshops, classroom observation, and online tutoring, etc. (Guru Digital Mentor Guidelines, 2022).

Implications of the Malaysia's Experience for China

Policy Transformation and Top-Level Design

China could learn from Malaysia's systematic approach of incorporating teacher leadership into the national education strategy (Gong, 2020). The specific suggestions are as follows: In the implementation framework of 'China Education Modernization 2035', a special plan for 'Teacher Leadership Development' special program should be added, with clear developmental goals and implementation paths set for three stages: 2025, 2030, and 2035. The Ministry of Education could take the lead in formulating the 'Guidelines for the Development of Teacher Leadership in Primary and Secondary Schools' to provide detailed policy guidance for localities and schools.

Establish a three-level teacher leadership training system at the provincial, municipal, and school levels: At the provincial level, set up an 'Outstanding Teacher Leadership Training Base' to be responsible for policy research and backbone training. At the municipal level, set up a 'Teacher Leadership Development Center' to carry out practical guidance and effectiveness evaluation. At the school level, implement a 'Teacher Leadership Growth Plan' to ensure full participation of all staff. This multi-tiered implementation model can not only ensure unified standards but also adapt to local differences.

Policy design should focus on the dual-track development of 'professional competence + leadership,' avoiding tendency of formalization. Drawing on the experience of Malaysia's 'Chief Teacher' system, leadership indicators can be strengthened in the existing backbone teacher system. Substantive leadership contributions, such as 'mentoring other teachers,'

‘curriculum development,’ and ‘school improvement’ should be made as essential conditions. while superficial indicators such as papers and awards should be reduced.

Institutional Innovation and Empowerment Practices

Application of Distributed Leadership Model

Chinese schools, considering the cultural characteristics of the ‘society based on personal connections’ in China. The practice of distributed leadership should establish clear rules and boundaries to avoid the influence of interpersonal relationship factors on professional judgment. The ‘structured empowerment’ strategy can be adopted: clearly define the scope of power (e.g., which matters can be independently decided), the decision-making processes (e.g., how to reach consensus), and the accountability mechanisms (e.g., criteria for performance evaluation).

Three pilot practices of distributed leadership can be implemented: First, the autonomy of the course and teaching is decentralized, allowing the teaching and research group to decide no more than 30% of the course content and teaching methods; Second, establish interdisciplinary project teams with teachers taking turns to serve as leaders; Third, establish a ‘Teacher Leadership Committee’ and participate in major school decisions.

Construction of Professional Learning Communities

Reforming the administrative-led teaching and research groups into teacher-driven professional learning communities (PLCs) involves the following specific paths: reducing administrative instructions and granting the PLC the right to independently determine the discussion topics and forms; providing resource support, including one professional study day per month and necessary activity funds; establishing incentive mechanisms and incorporating PLC participation and contributions into the teacher evaluation.

In the Huangpu District of Shanghai, the promotion of interdisciplinary learning has facilitated cross-disciplinary collaboration among teachers. Many schools, including the Shanghai School of Economics and Management and the Shanghai Dazhong Industrial School, have carried out interdisciplinary project-based teaching design and shared teaching cases integrating different subjects. These practices indicate that interdisciplinary collaboration has been promoted and implemented to a certain extent within the region. Moreover, an effective Professional Learning Community (PLC) requires three key conditions: first, a stable activity frequency (it is recommended to do it twice a month, for 2 hours each time); second, a focus on practical problems (such as overcoming students' learning difficulties); and third, professional guides can be rotated by key teachers (Xing & Xi, 2025).

The Enhancement of Trade Union Organizational Functions

Learning from the experience of NUTP to enhance the functions of the China’s Education Trade Unions in teacher professional development. Teacher participation in policymaking helps enhance their perception of social status, sense of professional autonomy, and leadership awareness. For instance, an analysis based on 22,369 teacher questionnaires indicates that teachers’ participation in policymaking can effectively enhance their perception of their social status. Moreover, teachers’ perception of political status and social respect play a significant chain-mediating role in the impact of policy participation on status cognition (Yan et al., 2025). Specific measures could include Establishing ‘Teacher Professional Development

Committee' under education trade unions at all levels to collect and reflect teachers' concerns and demands; Establishing an 'Education Policy Hearing System' to organize discussions among stakeholders before the implementation of major policies; Carrying out the 'Teacher Leadership Development Forums' to promote the sharing of experiences and best practices.

Reform of the Progressive Assessment System

Diversification of Teacher Evaluation

For the diversification of teacher evaluation, it is suggested to implement it in three steps: The proposed implementation is recommended to be carried out in three phases: In the short term (1–2 years), add the option of 'leadership contributions' in the evaluation of senior teachers, such as mentoring young teachers and developing school-based courses, with its weight of 10%. In the medium term (3–5 years), establish an independent evaluation dimension for teacher leadership, with a weight of 25%. In the long term (more than 5 years), establish a dual-track evaluation system that attaches equal importance to teaching ability and leadership.

The evaluation method should focus on multiple pieces of evidence: not only the results (such as the effectiveness of guidance), but also the process (such as the frequency of professional sharing). It should not rely solely on administrative evaluations, but also collect feedback from colleagues, students, and parents. Moreover, not only quantitative indicators should be used, but also qualitative descriptions should be emphasized. Such a comprehensive evaluation is more truly reflect the development of teacher leadership.

Comprehensive Student Evaluation

Drawing on the transitional strategy of 'reducing unified exams + strengthening school-based assessments' in Malaysia, the following approaches could be considered: First, reduce the frequency of standardized exams (e.g., from twice per semester to once), while developing school-based assessment tools (such as growth portfolio). Once the conditions are ripe, integrate the results of school-based assessments into the college admission evaluation system (Wang, 2020).

The 'Green Evaluation' reform piloted in many places of Zhejiang Province has incorporated students' moral development, physical and mental health, and artistic literacy into the evaluation system. This reform has led to a significant increase in teachers' innovative teaching practices, and the excellent rate of students' comprehensive quality evaluation has improved significantly. This indicates that the evaluation reform can effectively release the leadership potential of teachers (Department of Education of Zhejiang Province, 2021).

Cultural Reshaping and Cognitive Transformation

It is suggested to adopt three approaches to carry out systematic publicity on the concept of teacher leadership and correct the cognitive deviation that 'leadership = position'. First, incorporate teacher leadership as a compulsory content of the cultivation of normal students and teacher training. Second, organize the 'Teacher Leadership Publicity Month' activity to change cognition through case sharing. Third, develop localized theoretical frameworks, such as 'Professional Influence' framework, which are more in line with the cultural psychology of China (Gong, 2020).

The transformation of principals' leadership style is pivotal. It is suggested that 'promoting the teacher leadership development' be included into the evaluation indicators for principals. Additionally, specialized training should be carried out to help principals master supportive strategies such as empowerment, coaching, and team building.

Support System Construction

Refinement of the Certification System

As a mechanism for enhancing teachers' professional capabilities, teacher leadership certification has been widely studied at home and abroad (Sun, 2024). It is suggested that establishing a three-level teacher leadership certification system: school level (for instructional leaders), district and county level (curriculum leaders), and provincial level (system leaders). The certification criteria should cover three dimensions: professional competence (such as the level of subject teaching), leadership competence (such as team-building skills), and moral quality (such as professional responsibility). The certification process emphasizes performance-based assessments, such as on-site teaching demonstrations and team coaching presentations etc. (Song et al., 2024).

Curriculum System Development

Higher education institutions can develop a modular teacher leadership curriculum system, which includes basic modules (such as leadership theories), professional modules (such as curriculum leadership), and practical modules (such as action research). The implementation of the course can adopt practice-oriented methods, including case teaching (accounting for 40%), situational simulation (accounting for 30%), and field projects (accounting for 30%).

Project Follow-up Mechanism

A comprehensive support system for the Teacher Leadership Development Program should be established, including introductory guidance (providing new leaders with three months of intensive training), continuous mentoring (equipped with experienced mentors) and professional communities (regular exchanges and discussions). Financial guarantee is the key to the sustainability of the project.

It is suggested to establish the 'Special Fund for Teacher Leadership Development'. The sources of funds can include government grants (accounting for 60%), school matching funds (accounting for 20%), and social donations (accounting for 20%). The fund is mainly used to support research and practice projects on teacher leadership and to reward outstanding leaders.

Conclusion

This study, through a systematic comparative analysis between China and Malaysia, reveals the difference in the paths of teachers' leadership development under different social-cultural backgrounds. In China, the development of teacher leadership is constrained by three structural contradictions: the contradiction between the centralized management system and the need for teachers' empowerment, the contradiction between the exam-oriented education tradition and the orientation towards quality education, and the contradiction between bureaucratic culture and the construction of professional communities. These

contradictions have led Chinese teachers' leadership to face the predicament of 'cognitive bias, limited power, ambiguous roles, and insufficient support.'

In contrast, Malaysia has established a relatively complete ecosystem for the development of teacher leadership through the 'Education Blueprint'. Its successful experience can be summarized in four points: First, national strategic guidance: clearly identifying teacher leadership as a key point for educational reform. Second, driven by institutional innovation: establishing substantive development paths such as Guru Cemerlang program. Third, the support of cultural integration: developing adaptive practices in the context of a diverse society. Fourth, progressive reform strategy to balance the relationship between change and stability.

In conclusion, there is no one-size-fits-all model for the development of teachers' leadership. It must be rooted in specific social and cultural soil. When drawing on international experiences, China should follow three principles: selective absorption rather than blind adoption, adaptive transformation in line with the local context, and innovative development with Chinese characteristics (Gong, 2020).

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