



Strategies for Enhancing the Leadership in Junior High School Teachers in Regional Schools of Chaozhou City, China

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Abstract

Background and Aim: The "teacher-school community" connected by "teacher+school" is an important issue that modern organizational behavior has long focused on, especially the strategy of enhancing teacher leadership in the teacher-school community, which has become a widespread focus in modern school development and reform. In 2018, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council jointly issued the "Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teacher Team Construction in the New Era", which further strengthened the requirements for improving teacher leadership from a policy perspective, greatly highlighting the value and significance of exploring strategies for enhancing the leadership of junior high school teachers at the level of combining theory and practice.

Materials and Methods: Focusing on the strategy of enhancing the leadership of junior high school teachers, this study aims to solve the problem. Based on the systematic deconstruction and dimension division of the connotation of junior high school teacher leadership, a questionnaire survey is conducted to systematically investigate 1106 teachers of junior high schools in Chaozhou City, Guangdong Province, China. Using SPSS software to collect and analyze the data, a comprehensive investigation is also conducted on the problems in their leadership development, the causes of these problems, and targeted scientific strategies that align with the development needs of regional teacher leadership.

Results: The questionnaire survey shows that the leadership of middle school teachers in Chaozhou City is at a moderate level, and there is still a lot of room for improvement in each subdimension.

Conclusion: Researchers have proposed strategies for enhancing the leadership of junior high school teachers from five dimensions: professional leadership, cultural cultivation, organizational development, home-school cooperation, and social appeal.

Keywords: Junior High School Teachers; Teacher Leadership; School Development; Strategy

Introduction

The "teacher-school community" connected by "teacher+school" is an important issue that modern organizational behavior has long focused on. Among all the issues related to the relevant research is the strategy of enhancing teacher leadership in the teacher-school community, which has become a widespread focus in modern school development and reform (Frost & Harris, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Grant, 2006; Harris, & Muijs, 2005; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). In 2018, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council jointly issued the "Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teacher Team Construction in the New Era", which further strengthened the requirements for improving teacher leadership from a policy perspective in China. Teacher leadership has its own regional and cultural differences in development. The research on teacher leadership internationally has a long history and relatively mature theoretical development (Li & Pei, 2017). However, research in China has only recently begun, and there is still a lack of systematic theoretical guidance and professional practical research that combines Chinese cultural scenarios (Sun, 2021; Yang, et al., 2014). Successful education depends on qualified teachers (Chai, 2023). Teachers are the main resource of education (Chen, 2023; Li, et al., 2023). Strengthening the construction of the teaching staff (Li, 2023) is not only a pioneering project in China's basic education but also a fundamental project for overall economic and social development. Improving teacher leadership helps to build a good educational ecosystem and innovate the development model of schools (Hu & Gu, 2012; Jin, 2007; Zhou & Guo, 2014). The new round of basic education reform in China since 2021, greatly highlights the value and significance of exploring relevant and effective strategies for enhancing the leadership of junior high school teachers at the level of combining theory and practice (Zhou & Chen, 2021).



Therefore, this article focuses on solving the problem of enhancing the leadership of junior high school teachers. Based on the deconstruction and dimensional division of the connotation system of junior high school teacher leadership (Gao & Zhang, 2022), a questionnaire survey is conducted to systematically investigate the teacher community in junior high schools in Chaozhou City, Guangdong Province, China. The study explores the various problems in the development of junior high school teacher leadership since the new round of basic education reform in China began in 2021. Based on analyzing the causes of its problems through data collected, combined with relevant national and local teacher development policies, targeted scientific strategies that are in line with the needs of regional teacher leadership development are proposed.

This study centers on the leadership of junior high school teachers in regional schools in China. The main questions to be explored are: (1) What is the current situation of leadership among junior high school teachers in regional schools? (2) What are the difficulties in developing leadership for junior high school teachers? (3) What are the leadership development strategies for junior high school teachers?

Objectives

1. To further clarify the concept of teacher leadership and improve the theory of teacher leadership for junior high school teachers.
2. To explore strategies for enhancing the leadership of junior high school teachers at the level of combining theory and practice.
3. To provide a new research perspective and analytical information for the professional development of junior high school teachers.

Literature review

1. The development of teacher leadership

In the 1980s, the United States was the first to propose the theory of "teacher leadership" and produced influential works and literature on the connotation, concept, definition, and function of teacher leadership. The development of leadership among primary and secondary school teachers in the United States is influenced by various factors given by various parties in the trend of the times, mainly including the teacher professionalization movement, leadership theory, the national mainstream consciousness of individualism, and the teacher empowerment and empowerment movement. The research on teacher leadership in the United States has gone through the first stage of traditional teacher leadership theory research, and the second stage of modern teacher leadership research, with a diversified trend in theoretical research directions. There has been a diverse exploration of the subject of teacher leadership and the ways of developing leadership. Individual behavior or efforts can no longer constitute teacher leadership, and the development of teacher leadership shows a collective tendency. Teacher leadership goes beyond traditional roles and power-based approaches, and achieves leadership over school members through a process of command and control, demonstrating diverse leadership styles. It highlights the dynamic and organic coexistence of formal leadership and informal leadership, attaches importance to teacher cooperation, and focuses on promoting the development of teacher leadership in the teacher professional community. For example, Children Bowen, Moller, and Scrivner (2000) believe that teacher leadership is the collective leadership of school members, and define it as the process of promoting student learning, promoting school improvement, and pursuing excellent teaching practices in a learning community. School members work together to contribute to the progress of school education and all the affairs that influence the school's development. Crowther, Kaagen, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) believe that teacher leadership is the collective leadership of the teacher community, which promotes the transformation of school teaching, enhances the connection between schools and communities, and ultimately achieves the success of the entire school. The rich achievements of research on foreign teacher leadership have provided references, opened up ideas, and opened up future research directions for Chinese teacher leadership research.



The research on teacher leadership shows that the relevant studies are mainly divided into two periods and different fields of theoretical research, which involve the connotation, role, characteristics, dimensions, etc. of teacher leadership. Modern teacher leadership has been seen as a positive interactive, goal-oriented interpersonal influence that highlights group responsibility and occurs in a common culture and work. The construction of a "community of leaders", emphasizes the collective responsibility and shared collaboration in the professional community of teachers, and clarifies that leadership is the obligation and responsibility of all members of the organization, a process of mutual influence, and interaction among members of the organization. In school organizations, teachers have the ability, obligation, and right to become leaders, advocating for the decentralization, transfer, and sharing of leadership responsibilities in schools.

After entering the 21st century, China has closely followed the pace of global education development and transformation, considering teachers as the core factor of education reform, and has issued a series of policies to promote the construction and development of the teacher team. In the new round of teaching curriculum reform that began in 2001, China positioned teachers as the main body of education and the key to cultivating high-quality talents. Teachers are the professional forces in implementing educational policies, and the practitioners of curriculum reform, and they are the ones who grasp the fate of educational reform. It can be seen that the concept of teacher leadership has been established. There is no direct mention of naming "teacher leadership" in China's teacher policy or documents of teacher development, but in reality, the requirements, rights, and practical measures of "teacher leadership" are mentioned in various policy documents.

At the national level, China's requirements for the transformation of the role of teachers not only focus on the improvement of their comprehensive quality and abilities, but also on the development of teacher leadership, and the role of teachers in promoting school reform, promoting their professional development, and enhancing student academic achievement. Therefore, under the new situation and requirements, how to develop and utilize the leadership potential of all teachers in school development is an urgent issue that needs to be put on the agenda.

2. Connotation of teacher leadership

British scholars Reynolds, Sammons, Stoll, and Hillman (1996) pointed out that the key to successful school improvement lies in continuous attention to teacher leadership, which is an important force driving educational change. Teachers share leadership in professional communities to help all teachers reach collective consensus, enhance collective confidence and ability, jointly build advanced teaching models, improve management models, enhance school efficiency, influence school culture, and make school culture more inclusive and cooperative,

According to Gao & Zhang, (2022), teacher leadership is a form of professional influence in the circumstances of schools. This study suggests that in the specific educational and teaching scenarios of Chinese schools, the connotation of teacher leadership includes: (1) Teacher leadership is a non-hierarchical, non-power, and non-functional influence in the school context. Teamwork is the core form on which teacher leadership is implemented and performed. (2) Teachers play a positive role in the interaction and collaboration with students, colleagues, schools, and parents, as well as in community cooperation and professional community development, to develop teacher leadership and share leadership. (3) Teacher leadership is an important resource for teacher development. (4) Developing teacher leadership is an important strategy for school development, which helps to transform the school's future vision and improve the school's future chances.

Conceptual Framework

In terms of dividing the dimensions of teacher leadership, both foreign and domestic scholars acknowledge that teacher leadership is the core of teacher leadership in overall planning, mainly acting at the class level. But it also emphasizes the involvement of teachers in internal management at the school level, as well as their leadership in cooperation with stakeholders such as parents, communities, and society. The common factors presented in most model constructions include "professional leadership, decision-

making participation, shared responsibility, communication and collaboration, and group development", which seek to develop and exert shared leadership in the professional community of teachers. Therefore, it indicates that the framework for teacher leadership should demonstrate the key points mentioned in previous research.

In terms of foreign research outside China for further investigation, this study mainly refers to the views of Berg, Carver, and Mangin (2014), the Teacher Leadership Self Evaluation Scale (Katzenmeyer & Moller's, 2001), and the Teacher Leadership Model Standards (TLMS) of the American Teacher Leadership Exploration Alliance 2011 (Berg, J., Carver, C., & Mangin, M., 2014). The Teacher Leadership Model Standards (TLMS) 2011 (Berg, J., Carver, C., & Mangin, M., 2014) demonstrate the forms of group, shared, and organizational responsibility in teacher leadership, requiring the establishment of a collaborative team culture, the development of a collective responsibility, and the emphasis on collaborative learning within the team.

The conceptual framework inspired by the above research and suggestions is planned carefully with the research by Gao & Zhang, (2022). The framework presented by these two scholars highlights the forms of group learning, sharing, and organizational responsibility exhibited by junior high school teacher leadership in the context of Chinese culture. The development and implementation of teacher leadership is based on a collaborative team culture that emphasizes collective responsibility and collaborative learning within the team. In the progressive hierarchical structure model of the teacher leadership evaluation index system they constructed, teacher leadership includes five dimensions: professional leadership, cultural cultivation, organizational development, home school cooperation, as well as social appeal or social charisma (as shown in Figure 1).

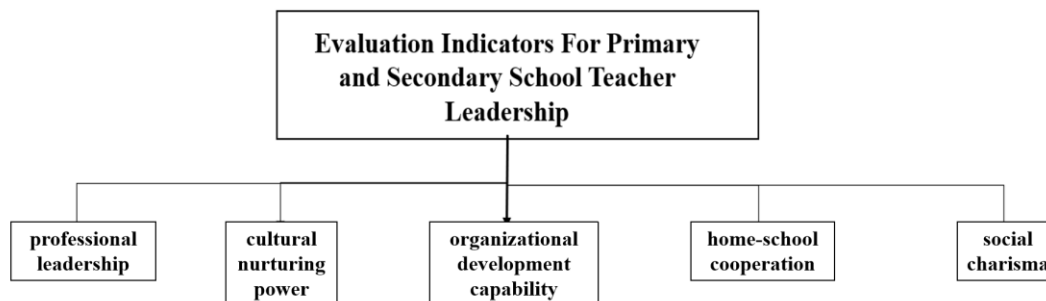


Figure 1. Progressive hierarchical structure model of the teacher leadership evaluation index system
Note: Constructed by the author

The progressive hierarchical structure model of the teacher leadership evaluation index system for Chinese primary and secondary school teachers includes professional leadership, cultural cultivation, organizational development, home school cooperation, and social appeal/social charisma, which complement and support each other in developing teacher leadership in all ways and further benefit the teachers in their professional development. Among all the five aspects, the first core point, namely, professional leadership is the core of junior high school teacher leadership, and a shared and collaborative team culture is the hub for the sustained development of high school teacher leadership.

In 2021, China launched a new round of basic education reform. On July 24, 2021, the Opinions on Further Reducing the Homework Burden and Extracurricular Training Burden of Students in Compulsory Education (General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and General Office of the State Council, 2021) were issued, advocating the formation of a good educational ecosystem of mutual understanding and promotion among families, schools, and society. The "double reduction policy" advocated by China in 2021 which aims at reducing the students' burden in both school homework and



after-class academic training in primary and junior middle school has restructured the development model of basic education, emphasizing the position of school education as the main battlefield for students' overall development. The "double reduction policy" focuses on improving the quality and efficiency of school education, and puts forward higher requirements for the construction of school teacher teams and the development of teachers' comprehensive abilities. Teacher leadership, as a non-administrative influence, plays a crucial role in promoting and implementing educational reforms in the development and operation of teaching, curriculum, collaboration, and community. Therefore, developing teacher leadership can effectively promote the implementation of the "double reduction policy" and deepen basic education reform (Zhu, 2022).

Methodology

This study based its findings and indication for research on a survey. The survey questionnaire on the leadership situation of middle school teachers used in this study was completed based on the framework of the leadership evaluation index system for Chinese primary and secondary school teachers developed by Gao & Zhang, (2022). Researchers conducted a questionnaire survey on the leadership situation of junior high school teachers in Chaozhou City, Guangdong Province. The data results were statistically analyzed and SPSS software was used to conduct a relevant analysis of the data, deeply analyzing the problems in the development of teacher leadership at a deeper level, and providing a basis for finding appropriate solutions.

The survey questionnaire on leadership among junior high school teachers includes five dimensions: professional leadership, cultural cultivation, organizational development, home school cooperation, and social appeal/social charisma. There are 26 items in the questionnaire for each dimension. Among them, items 1-7 are professional leadership which indicates that junior high school teachers, through their "teacher" identity, can exert their leadership skills both in classroom teaching and in curriculum implementation. The professional competence and cultural heritage of teachers can have an impact, helping others actively and proactively seek their professional development. Items 8-12 are cultural cultivation which indicates cultivating a culture of trust, cooperation, and sharing among the teacher community. Items 13-18 are organizational development which demonstrates teachers playing a role in influencing decision-making and assisting the principal in management is conducive to the reform of institutional mechanisms and promotes the development of schools. Items 19-22 are home school cooperation which emphasizes the collaboration between families and schools and provides further guarantees for building an education powerhouse and ensuring high-quality education that satisfies the people in China. Finally, items 23-26 are social appeal which is mainly about building partnerships with stakeholders from all walks of life, to activate their power to participate in school leadership, to help them to investigate into school culture, and to experience the educational atmosphere of the school.

Using the Likert 5-point scoring system, the range from "1" to "5" indicates "completely disagree" to "completely agree", with no reverse scoring questions. The Likert scale is very suitable for delving deeper into a specific topic and identifying in detail people's views on the relevant topic. To ensure the authenticity and effectiveness of the collected data, the questionnaire guidelines will emphasize confidentiality regulations and send an informed consent form.

The survey questionnaire on leadership among junior high school teachers is divided into three parts:

Part 1: Questionnaire Guidelines

Part 2: Demographic information, which refers to the basic situation of junior high school teachers. This includes seven aspects of the teacher's gender, age, education level, professional and technical titles, teaching time, position, and the subjects taught.

Part 3: Leadership Scale for Junior High School Teachers.

1. Research subjects and sampling methods

The researchers contacted 120 junior high schools through relevant officials from the Education Bureau of Chaozhou City and two county education bureaus in Guangdong Province and developed and



distributed questionnaires using Questionnaire Star. All teachers answer individually, and no questions are allowed to be missed or skipped. 1106 valid questionnaires were collected, with a response rate of 92.17%.

2. The reliability and validity of the formal questionnaire

Through reliability analysis, the reliability coefficients of the formal survey questionnaire on leadership among junior high school teachers are: professional leadership is. 924, cultural cultivation is. 938, organizational development is. 956, home school cooperation is. 907, and social appeal is. 889. The overall reliability coefficient value is 0.975, which is greater than 0.900, indicating that the reliability quality of the research data is very high.

Validity is defined as the correctness or validity of the measurement data. Validity analysis requires Bartlett's test (the corresponding p-value needs to be less than 0.05). The data from this study were subjected to Bartlett's sphericity test ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the study data is suitable for validity analysis (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1 Validity of the Leadership Survey Questionnaire for Junior High School Teachers

KMO and Bartlett's test		
KMO Value		0.971
Approximate chi-square		31765.08
Bartlett's test of sphericity	df	325
	p Value	0

Results

In this study, a survey was conducted on the leadership of junior high school teachers in Chaozhou City. The average score for all items was calculated, and the higher the average score, the better the leadership of junior high school teachers. The median of the overall situation of the scale and the theoretical mean score of each dimension is 3. When the mean score of the overall situation and each dimension is greater than 3, it indicates that the leadership of junior high school teachers is better, otherwise, it is not.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of leadership levels in various dimensions of junior high school teachers

Basic indicators						
Item	sample size	minimum value	maximum value	average value	standard deviation	median
professional leadership	1106	1	5	4.021	0.809	4
cultural nurturing power	1106	1	5	3.873	0.941	4
organizational development capability	1106	1	5	3.373	1.102	3.333
home-school cooperation	1106	1	5	3.693	0.962	3.75
social charisma	1106	1	5	3.769	0.926	4

According to Table 2, the 1106 middle school teachers who participated in the survey showed a specific performance in leadership scores, with the lowest score of 1 and the highest score of 5. The overall average score was 3.754, with a standard deviation of 0.848, which was higher than the theoretical mean. This indicates that the leadership level of middle school teachers in Chaozhou City is at a moderate level and there is a lot of room for improvement. The overall situation of mean value and total score further prove the situation and result in the survey.

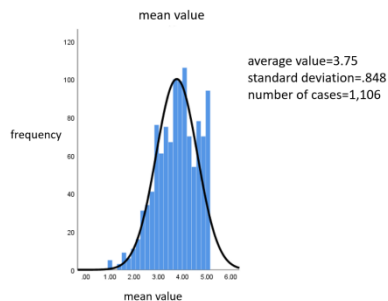


Figure 2. Overall situation of leadership level of junior high school teachers (mean)

Note: Constructed by the author

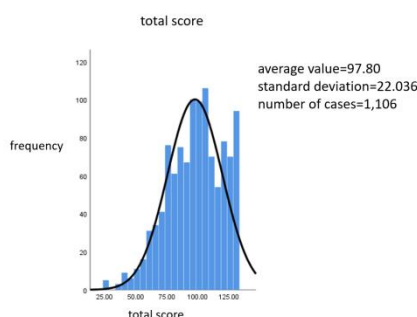


Figure 3. Overall situation of leadership level of junior high school teachers (total score)

Note: Constructed by the author

Discussion

To better understand the leadership of junior high school teachers, this study used independent sample t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and post hoc multiple comparisons based on individual factors of teachers, namely seven factors, including gender, age, education level, professional and technical titles, teaching time, position, and the subjects taught, The focus is on gaining a deeper understanding of the significant differences in individual factors among junior high school teachers in Chaozhou City in terms of teacher leadership, and obtaining the following information:

1. Different gender samples showed significant ($p < 0.05$) effects on professional leadership, cultural cultivation, organizational development, home-school cooperation, and social appeal. Overall, the average number of male teachers is significantly higher than that of female teachers. As in traditional practice in Chinese culture, male leaders still hold the most important positions in the school. Only a few vice principals of junior high schools are female teachers who are only in charge of teaching work and do not participate in personnel management and other affairs relating to school management. Most teaching and research leaders or grade leaders in junior high schools are also female teachers, and their daily work mainly involves handling various tasks related to teaching or research instead of what are considered to be the essential issues concerning school management.

2. The sample data of age showed a significance level of 0.01 for the total score ($F = 16.203$, $p = 0.000$), and the comparison of average scores among groups with significant differences was "36-45 > 24-35; 46-60 > 24-35; 46-60 > 36-45", which in all shows that teachers who are at the age of about 35-60 with longer working years in the schools are considered to be authoritative senior teachers in the school. And this is naturally admitted and accepted by all the teachers. They either hold certain positions or have rich teaching



experience, and can exert a relatively effective influence in the professional community of teachers in the school.

3. The samples with different professional and technical titles showed significant differences in total scores ($p < 0.05$). Further analysis shows that teachers with senior, intermediate, and junior professional titles have decreasing scores in overall leadership level and various dimensions. Teachers with senior professional titles exhibit stronger performance in various dimensions of teacher leadership, and they have a significant influence within the teacher community. To be exact, teachers in this group are given more responsibilities.

4. The teaching time has a significant effect on the total score at the 0.01 level ($F = 10.283$, $p = 0.000$). Teachers with over 20 years of teaching experience are highly influential members of the teaching community. They are very familiar with the situation of the school, have rich life experiences, and have broad social knowledge. They also have a high level of professionalism and creativity, a high level of professional knowledge, and an objective understanding of their professional development. They have a strong adaptability to updating and applying professional knowledge. This type of teacher also performs better in teaching ability and professional knowledge and skills. Even if they do not hold leadership positions, they can still express their opinions on school affairs and have a relatively sufficient voice.

5. Different positions of job samples showed significant differences in total scores ($p < 0.05$). Positions in the school administrative departments are clearly the most effective means of obtaining and exerting teacher leadership. The average leadership of teachers with formal positions is higher than that of teachers without positions in all dimensions. It is obvious that the principal or the vice principal is the highest-ranking personnel in the school's administrative department, and they can easily obtain more opportunities than other colleagues to develop and demonstrate leadership. Ordinary teachers who do not assume formal positions, lack the power granted by their positions and are unable to use any other factors besides professional authority to influence other teachers.

Conclusion

Essentially, the driving force behind the development of teacher leadership comes from their self-education awareness and self-identity actions. The development of teacher leadership is essentially an endogenous development, which refers to the influence of teachers on their surroundings in the process of professional self-renewal and continuous growth. In terms of the conclusion of the research, it is concluded that: (1) For the education and economic development in areas with shortcomings in high-quality education development, teachers are extremely important human resources. They are the driving force behind the school development. The formation and development of teacher leadership are influenced by various internal and external factors, including pre-existing factors such as individual abilities, as well as post-existing factors such as individual efforts, national, social, regional, school education policies, and organizational environment. (2) Under a narrow and fixed management system, junior high school teachers have a vague understanding of the concept of teacher leadership. Junior high school teachers have significant cognitive limitations and weak awareness of teacher leadership, making it easy for them to delegate their professional development rights, participation in community activities, and decision-making power to others. (3) The limited space for the development of teacher leadership in the professional community of junior high school teachers, weak personal leadership development willingness, insufficient shared leadership, and insufficient support from the school level for junior high school teacher leadership are intertwined, forming key factors that hinder the improvement of junior high school teacher leadership. (4) The cultivation and inspiration of professional leadership, cultural cultivation, organizational development, family-school cooperation, and social appeal are the core issues that must be grasped and solved in the process of enhancing teacher leadership. (5) The participation and support of stakeholders will greatly catalyze the development of teacher leadership, forming the basic pressure and endogenous motivation for teachers to independently enhance their leadership.



Recommendation

The attention to the development and enhancement needs of teacher leadership is an inherent requirement for teachers to adapt to educational development and self-transformation and is also a key factor in improving teacher satisfaction and self-efficacy. In the structure of China's education system, the primary and secondary school teacher team is the largest professional group. Enhancing the leadership of these regional teacher groups is the foundation for teachers to establish themselves. Therefore, building practical and feasible leadership enhancement measures that meet the survival and development needs of teachers is conducive to building a high-quality, high-level, and dynamic teaching team, and promoting the sustainable and healthy development of education in this region.

Professional leadership is the first core dimension, and the positive impact of a teacher's professional knowledge, classroom organization ability, and teaching skills on student performance has always been widely recognized by various sectors of society (Wang, 2015). Teachers should not only enhance their professional leadership in teaching and curriculum but also strengthen their information technology leadership and share leadership in all aspects. Junior high school teachers should enhance their awareness of information technology, improve their ability to apply information technology, proficiently use modern information technology to access teaching resources, engage in self-directed learning, guide student learning, share teaching, and curriculum leadership, etc., to enhance their influence in the time when information technology is valued in depth.

The second core dimension of cultural cultivation is to determine the areas and boundaries of teacher leadership focus through team sharing, providing the fundamental basis for implementing teacher leadership. The school culture of innovation, openness, cooperation, and trust must replace the conservative, closed, competitive, and lazy culture, allowing all teachers to experience a sense of happiness and achievement (Zeng Panpan, 2023).

The third core dimension, organizational development, requires not only schools but also other administrative organizations of education to provide appropriate, multi-level, and collaborative organizational conditions for the development of teacher leadership, such as the formulation and implementation of relevant teacher leadership policies. This is an important way and key link for the development of teacher leadership, and also a basic prerequisite for improving teacher leadership. The cultivation, development, and utilization of teacher leadership require the establishment of a system that can play the role of teachers as the main body and enhance their enthusiasm to ensure it. All require the state and relevant departments to formulate effective policies, and schools to take corresponding incentive measures and educational training for teachers to stimulate their leadership potential.

The last two core dimensions, home school cooperation and social appeal/social charisma are the sources of motivation for teacher leadership to transcend school walls. The process of school management includes the interaction between the energy of principals, teachers, students, external stakeholders such as family elders, and the school management context. The improvement of teacher leadership is to enhance the endogenous motivation of teachers as the main body, coordinate the management of the school's operation of teacher work mechanisms, strengthen the support of high-quality resources from all sectors of society, as well as implement and improve the government's measures powerfully for teacher work mechanisms.

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