

# A Study on the Cultivation of the Professional Development Awareness of Middle School English Teachers from the Perspective of Attribution Theory

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**Abstract:** Weiner's attribution theory is one of the most representative motivational attribution theories. As an internal psychological factor motivating teacher professional development, attribution plays different roles in different stages of teachers' professional development. In order to realize the professional development of teachers, we should strengthen cultivation and make efforts to stabilize motivation in the survival stage. In the stage of teaching situation concerns, we should make internal attribution and correctly understand ourselves. In the stage of concerns about pupils, we should make unremitting efforts to grasp controllable factors.

**Key words:** attribution theory; awareness of teacher professional development; survival concern; teaching situation concern; concerns about pupils

## I. Introduction

In psychology, attribution is understood as a process, which refers to the cognitive process that people use perception, thinking and other internal information processing activities based on the result of a behavior or event to clarify the cause of the result. In education and teaching, attribution is the internal factor of teachers' perception of the world, which affects teachers' educational beliefs, and in turn determines the occurrence of teachers' teaching behaviors. In 1972, the American psychologist Weiner creatively combined attribution theory and motivation theory organically, opening a precedent for the study of attribution effects. The theory believes that attribution affects changes in expectations and emotional responses. Through individual behavioral research, the cognition of the success or failure of behavioral results can be explained. The content summarizes the reason for the success or failure of behavior, namely behavior responsibility, into six elements: ability, effort level, physical and mental condition, luck, difficulty of the task, and external environment. These six elements are reflected in three dimensions: stability, internal External factors and controllability. Therefore, the author attempts to study the cultivation of teachers' professional development consciousness from the perspective of attribution theory, analyze the basic characteristics of teachers in the four stages of professional development

from the perspective of attribution theory, and propose corresponding countermeasures based on the three dimensions of attribution.

## II. Attribution theory and teacher's professional development

### 2.1 Attribution theory and its current studies

Attribution theory belongs to a field of social psychology. It explores how individuals "attribute" events, and how this cognition and perception affect their behavioral motivations. It focuses on the elaboration of the causality of events. Weiner, an American psychologist, absorbed Heider's point of view in the 1970s and proposed this far-reaching theory, which creatively combines attribution theory and motivation theory. The content can be divided into three dimensions: stability, controllability, internal and external factors. In Weiner's view, there are six main factors that affect a person's success or failure: ability, effort, difficulty of the task, luck, physical and mental status, and external environment (the external environment involved here mainly refers to the objective factors that cannot be actively controlled by behavioral subject, such as government regulations, learning or training opportunities provided by education departments, school management systems or evaluation mechanisms, etc.).

Although the research on attribution theory in our country started late, there are many results from the perspective of attribution theory to study teacher teaching practice and student learning behavior. Based on authoritative Chinese databases such as CNKI, Weipu, Wanfang, etc. Taking attribution theory, motivation theory, success or failure attribution as the subject keywords, search for relevant classic academic papers, authoritative works with high citation rates in China and some related cutting-edge research in the past ten years. There are not many researches on teachers' teaching practice on the motivation and behavioral influence of college or university students, and only a handful of researches on the professional development of teachers can be searched. By analyzing the problems existing in the cultivation of professional development awareness of middle school English teachers, this paper deeply analyzes the causes of weak professional development awareness of teachers based on attribution theory, and puts forward several strategies to cultivate professional development awareness of teachers based on this theory, in order to provide reference for better professional development of teachers. It is also of certain reference significance to establish a new class of teachers with excellent professional quality and high quality.

The research on attribution of teachers' teaching success or failure is mainly about attribution and explanation of teachers' teaching behavior from the theoretical aspect, and analysis of the reasons, results and countermeasures of teachers' job burnout by empirical research. It has been found that attributions of teachers' success or failure are of great significance to teachers' understanding and adjustment of their teaching behaviors. Therefore, as an internal psychological factor motivating teachers' professional development, attributions play an extremely important role in both professional development and lifelong development of teachers. As an important element of educational development, teachers' professional development is closely related to their attribution of success or failure. Therefore, the cultivation of teachers' professional development consciousness from the perspective of attribution theory is a point worth studying in the educational circle.

### 2.2 Teachers' professional development awareness

The consciousness of professional development of teachers is a special consciousness of their own professional development, which is the concrete embodiment of self-consciousness in the teaching profession. According to Professor Ye Lan (2001), teachers' awareness of professional development, divided by time dimension, at least includes awareness of their past professional development process, awareness of their current professional development status, level and stage, and awareness of their future professional development planning.

Teacher professional development consciousness is a multi-dimensional, multi-level psychological

activity system, which will have a huge restriction and influence on human psychology and behavior, and to a certain extent determines the teacher's individual behavior style, teaching method and response. The attitude of one's own future development plays a vital role in the teacher's own development. It not only connects the teacher himself and the external environment like a bridge, but also helps teachers to treat their own knowledge, their own emotions, and their own behavior as a bridge. As the object of knowledge and practice, he constantly constructs his own subjective internal world, thus making his own development possible. As Professor Ye Lan (2001) said, "When a teacher becomes a teacher with self-professional development needs and awareness under the needs and consciousness of self-professional development, he can consciously look for learning opportunities, and then he can clarify what he really needs. What direction to develop and how to develop, etc., can become a "self-guided learner." Only with the awareness of self-development can it be possible to give full play to the teacher's subjective initiative, actively seek more opportunities to promote self-development, and strive to become a lifelong learning Practitioners. The process from the realization of professional development to practice is the process of teachers constantly breaking through their current cognition, fully tapping their own potential, and pursuing professional development. Teachers' teaching practice is determined by their beliefs. Qian Bing (2018) believes that teachers' professional development awareness is an inexhaustible source of motivation for teachers' professional development. At present, there are many researches on teachers' professional development awareness, such as "The Influence of Teachers' Self-awareness and School Supporting Atmosphere on Teachers' Professional Development", "The Loss and Awakening of Teachers' Self-Development Awareness", etc. From these existing studies, we It is not difficult to find that the lack of professional development awareness of teachers is an important reason that hinders teachers' professional development. Some teachers lack self-development awareness during the teaching process, and they are prone to job burnout over time. This bad and negative emotion is not only detrimental to Teachers' own mental health is also not conducive to teachers' pursuit of long-term self-development. Existing studies have shown that teachers' self-awareness at the individual level and school factors at the organizational level will affect the professional development of teachers to a large extent. Therefore, actively explore the status quo of teacher professional development and unearth the deep-seated reasons for the weak self-development awareness of teachers , Seeking ways and strategies to cultivate teachers' self-development consciousness has very important practical significance for teachers' professional growth. Weiner's attribution theory provides an effective tool for us to understand and cultivate teachers' professional development awareness.

### **2.3 Teachers' professional development under the attribution theory**

In 1969, according to the contents of teachers' concern, Fuller divided teachers' professional development into pre-teaching concern stage, early survival concern stage, teaching situation concern stage and student development concern stage. According to the viewpoint of developmental psychology, the development of things has stages, and so does the professional development of teachers. This study adopts the four-stage theory of teacher professional development proposed by Fowler to study the characteristics of different stages of teacher professional development from the perspective of attribution theory.

#### **2.3.1 The characteristics of teachers in the pre-teaching stage of focusing on inquiry under the attribution theory**

This stage belongs to the period of teacher cultivation. It mainly refers to the teacher students who are trained in the school. They think that they are still students. Since they have not really experienced teaching practice, they only pay attention to themselves, and focus on the study of theoretical knowledge without real contact. The front-line teaching situation, so pre-service teachers at this stage will not have empathy for front-line teachers with job burnout, and even criticize front-line teachers with weak self-development awareness, and blame first-line teachers for not pursuing teacher professional development. They are not

working hard enough and their teaching ability is not good enough. Since they did not go to the frontline to conduct in-depth investigations and interviews, their impressions and knowledge of front-line teachers remained in the textbooks or the oral narrations of teachers they knew, and could not empathize with them. Therefore, they would not “attribute” the teachers’ passive response to professional development as the school’s Objective factors such as external environment and interpersonal relationship.

### **2.3.2 The characteristics of teachers in the early stage of focusing on survival under the attribution theory**

Teachers at this stage are first exposed to actual teaching work. They are concerned about the survival of a teacher, especially the control of the classroom, whether they are liked by students, and the evaluation of themselves by leaders and colleagues. The goal of their work is to achieve the teaching process. Perfect and mainly accepted and recognized by students, unable to accurately evaluate the difficulty of teaching tasks, and their own development motivation cannot be adjusted timely and flexibly according to the difficulty of the task. Therefore, teachers at this stage will feel powerless when encountering setbacks in teaching. It’s said that “a teacher who just concentrates on work, works silently, never reflects on review, does not summarize and improves, then at best can only be an authentic “teacher” and can never become a true educator.” They often use the evaluation of the outside world as a measure According to my own teaching standards, more time is spent on the grasp of teaching materials and the design of teaching links, but not too much time for teaching reflection, so it is difficult to achieve great progress.

### **2.3.3 Teachers' characteristics in the stage of focusing on teaching situation under the attribution theory**

Teachers at this stage are quite familiar with the teaching content, have mastered the teaching skills and methods, and begin to shift their attention to the various problems and limitations in the teaching situation, and use how to successfully control the classroom as the standard. In addition, they are concerned about whether the school can provide the resources and conditions they need for teaching, and they are still concerned about their own performance in the teaching situation, and can reasonably evaluate the difficulty of the teaching task. Teachers at this stage pay more attention to their own teaching level, and have formed their own models in terms of teaching content, teaching design, and teaching methods. Teachers at this stage are not concerned about improving teaching effects and teaching skills. At the same time, they will also feel anxious about the tedious, repetitive and monotonous work of the teaching profession.

### **2.3.4 Teachers' characteristics in the stage of focusing on students' development under the attribution theory**

Teachers at this stage have been able to freely shift their attention from themselves to the learning needs and development of students, especially paying attention to students’ psychological development and learning outcomes. The most important thing is that teachers at this stage will consider individual differences among students , Recognizing that students of different development levels have different learning needs, so they will teach students in accordance with their aptitude and adopt appropriate teaching methods according to the differences of students, aiming to promote the development of students. The student-oriented teaching concept is more prominent at this stage. Teachers at this stage have a strong and stable internal work motivation, which is mainly reflected in the mastery of teaching laws, accurate insights into student characteristics, flexible teaching methods and methods, and Have a strong sense of self-reflection and strong classroom observation ability. With the steady development of the teacher’s profession, the richness of teaching experience, and the growth of experience, his professional development motivation has reached a controllable and stable level, thereby reducing the negative emotions facing professional pressure and adjusting the subjective and objective factors well. The impact on your own professional growth.

### **III. Cultivation of the professional development awareness of middle school English teachers**

#### **3.1 The current situation of the professional development of middle school English teachers**

In recent years, the news that “teachers are under increasing pressure” and “teachers may become the most stressed professions” are not alarmist reports. According to surveys, the main sources of pressure for English teachers are “titles and promotions” and “total amount of work”. “Students’ test scores and pressure to enter a higher education.” Although many teachers will use “professional development needs” as a source of pressure, more data shows that heavy work and unsatisfactory physical conditions make many English teachers feel The development consciousness is no longer strong. Teachers’ beliefs affect teachers’ professional practice. Similarly, the strength of teachers’ professional development awareness directly affects teachers’ professional development. At present, the English teacher group is burdened by non-teaching tasks, as well as the decline in the status of the English subject and the lack of attention by students and parents to the subject. The situation has made English teachers physically and mentally exhausted, and their professional development awareness is weak. Therefore, education authorities and schools are more needed. Take appropriate measures to cultivate teachers' awareness of professional development and encourage more teachers to pursue their own professional development.

#### **3.2 Problems existing in the process of cultivating the professional development awareness of middle school English teachers**

Based on the attribution theory, this research finds and sorts out the problems in the professional development of English teachers, which are mainly reflected in the following four aspects:

##### **3.2.1 Professionalism**

Professionalism refers to teachers' knowledge and understanding of education, and the establishment of educational ideals and beliefs in their thinking and pursuit of education. Professionalism is the spiritual pillar for teachers to engage in educational work and the source of motivation for creative work, and it plays a directional role in the professional development of teachers. However, many teachers are not firm enough in their beliefs. Once they encounter setbacks in education, their original educational ideals will also be affected. Due to vague ideals and beliefs, some teachers also have problems with their ethics and style. They habitually attribute their failures to some external factors such as job difficulty, luck, school management or assessment system, etc., they are not enterprising and lack professionalism.

##### **3.2.2 Professional knowledge**

The professional knowledge of teachers includes ontological knowledge, conditional knowledge, practical knowledge, and operational knowledge. In the past, the country's recognition of teacher qualifications was not strict enough, and many people who did not receive professional teacher education can also be teachers. This has led to some teachers with teacher qualification certificates that have a weak foundation for specific subjects and a serious lack of conditional knowledge. The accumulation of teaching practical experience, its practical and operational knowledge is increasing day by day, and barely possess the subject knowledge that a teacher should master, but because it has not received special teacher education or training, it should have the pedagogy and psychology in the teaching profession Knowledge is severely lacking. However, because the acquisition of the teacher qualification certificate gave them enough confidence, once they have achieved success in teaching, they will attribute their temporary success to their controllable factors-hard work, or feel that they are strong. At present, the country is paying more and more attention to the construction of a new type of teacher team, and the assessment of teachers is also increasing. It is required that all teachers should keep pace with the times and continuously increase the reserve of professional knowledge in order to pursue the long-term development of professional growth.

### 3.2.3 Professional competence

The improvement of teachers' professional ability mainly requires the promotion of both the external environment and self-reflection. Taking reflection ability as an example, the reflection ability of teachers has received the attention of a few researchers, but has not yet attracted the attention of relevant education departments, making it a Negative factors that restrict schools from cultivating teachers' professional development awareness. The knowledge structure of junior high school teachers lacks systematic pedagogy, psychology and other theories, cannot summarize and reflect on the existing and worthy research problems in teaching in a timely, scientific and effective manner, and their reflective ability is generally not strong. Many teachers have over-maintained self-image and strong self-esteem. Even if they encounter difficulties and problems in the reflection process, they will be a hindrance to face and refuse to communicate and discuss with colleagues in a timely manner. The reflection effect is not good, which makes it difficult to improve professional ability. The professional growth of teachers is fettered.

### 3.2.4 Professional wisdom

The professional wisdom of teachers is the product of the integration of teachers' professional spirit, professional knowledge and professional ability. It comes from the accumulation, refinement and crystallization of teachers' teaching practice. It is a teacher's personalized, comprehensive, high-level professionalism. Because professional wisdom can only be derived from self-summary and long-term unremitting insights from teaching practice and learning, some teachers have a passable attitude towards teaching work after professional burnout, lack of self-reflection awareness, neither summary nor reflection, Even if they know that success comes from the cyclical process of "practice-reflection-re-practice-re-reflection", they will not spend too much time in this process.

## 3.3 An Analysis of the causes of middle school English teachers' weak awareness of professional development

If Weiner's attribution theory is used as a tool to understand teachers' self-development consciousness, we can get the following reasons for their indifference to self-development consciousness:

### 3.3.1 Lack of self-awareness

Some teachers have just entered the teaching position. The great gap between ideals and reality has led to some errors in teachers' understanding of themselves. Many teachers, especially young teachers and male teachers, lack a correct understanding of their own value, their own work, and their social status. The low level of teachers' pay and the deviation from the salary they receive makes teachers feel that they have not realized their social value in the teaching profession, and lack a sense of professional identity and belonging. As the saying goes, soldiers who do not want to be generals are not good soldiers. Before becoming a real teacher, every teacher is full of enthusiasm. He wants to make a contribution to the country's education and aspires to be a good teacher, even an outstanding backbone teacher, who is valued by the school, recognized by parents, and loved by students. However, many teachers will form an understanding and evaluation of their own education and teaching ability in their own education and teaching practice. It is undeniable that many teachers lack a correct understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses and their own quality and ability to engage in the teaching profession. , I believe that some literacy and abilities are irreparable regardless of the degree of hard work. This cognitive bias has caused teachers to attribute their personal inattention to objective factors such as the difficulty of work and the external environment.

### 3.3.2 Low expectations for development

As the value of education becomes more prominent in the future development of individuals, the expectations of teachers from all walks of life are getting higher and higher, but the expectations of teachers for their own development become more and more as their sense of belonging and happiness in school decreases.

Come lower and lower. In the course of professional development, teachers carry too many business tasks outside of teaching, and the burden of non-teaching work is too heavy, which leads to increasing professional pressures. Teachers' expectations for their own professional development and the actual situation There is a great contradiction between. When faced with the heavy burden of teaching and non-teaching tasks, many novice teachers have general or no professional expectations. In the ordinary teaching process, they hold the attitude of "being a monk hitting the clock for a day", even if the students they bring have not achieved the ideal The teacher will also be indifferent or just blame the students for not working hard enough. The teacher has no expectations for his own professional development, not to mention that he will reflect on his own factors.

### **3.3.3 Insufficient attention from schools and inadequate motivation for teacher development**

The reasons for teachers' indifferent self-development consciousness include some external factors that teachers cannot control, such as schools' teaching management tends to be utilitarian, school's assessment mechanism does not take into account the teachers' long-term development, etc., and some school leaders' management level is low , Teaching management revolves around students' scores and grades. This management method not only fails to stimulate teachers' self-development awareness, but also often dampens teachers' professional development enthusiasm and hinders teachers' professional development; in addition, schools are creating opportunities for teachers to learn and advance Insufficient attention, single method of teacher training, excessive emphasis on knowledge transfer, low training effect, ignoring of teachers' personal experience and emotional feelings, leading to low motivation of teachers to participate in training and lack of motivation for professional development... These ills are to a certain extent The above has stifled teachers' enthusiasm and creativity in actively seeking to solve problems, and even caused some teachers who have great hopes for training to have a strong dislike and disgust towards their own professions, and objectively strengthen teachers' laziness and perfunctory Behavior affects the professional development of teachers.

## **IV. Cultivation of professional development awareness of middle school English teachers based on attribution theory**

### **4.1 Survival concerns: Strengthen toughening and strive to stabilize motivation**

Many novice teachers lack professional development motivation or unstable motivation when entering the teaching position. They rely on external driving forces (such as the evaluation of professional titles, the acquisition of teacher honors, the recognition of leaders and colleagues, etc.) to pursue professional growth. However, teachers themselves Intrinsic motivation is the key factor to promote the professional development of teachers themselves. Teachers' own teaching ability and work difficulty are stable, but there are many influencing factors that are unstable, such as their own efforts, luck, physical and mental conditions, external environment, etc., which are constantly changing. Therefore, teachers should strengthen their experience, even with experience. Insufficient, we must also learn to control our emotions and strive to stabilize our motivation for professional development. In the process of strengthening the practice, accidental successful experience will help strengthen teachers' self-confidence in carrying out effective teaching and form hard work—physical and mental pleasure —Success—The factors of stability and instability that continue to work together act on the virtuous circle of teachers' professional development.

### **4.2 Teaching situation concerns: Attribution of internal factors, a correct understanding of self**

For teachers, especially those who have just stepped into the teaching profession and are concerned about the survival stage, deepen the understanding of the teacher's profession and the recognition of their own abilities and positioning, achieve correct attribution, strengthen their own self-cultivation, and experience with heart The joy and happiness that work brings can ensure that teachers have a strong sense of self-development. Among the factors that affect teachers' self-development awareness, there are internal factors at the teacher's

personal level, such as the teacher's academic or educational knowledge reserve, teaching ability, own effort, attitude towards students and work, the teacher's physical and mental health and personal emotions Wait. There are also many external factors that teachers cannot control, such as the difficulty of teachers' teaching work, wages, individual differences among students, and the management level of school leaders. Internal and external factors work together to restrict or promote the professional development of teachers. As far as teachers are concerned, only by working hard to attribute to their own factors, can they actively exert their own initiative and creativity, can feel joy and happiness in their work, can maintain and stimulate a strong sense of self-development, and can continue to grow.

#### 4.3 Concerns about pupils: Make unremitting efforts to grasp controllable factors

Although the external environment plays a vital role in cultivating teachers' autonomous professional development awareness, if a school grants teachers more autonomy and freedom, it provides teachers with a platform for self-expression, stimulates teachers' self-development needs, and cares about teachers' self-development. Professional development, and actively create opportunities for teachers to go out for investigation, training and further study. Under the guidance of school leaders and the influence of peers, their awareness of pursuing self-development will continue to increase, provided that these uncontrollable factors play a positive role effect. However, among the six factors that affect the success or failure of an individual, only effort can be controlled by one's own wishes, and the others are beyond the scope of personal control. It is said that "work hard will not necessarily succeed, but if you don't work hard, you will definitely not succeed". Only when teachers try their best to master the controllable factors in the daily teaching process, can they face some accidents calmly. Teachers' work is inherently complex and cyclical, so even if you encounter setbacks, you should try to get rid of the pain of failure through your own efforts, instead of attributing failures to uncontrollable factors such as luck and the external environment. Weaken the importance of your own efforts for success.

## V. Conclusion

The professional development of teachers is a dynamic process, and not every teacher's professional development is carried out in strict accordance with the four stages of teacher professional development proposed by Fowler. Under the perspective of attribution theory, for all kinds of subjective and objective factors influencing teachers' professional development, teachers should learn from the stability, controllability, inside and outside three dimensions for the objective, the correct attribution, only in this way, to improve their own professional development initiative and creativity, so as to promote long-term autonomous professional development of teachers.

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