

Research on the Pathways for Enhancing Secondary School English Teachers' Teaching-Research Abilities Based on the U-G-S Community

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Abstract: This study adopts a case study approach, looking at how to improve English teachers' Teaching-Research Abilities in secondary schools based on the U-G-S (University-Government-School) community. It focuses on a project at Lingnan Normal University that helps Zhanjiang No. 8 Middle School. It finds that this community can help teachers improve their teaching-research abilities by using a "four-in-one" method. First, Expert Guidance involves giving high-level talks to introduce university research methods and help teachers overcome research challenges. Second, Reflective Practice uses demonstration lessons and feedback to help teachers think about their teaching in real situations. Third, Resource Sharing creates an online database for regular learning. Fourth, Research Output offers guidance to turn teaching-research results into projects and papers. The study shows that this method greatly improves teachers' research skills and academic work. It helps develop key teachers and turns them into research-focused educators. This approach can be used as a model for teacher development in other regions.

Keywords: U-G-S Community; Secondary School English Teachers; Teaching-Research Ability; Professional Development; Pathway Research

1. Introduction

With the ongoing progression of basic education curriculum reform and the influence of artificial intelligence technology on language instruction, secondary school English educators are confronted with a transition from "knowledge transmitters" to "learning facilitators" and "teaching researchers." Nonetheless, at the

practical level, the enhancement of teaching-research capabilities among secondary school English teachers faces several challenges: Firstly, there is a deficiency in awareness and environment conducive to teaching research, which hampers the ability to conduct systematic educational research; secondly, there is a lack of research methodologies and professional guidance; thirdly, there is inadequate policy support and resource assurance for undertaking teaching-research activities, leading to suboptimal transformation of research outcomes^[1]; fourthly, there is an absence of a mechanism for sharing teaching-research resources across regions and between schools.

These challenges significantly constrain the professional development of secondary school English teachers, thereby impacting the overall enhancement of basic education quality. The U-G-S (University-Government-School) model—spearheaded by normal universities and collaboratively engaged by local governments and primary and secondary schools—presents a potential solution to these issues. This model establishes a collaborative platform for universities, governments, and schools, facilitating the optimization of educational resource allocation and is more conducive to improving the teaching-research capabilities of primary and secondary school teachers^[2]. Utilizing the Lingnan Normal University U-G-S Foreign Language Education and Teaching-Research Community as an example, and employing its project supporting Zhanjiang No. 8 Middle School as a case study, this research systematically investigates effective pathways for augmenting secondary school English teachers' teaching-research abilities, with the aim of providing a practical model of professional development for teachers as a reference.

2. Literature Review

The U-G-S community model is a significant innovation in teacher education. It refers to a joint teacher training and education mechanism based on a collaborative partnership between the government (or educational administrative departments), universities, and schools, forming a trinity that emphasizes coordinated innovation. Its fundamental guiding principle is "clearly defined responsibilities, complementary strengths, and win-win cooperation"^[3]. Through resource integration and institutional innovation, this model provides a sustainable support system for secondary school teachers' professional growth.

2.1 Development and Localized Innovation of the U-G-S Model

The conceptual origins of the U-G-S model can be traced back to the Professional Development Schools (PDS) model that emerged in the United States in the 1980s, where universities collaborated with local public schools or districts to deliver teacher education. PDS integrates three main functions: pre-service teacher preparation, in-service training, and school reform. Its aim is to improve the quality of pre-service teacher training, encourage professional development for teachers, and ultimately promote the growth of both schools and universities^[4]. Chinese educators, drawing on the PDS model and considering the unique features of China's national context and educational administration system, undertook key localized innovations by including the government as an indispensable third party in the collaboration framework. This innovation is essential because under China's education administration system, local education departments exercise direct authority over primary and secondary schools, controlling aspects such as teacher staffing, performance appraisal, title evaluation, and school funding^[5]. Thus, government involvement ensures stable institutional support and resource guarantees for university-school collaboration. The issuance of the *Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Implementing the Excellent Teacher Training Plan* in 2014 in China explicitly regarded "establishing a new triadic cooperative training mechanism among universities, local governments, and schools" as a key initiative, marking the entry of the U-G-S model into a phase of institutionalized development^[6].

2.2 Application of the U-G-S Model and Research Gaps

Current studies have explored the application of the U-G-S model from multiple perspectives. Huang and Xiao discussed its application in building teacher research teams for traditional culture, highlighting its capacity to foster ecosystems for teacher development and communication platforms^[1]. Huang and Hou, from the perspective of pre-service teacher training, emphasized the model's value in reforming university talent cultivation paradigms and enhancing governmental regulatory power^[5]. Han, in research on the training of generalist elementary school teachers in Gannan, China, further proposed concrete strategies for "tripartite joint cultivation"^[7]. However, a review of the current literature reveals a relative lack of research on pathways to improve the research capabilities of secondary school English teachers as a specific subject group. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing, through specific case studies, how U-G-S communities enhance the research capacities of secondary school English teachers.

3. Investigation and Analysis of the Current Situation of Research among Secondary School English Teachers

To accurately grasp the real challenges facing the development of research capabilities among secondary school English teachers, this study conducted questionnaires and in-depth interviews with the English teaching staff at Zhanjiang No. 8 Middle School during the early stages of their participation in the U-G-S community project led by Lingnan Normal University. The investigation revealed a less-than-optimistic situation. The difficulties facing secondary school English teachers are not only common to the teaching profession but also reflect the unique characteristics of the English subject, as evidenced in the following four aspects.

3.1 Limited Research Awareness and Environment

The enduring impact of exam-oriented education and substantial teaching responsibilities has led most secondary school English teachers to primarily identify as "knowledge transmitters" and "achievement enhancers." They widely perceive educational research as the domain of

university experts and scholars, with minimal relevance to their daily responsibilities. The self-perception as "classroom craftsmen" significantly outweighs that of "researchers". Surveys indicate that over half of these educators have "never considered" or "do not know how" to engage in educational research. The lack of intrinsic motivation for research and the absence of a culture of academic exchange within schools hinder the development of research as a deliberate pursuit among teachers^[1]. In comparison to core subjects such as Chinese and Mathematics, English has been deprioritized in recent years, prompting teachers to concentrate more on enhancing test scores rather than participating in comprehensive discussions on pedagogical issues, thereby resulting in a diminished research environment.

3.2 Deficiency in Research Methods and Professional Knowledge

While many secondary school English teachers exhibit strong foundational language skills and teaching capabilities, they often lack systematic training in educational research methodologies. Their understanding of fundamental research components, such as topic selection, literature review, research design, data collection and analysis, and report writing, is limited. Furthermore, in the context of new concepts and models emerging from basic education reform, such as core literacy, unit-based teaching, and smart classrooms, many educators feel insufficiently prepared and encounter difficulties in translating broad ideas into specific, researchable teaching problems. This dual deficiency in research methods and advanced disciplinary knowledge presents significant obstacles to engaging in research activities, making it challenging to initiate, let alone achieve, depth in research endeavors.

3.3 Insufficient Research Support Systems and Ineffective Channels for Research Application

National policies advocate for teachers to engage in research activities; however, educational institutions frequently lack the necessary systems and resources to support such endeavors. Firstly, teacher evaluations predominantly emphasize student grades and academic progress, rather than research contributions, which diminishes teachers' motivation to pursue research. Secondly, teachers are burdened with

substantial teaching responsibilities and classroom management, leaving limited time for research activities. Additionally, schools often lack financial resources to provide access to professional databases or to facilitate teachers' participation in academic conferences. Even when teachers conduct research, there are inadequate mechanisms for disseminating and utilizing the findings, resulting in research being relegated to reports or evaluation materials without enhancing teaching practices.

3.4 Elimination of Regional and Inter-School Barriers, and Absence of Collaborative Research Mechanisms

Traditional research endeavors are predominantly conducted within individual schools, operating in isolation with implicit barriers existing between schools, as well as between universities and secondary schools. Consequently, high-quality research resources, such as academic guidance from universities, regional exemplary teachers, and outstanding lesson examples, fail to circulate and be shared effectively. As a discipline, English should inherently promote openness and communication; however, these insular research models constrain teachers' perspectives, depriving them of access to advanced theories and diverse practices, thereby confining their research to a rudimentary and repetitive level. The U-G-S model is pivotal in addressing this issue, as it seeks to establish a novel, open, and collaborative research ecosystem.

In conclusion, the enhancement of secondary school English teachers' research capabilities is confronted with a confluence of challenges related to awareness, methodology, support, and mechanisms. These circumstances underscore the pressing need to develop a professional development system for teachers that integrates external support with intrinsic development.

4. "Four-in-One" Pathway for Enhancing Middle School English Teachers' Research Abilities

Through a comprehensive analysis of the current research landscape among middle school English teachers, the U-G-S community at Lingnan Normal University, in collaboration with Zhanjiang No. 8 Middle School, has developed a "four-in-one" collaborative framework designed to systematically address the identified challenges. This framework comprises four

interconnected and mutually reinforcing components: expert guidance, reflective practice, resource sharing, and Research Output.

4.1 Expert Guidance for Integrating Higher Education Research Paradigms into the Field

Within the U-G-S community, university experts deliver specialized lectures and methodological training, thereby integrating higher education research paradigms into the basic education setting. This initiative directly addresses the core challenges faced by middle school English teachers in project-based research and academic writing, offering a platform for teachers to learn directly from academic experts and scholars. For instance, the university invited experts in primary and secondary education research from several institutions to deliver lectures on topics such as "Strategies for Writing Middle School English Teaching Research Project Proposals" and "Integrative Design of Middle School English Units from an Interdisciplinary Perspective." These sessions not only addressed teachers' practical issues in applying for research projects but also systematically introduced the latest research paradigms from higher education into the basic education sector, significantly enhancing teachers' research awareness and academic literacy.

4.2 Reflective Practice for Skill Development in Real-World Settings

The U-G-S community facilitates practical activities such as demonstration lessons, lesson observations, and evaluation sessions, encouraging educators to enhance their instructional reflection and develop research skills within authentic teaching environments. This form of reflection, grounded in real-life contexts, is a crucial process in transforming external theoretical knowledge into personal teaching wisdom^[5], effectively bridging the gap between teachers' knowledge and their practice. During the project, the following practical activities were implemented: demonstration lessons that showcased advanced teaching concepts and methods; student foreign language ability displays that provided multiple perspectives for teachers to assess teaching effectiveness; and lesson evaluations and discussions that focused on curriculum design and teaching methods, fostering in-depth exchanges. Collectively, these activities constituted a comprehensive reflective practice

cycle, promoting the deep integration of theory and practice.

4.3 Resource Sharing for Building a Sustainable Learning Platform

By establishing a mechanism for resource sharing through an online case library, the U-G-S community offers educators continuous access to learning materials and support systems, thereby overcoming the temporal and spatial limitations inherent in traditional research activities. This strategy directly addresses the challenges of distinct regional and inter-school barriers and inadequate support systems, thereby broadening the impact of research activities and facilitating the timely dissemination of information. The U-G-S Community at Lingnan Normal University has developed an exemplary online case library that integrates expert lecture videos, outstanding instructional designs, demonstration lesson examples and more. This platform provides ongoing high-quality resources and support for teachers' professional development and research activities. Such a mechanism not only extends the reach of high-quality resources but also enhances their utilization efficiency, enabling educators to select learning content according to their specific needs and achieve personalized professional development, thereby promoting the regional flow of educational resources^[7].

4.4 Research Output for Externalizing and Promoting Research Achievements

Through systematic guidance in proposal writing, support for academic publishing, and facilitation of the transformation of research outcomes, the U-G-S community aids educators in converting research outputs into tangible academic achievements and funded projects. This process facilitates their professional transition from experience-based practitioners to research-oriented educators. In doing so, it addresses the bottleneck often encountered in the implementation of research outcomes and stimulates educators' intrinsic motivation for educational inquiry. Within the project framework, the development of research output yielded significant returns: member schools successfully secured eight teaching-research projects and two teaching quality enhancement initiatives, produced eight academic papers, and developed two exemplary classroom demonstration videos. This systematic

mechanism for research output ensures that research activities lead to concrete results, enhances educators' sense of accomplishment, and encourages sustained research engagement. Consequently, it progressively strengthens the research capacity of key educators and fosters the development of a vibrant and sustainable research community^[1].

5. Discussion and Reflection

Through a case study of the U-G-S community at Lingnan Normal University supporting Zhanjiang No. 8 Middle School, this research elucidates a "four-in-one" model for enhancing the research capabilities of secondary school English teachers, grounded in a systematic analysis of the current context. Findings reveal that the U-G-S community, by integrating expert guidance, reflective practice, resource sharing, and research output, effectively addresses the common research challenges faced by English teachers, promotes the development of their research competencies, and facilitates their transition into research-oriented educators. However, several issues merit further consideration.

First, the interests of the three parties are complex and not fully aligned: universities tend to prioritize academic value, government entities emphasize policy implementation and impact, and schools focus on solving practical teaching problems. These differing value orientations may hinder deep collaboration. Second, the sustainability of the collaborative mechanism heavily depends on ongoing administrative endorsement and project funding; a reduction in external support could weaken the continuity of cooperation. Third, some teachers still lack intrinsic motivation, viewing research participation as an added burden rather than an opportunity for professional growth. Furthermore, as this study adopts a single-case design, the generalizability of its conclusions is limited.

The assessment of teachers' research capacity relies primarily on quantitative outputs, with insufficient qualitative investigation into deeper transformations, such as shifts in teacher mindset and the restructuring of professional competencies. Future research should further

explore long-term operational mechanisms for U-G-S communities and develop differentiated strategies for enhancing research capacity among teachers in different subject areas and regional contexts. Such efforts will provide more actionable insights to support teacher development and advance quality education in China.

Fund Project

Lingnan Normal University 2025 Empowerment Project for High-Quality Development of Basic Education Assistance (Project Number: JCJYBF02).

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