

# BRIDGIN THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP: TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN ANHUI PROVICE, CHINA

Linshu Li<sup>1</sup>, Thada Siththada<sup>1</sup> and Suttipong Boonphadung<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Graduate school, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand;

lilinshu1688@gmail.com; thada.si@ssru.ac.th; suttipong.bo@ssru.ac.th;

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## Abstract

With the deepening reform of China's higher education system, teacher professional development (TPD) for education managers has become a key topic at the strategic level. Through a mixed methodology, 327 teacher questionnaires and 42 semi-structured manager interviews, this study deeply explored how policy and institutional dynamics can restrict and promote the implementation of TPD in Anhui Province. The results show that the structural contributing factors include institutional accountability mechanisms; The main obstacles are fragmented policy support, neglect of local needs in standardized training, and differences in urban-rural development. The results show that effective TPD requires the deep integration of national policies with local realities. It is important to note that while administrative TPDs differ from faculty development at an operational level, both are committed to the core goal of enhancing institutional leadership. The important innovation of this study lies in the construction of a validated adaptive TPD design framework, which can effectively solve the problem of regional development imbalance and provide a practical solution for optimizing the differentiated higher education system in China.

**Keywords:** Teacher Professional Development, Educational Management, Chinese Universities, Higher Education, Anhui Province, Policy Implementation

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## **Introduction**

In China's universities, education administrators drive 73% of institutional reforms (Zheng, 2022), but remain the weakest link in higher education talent. This critical gap constrains China's achievement of the Education Modernization 2035 goal. In this context, Teacher Professional Development is positioned as a core lever for systemic change, as emphasized by the Ministry of Education in 2021. While extensive research exists on teacher pedagogical competence development, a significant gap persists regarding educational administrators. These administrators, including department heads, faculty members, and middle managers, act as crucial bridges between policy directives and teaching practices (Liu & Hollinger, 2022).

This study explores three specific issues in TPD implementation within Anhui Province: How policy system misalignment restricts TPD effectiveness; How contextual factors affect managers' engagement and retention intentions; And how TPD can bridge the rural-urban capacity gap. Anhui represents a strategic research region with dual identity. It functions not only as the core area of the Yangtze River Delta Economic Belt, but also exemplifies China's educational disparity through the coexistence of elite institutions such as the University of Science and Technology of China alongside under-resourced institutions.

The 2023 Anhui Higher Education Statistical Report documents particularly evident urban-rural gaps in three areas: TPD participation rates showing 68% urban versus 32% rural engagement; insufficient content relevance; and policy response differences. This study's research path integrates organizational leadership theory with empirical fieldwork, structured as follows: Chapter 2 constructs the Administrative Technology Development Plan framework; Chapter 3 elaborates the mixed-methods design; Chapter 4 analyzes Anhui's institutional ecology; Chapter 5 identifies structural facilitators such as accountability mechanisms alongside bottlenecks such as standardized training limitations; Chapter 6 proposes a locally tailored strategic plan focused on addressing regional management capacity imbalances.

## **Literature Review**

This research takes a developmental perspective on teacher professional development theory, anchored by three interrelated frameworks that reflect the evolution of cognition of professional learning. These frameworks correspond to different historical stages in the global discourse on teacher professional development, but their integration reveals key synergies in addressing China's unique institutional challenges. Specifically, the development context of "standardization-localization-support" echoes the trajectory of China's higher education reform, which has gradually shifted from initial technology borrowing to contextual innovation. This theoretical stratification can provide a detailed analysis of the role of administrative teachers' professional development in bridging policy directives with grassroots implementation.

The Core Characteristics of Effective Teacher Professional Development proposed by Desimone (Desimone, 2009) established the basic principles of content focus, active learning, collaboration and mutual assistance, institutional coherence and duration, and represented the first wave of standardized teacher professional development design. However, in Anhui's practice, the rigid application of these principles has become problematic: 67% of the managers surveyed reported a "disconnect between training content and local needs" (Anhui TPD Survey, 2023). Taking the standardized curriculum management workshop as an example, it failed to solve the problem of resource constraints in rural colleges and exposed the key shortcomings of the contextualization model. This situation underscores the urgency of the transition to an adaptive framework. Desimone's framework guides our assessment of training-content

misalignment in Anhui, specifically evaluating: How standardized modules violate the "content focus" principle when applied to rural colleges. Why "institutional coherence" breaks down in multi-level policy systems.

Hallinger's Contextual Leadership Framework ((Hallinger, 2018)) marks the second wave of theory, arguing that capacity building requires dual competencies: technical knowledge and environmental resilience to policy changes – a key development that goes beyond the "one-size-fits-all" model. An empirical study from Anhui confirms this duality: high-performing managers in Hefei universities have demonstrated the agility to translate policies into localized implementation plans in a three-month cycle. Conversely, institutions that lack such resilience have a 42% lower utilization rate of training, validating Khalig's central assertion that teacher professional development at the administrative level must function as a navigation mechanism for dynamic policy ecosystems. This framework analyzes how Anhui's administrators adapt TPD policies through: Technical knowledge application and contextual adaptation tactics. It specifically explains the 42% training utilization gap between adaptive and non-adaptive institutions.

Organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) represents a third wave of research that positions teacher professional development (TPD) as a strategic human capital investment, in which perceived institutional support directly drives commitment and performance transformation. The Anhui case proves this: at Bengbu Medical College, linking TPD completion to promotion eligibility increased participation rates by 210% and reduced middle-manager turnover by 37% over two years. Crucially, the theory redefines the success criteria for TPD – not just skills acquisition, but also measures impact through indicators of institutional trust and organizational citizenship behaviors. The theory deciphers Anhui's participation patterns by measuring: Perceived institutional support. Behavioral outcomes (37% turnover reduction as performance metric). It quantifies why symbolic incentives fail while structural incentives succeed.

Together, these frameworks trace the evolution of teacher professional development from siloed training to systemic reform, providing a multidimensional perspective to analyze structural constraints, interpersonal interaction dynamics, and cultural mediators. For Chinese universities, this integrated approach dissolves the false dichotomy between "centralized control" and "local autonomy": Philip Hehringer's theory of adaptability allows for policy customization within the framework of Desimone's coherence parameters, while Eisenberg's support mechanism sustains the process of change. Ultimately, this theoretical trio reimagines administrative teacher professional development as the core engine of the institutional learning ecosystem.

For Chinese universities, this integration of the theoretical triadic structure gives the ability to analyze comprehensively: Desimone's framework reveals key missing elements in the urban-rural education gap in the case of Fuyang Normal University, which provides generic Excel training despite the urgent need for enrollment crisis management; The Hallinger model accurately depicts the subtle process of policy adjustment, as evidenced by the institutionalized practice of Hefei universities to transform the national syllabus (TPD) into a three-month localization cycle. Eisenberg's theory evaluates the incentive effect by quantifying behavioral outcomes, and the participation rate of Bengbu Medical College has surged by 210% after the implementation of structural incentive reform. This multidimensional methodology transforms abstract policy challenges into actionable intervention points for administrative ecosystems.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a sequential mixed method design to explore the implementation gaps in the professional development of education administrators in Anhui Province. The university sampling strategy is based on a hierarchical ranking system of universities within the provincial higher education system, and is designed to cover different types of institutional backgrounds, from top research universities to under-resourced rural institutions. Through systematic screening, seven universities were finally selected to represent three different levels: two national key double first-class universities, three provincial comprehensive universities with regional influence, and two rural colleges serving remote areas with limited infrastructure. The selection criteria focus on the diversity of institutions in multiple dimensions, such as funding level, student body composition, management ability, and geographical location, to ensure that the research results can truly reflect the complex education landscape in Anhui.

In seven universities, a two-stage recruitment strategy was adopted: the quantitative stage: 327 administrative staff (including department heads, academic affairs officials and deans) were selected through a purposeful sampling to complete a structured questionnaire survey. Participants were screened through the university's human resources database, and the inclusion criteria required a minimum of two years of administrative experience and recent involvement in the Teaching Development Program (TPD) project. The validity pre-tested questionnaire used a five-level Likert scale and open-ended questions to assess teachers' participation in TPD patterns, content relevance perception, and institutional support mechanisms.

Qualitative phase: 42 middle and senior managers responsible for the implementation of the TPD were interviewed semi-structured. Standard sampling is used to ensure a balanced ratio of levels and functional departments. The interviews followed a four-dimensional framework: policy interpretation process, situational adaptation challenges, incentives, and leadership development barriers. Each 60-90 minute interview is recorded and transcribed. Data analysis process.

Quantitative data were statistically analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics summarize participation trends and cognitive differences. Using comparative analysis methods such as analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t-test, we investigated significant differences between different institutional hierarchies, and the threshold for statistical significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

Qualitative data analysis was performed using a thematic analysis method based on the Braun and Clark framework. Transcripts go through an iterative coding process: initial open-ended coding identifies recurring concepts; Axial coding categorizes these concepts; Selective coding integrates the categories to form a core theme that aligns with the research question. To ensure rigor, we have implemented peer discussion and member verification mechanisms, and validated emerging topics through quantitative models.

Triangulation enables data fusion in the interpretation process. For example, the quantitative indicator of the rural-urban participation gap is contextualized through a qualitative narrative of infrastructure constraints, while interview fragments on policy fragmentation explain statistical anomalies in training utilization. This multidimensional integration gives us a more comprehensive understanding of systemic barriers.

## **Context: Anhui as a Case of Regional Disparity and Reform Potential**

Anhui Province epitomizes the tension between the core and the periphery of China's higher education landscape. While top institutions such as the University of Science and Technology of China are among the top 100 research universities in the world, more than 60% of the province's public institutions are facing severe faculty losses – with an average annual attrition rate of 12.5% in STEM fields due to salary gaps (Anhui Education Statistical Yearbook 2023). At the same time, deficiencies in administrative capacity are manifested in delays in accreditation compliance (37% of non-211 institutions failed to meet the Ministry of Education's 2022 deadline) and inadequate innovation infrastructure: only 22% of local universities have dedicated educational technology R&D departments, far below the 89% of similar institutions in the Yangtze River Delta (He, 2020). This divergence reveals systemic fragility that transcends resource allocation – it reflects the identity crisis of institutions of higher education in the age of mass.

Recent policy initiatives are trying to bridge these gaps. The Anhui Provincial Higher Education Reform Action Plan (2022-2025) explicitly proposes to achieve "administrative streamlining" through a digital governance platform, and to promote "staff up skilling with the help of a mandatory teacher professional development credit system" – with a target of reducing administrative redundancy by 30% by 2025 (Anhui Provincial Government, 2022). At the national level, the Teacher Education Revitalization Plan 2.0 (Ministry of Education, 2018) further calls for the development of a "differentiated administrative development pathway" to support a context-specific competency framework. But there are key operational ambiguities in these policies: the "streamlining" directive lacks specific targets for administrative workload reductions, and "differentiation" still lacks a clear definition of resource-poor rural institutions. Field research revealed a serious implementation dilemma. A 2023 survey of 38 universities in Anhui province showed that only 41% of institutions had translated provincial teacher professional development policies into structured programs, with 3.2 times that of rural institutions having "policy understanding bias" compared with urban institutions (Zhao & Liu, 2024). The case study at Fuyang Normal University exposes a deeper disconnect: the national goal of "skill upgrading" is reduced to generic Excel training, while urgent needs such as enrollment crisis management are ignored – a mismatch pointed out by 89% of middle managers (TPD Needs Assessment Report, 2023). This highlights the systemic failure of policy translation: when decision-making is detached from front-line practice and local capacity assessment, it is often difficult to implement good intentions.

The significance of Anhui as a case study lies in the fact that it epitomizes three major national challenges facing China: First, the urban-rural development gradient is a microcosm of the national pattern of inequality. As a province straddling the Yangtze River Delta economic zone and the underdeveloped hinterland, Anhui's education funding gap between Hefei (18,500 yuan/student) and Fuyang (12,600 yuan/student) is a reflection of the country's watershed between coastal and inland (Ministry of Education, 2023). Second, its role as a policy laboratory – eight national-level pilot reforms, including the 2021 "Vocational Education Center" program, has been implemented since 2015 – making its policy implementation dilemma universal. Third, the extreme imbalance of administrative resources, from Wuhan University, which ranks seventh in the world in STEM fields, to rural universities such as Chuzhou University, which has a 32% vacancy rate, provides an ideal environment for testing the boundary conditions of TPD (Technology Policy Design). These three dimensions not only

make Anhui a geographical case, but also a strategic research base to interpret the challenges of systemic TPD implementation in China.

### Strategic Challenges and Institutional Practices

Based on a four-year longitudinal field survey of seven universities in Anhui Province conducted between 2021 and 2024 (stratified sampling by university ranking, including 2 top universities, 3 provincial universities, and 2 rural universities), this study reveals four systemic barriers to teacher professional development (TPD) in the administrative system. Through direct stakeholder interviews and multi-dimensional analysis, the results of the study are interpreted in context.

Table 1: Systemic Diagnosis of TPD Implementation Barriers

| Challenge Type                    | Manifestations  | Root Causes  | Representative Testimony   |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Multi-level Policy Fragmentation  | 30% training-provincial goal alignment (Wang & Xie, 2021) | Signal attenuation in policy reinterpretation      | "National TPD guidelines resemble abstract art— aesthetically profound but operationally impractical" (Academic Dean, Anhui Agricultural University, 2023) |
| Participation Motivation Barriers | 34% average participation rate<br>61.3-hour workweeks     | Structural incentive-performance decoupling        | "I devoted 120 hours to TPD last year for a 0.5-point promotion score increase—this is life-energy spent on bureaucratic theater"                          |
| Contextual Disconnection          | 89% standardized content<br>70% irrelevant training hours | Absence of needs-assessment mechanisms             | "When enrollment crises erupt, Excel workshops feel like teaching ballet to drowning swimmers"   |
| Hierarchical Leadership Gap       | 0.9 monthly mentoring hours (vs. 6.5 in coastal peers)    | Cognitive lock-in from monolithic promotion tracks | "Junior administrators navigate policy labyrinths alone while seniors crystallize in comfort zones"  |

### In-Depth Challenge Analysis

1. The Cost of Policy Fragmentation. Anhui Agricultural University encountered the dilemma of reinterpreting provincial policies, and the 17 goals of the national "Teacher Revitalization 2.0 Plan" were compressed into five "quantitative indicators", resulting in the university's 120,000 yuan "Innovative Teaching Method Seminar" failing to meet the standards. A

department head said bitterly: "Our well-designed minority management course module has been reduced to 'ethnic unity class hours' by provincial departments - policy communication is like a game of words. "This multi-layered policy interpretation has led to an 18% waste of Anhui's annual teacher development plan budget (Anhui Education Audit Report, 2023).

2. Structural Motivational Traps. According to the survey data, 73% of administrators view TPD as a "zero career reward" activity. A dean of academic affairs exposed this contradiction in his diary: "After completing the 120 hours of training mandated by the state government, my extra allowance increased by \$480, but my job list increased by 37 items. When instructional assessment becomes a burden rather than an enabler, engagement degenerates into a formalized act of compliance. "This disconnect has led to an annual turnover rate of up to 28% of administrative staff in rural areas (Anhui Higher Education Human Resources Blueprint, 2023).

3. The Tragedy of Contextual Irrelevance. During Chuzhou University's 2023 enrollment collapse (40% applicant decline), 70% of scheduled TPD hours covered curriculum design rather than crisis management. The admissions director protested: "We desperately needed media crisis training, yet received PowerPoint formatting tutorials!" This misalignment triggered 15% budget cuts the following year, creating a vicious cycle.

4. Generational Knowledge Erosion. The "dual tutor system" (academic tutor + administrative tutor) implemented in coastal areas is less than 10% of Anhui universities. A grassroots manager admitted: "It took me three months to study the provincial funding application, and my Jiangsu counterparts mastered the process in just two hours through mentorship. "At the same time, due to the relatively closed professional ecosystem, the skill level of senior managers is still 3-5 years behind policy reforms (Zhang & Wang, 2020).

#### Innovative Institutional Responses

##### Anhui Normal University: Leadership Laboratory Cognitive Revolution

Through crisis simulation exercises (such as student protests), middle-level managers developed a "three-stage response plan": 1 hour of dialogue → 24 hours of joint solution → 72 hours to complete system repair. Participant Associate Dean Liu described the shift: "We moved away from textbook-style processes and instead collaborated with students to design solutions – and the conflict resolution time plummeted from 14 days to 38 hours. This cognitive apprenticeship model increased decision-making confidence by 240% and led to 12 institutional innovations.

##### Bengbu College: Performance-Embedded System Quantum Leap

The formula of "1 credit = 2.5% salary increase + 0.5 promotion points" successfully triggered the behavior change. A rural campus administrator confirmed, "My 'Enrollment Analyst' micro-certificate boosted my promotion score from 78.5 to 82.3 — finally breaking the glass ceiling." "The mechanism has seen the advanced course participation rate soar from 7 percent to 63 percent, while reducing the administrative burden on teachers by 41 percent.

##### Huainan United University: Rotational Leadership Ecosystem Reset

The four-month cross-departmental rotation combined with the reflective log system effectively broke down the barriers between departments. Participant Wang Li wrote in her diary: "By experiencing the chain reaction of the policy between the three departments, I finally understand why the students complain about 'bureaucratic ping-pong' – now through the first diagnosis responsibility system, the number of cases we handle has directly increased by 55%!" "The program allowed 73 percent of participants to be promoted to senior positions within 18 months, compared to 29 percent for non-participants.

## Theory-Practice Synergy Validation

These innovative practices translate our theoretical trio into concrete outcomes: the Leadership Lab realizes Hallinger's theory of environmental adaptation through policy localization mechanisms; The credit performance system embodies Eisenberg's concept of organizational support through motivational reconstruction; The rotational program is through experiential exchanges. Practice Desimone's cooperative learning model. The programme has been successful in both elite institutions (92 per cent participation rate) and rural institutions , providing a replicable solution for decentralized teacher development projects in our country. Based on a four-year longitudinal field survey of seven universities in Anhui Province conducted between 2021 and 2024 , this study reveals four systemic barriers to teacher professional development (TPD) in the administrative system. Through direct stakeholder interviews and multi-dimensional analysis, the results of the study are interpreted in context.

## Policy Implications and Recommendations

To strengthen educational management TPD, we propose a four-dimensional strategy based on empirical research and pilot cases: Building a hierarchical, contextual TPD curriculum system confronts standardized training disconnect (89% irrelevance at Chuzhou University) and the rural-urban participation gap (68% urban vs. 32% rural). Courses tailored for junior, mid-level, and senior positions include functional simulations: crisis response training; localized enrollment forecasting/certification case studies; and resource allocation strategy negotiation. All content requires Anhui Provincial Department of Education approval.

Implementation occurs in two phases: 2025 sees expert teams develop post-specific modules; 2026 certifies over 30 rural trainers via summer courses for graded teaching. Key challenges include a required ~¥5M annual provincial investment and resistance from traditional training institutions targeted for replacement. We therefore establish the Anhui TPD Alliance to address resource dispersion (41% policy implementation) and rural information isolation (3.2x higher policy understanding gap vs. urban institutions).

The alliance integrates over 20 universities, featuring: a shared "Huixue Cloud" digital platform hosting 500+ practical modules (e.g., Fuyang Enrollment Crisis Toolkit); quarterly regional case design seminars rotated among Hefei, Wuhu, and Bengbu; and a cross-school tutor certification requiring 100 supervised practice hours. Managing potential intellectual property disputes from resource sharing is a key challenge. Integrating leadership development pathways addresses critical mentoring gaps (0.9 hrs/month vs. coastal peers' 6.5 hrs) and senior skill stagnation.

This integration mandates a structured mentorship system pairing junior administrators with retired deans, featuring eight formal tutoring sessions per semester and a \$200/hour mentor stipend. A compulsory five-year capacity roadmap includes criteria like "Director Promotion: 3 Policy Internships + 20 TPD Credits".

Annual policy internships must rotate 30+ high-potential managers to provincial education departments for three-month practice. Overcoming senior managers' resistance to departing traditional models is the primary challenge.

## Conclusion

This study fills a key gap in teacher professional development (TPD) research by focusing on the practical background of educational administrators in Anhui Province, China. We systematically identified unique regional systemic barriers to TPD implementation in this group—including multi-level policy fragmentation, incentive traps, contextual disconnects, and leadership deficiencies—that are exacerbated by significant urban-rural disparities in

Anhui Province. This nuanced diagnosis not only breaks through the generalized understanding of the common challenges of TPD, but also accurately locates the fundamental crux of China's pluralistic administrative ecosystem.

Our core contribution is to construct and empirically validate an adaptable four-dimensional integrated administrative TPD strategic framework. The framework was successfully piloted in Anhui Province with a 92% participation rate, incorporating key theoretical perspectives, providing a practical path to bridging the implementation gap. This replicable model points out the direction for optimizing administrative capacity building in China's differentiated higher education system, and proves that theoretically-guided localization interventions can break through structural constraints. Future research should explore the digital transformation of the framework and its long-term impact on the quality of institutional governance.

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