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Dilemmas and Support System for the Teaching Competency Development of Young University Teachers from the Perspective of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Na Su^{1,*}
¹ Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, China

* Correspondence: Na Su, Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, China

Abstract: From the perspective of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), the continuous development of young university teachers' teaching competency is directly linked to the overall talent cultivation quality and long-term sustainability of higher education institutions. Currently, young academic professionals generally face significant practical dilemmas, including a pronounced imbalance between scientific research expectations and teaching responsibilities, imperfect performance evaluation systems that disproportionately favor research outputs, and inadequate institutional training support. These deeply intertwined problems severely restrict their professional growth and pedagogical innovation. Based on the comprehensive theoretical framework of SoTL, this paper systematically analyzes the underlying manifestations and root causes of the aforementioned dilemmas. Furthermore, it constructs a robust, multi-dimensional support system designed from the critical perspectives of strategic policy formulation, continuous professional development, and targeted incentive mechanisms. The research also critically discusses potential operational challenges, such as structural resource allocation gaps and notable disparities in individual initiative, which may arise during the practical implementation of the proposed support system. The study ultimately concludes that the fundamental key to effectively addressing these persistent dilemmas lies in fully incorporating teaching excellence into the broader academic evaluation framework. Through deliberate institutional design, comprehensive policy reform, and proactive cultural guidance, universities can successfully establish a sound, sustainable academic ecosystem featuring a positive, mutually reinforcing interaction between high-quality teaching and rigorous scientific research.

Keywords: scholarship of teaching; higher education; teaching competency; faculty development; academic evaluation

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1. Connotation and Analytical Value of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Perspective

1.1. Theoretical Foundation of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

The concept of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) was systematically proposed in the 1990s, emphasizing the transformation of teaching from a technical activity into an academic endeavor. This perspective underscores that teaching is not merely the unidirectional transmission of knowledge but involves a systematic approach that integrates design, reflection, and communication. Teaching practices should be informed by disciplinary knowledge and educational principles, moving beyond reliance on intuition or routine methods. A key distinction is made between teaching as a classroom activity and the scholarship of teaching, which requires educators to treat their teaching practices as subjects of research. This involves presenting findings in formats that allow for peer review, validation, and broader academic discussion. Such an approach fosters a deeper understanding of teaching methodologies and encourages the development of innovative practices that contribute to the academic community [1, 2].

The theoretical framework of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is built upon three interconnected dimensions. First, it emphasizes the academic foundation of teaching, advocating for instructional designs that are grounded in established disciplinary knowledge and educational theories rather than relying solely on personal experience or intuition. Second, it highlights the researchability of teaching, encouraging the use of empirical methods to investigate teaching challenges and evaluate outcomes. This systematic approach aims to build a cumulative body of knowledge that enhances teaching practices [3, 4]. Third, it stresses the importance of the publicity of teaching, urging educators to share their experiences and achievements within the academic community. This openness facilitates constructive peer feedback and fosters collaborative improvement. Together, these dimensions provide a robust framework for analyzing the teaching competencies of educators, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, and offer essential guidelines for identifying challenges and formulating effective solutions.

1.2. Guiding Significance of the SoTL Perspective for Young Teachers' Teaching Competency Development

For young university teachers in the early career adaptation stage, the SoTL perspective holds significant guiding value. One of its primary contributions is aiding young educators in transitioning from their roles as doctoral researchers to professional teachers. Doctoral training often emphasizes research capabilities, leaving teaching competency underdeveloped. The SoTL philosophy underscores the equal importance of teaching and research as core academic activities. It encourages young teachers to adopt a rigorous and methodical approach to teaching, helping them move away from the perception that teaching is a secondary or less significant responsibility. By fostering this mindset, SoTL supports the development of a balanced academic identity that integrates both teaching and research.

Additionally, SoTL promotes the concept of mutual reinforcement between teaching and research. Young educators are encouraged to leverage their research findings to enrich their teaching materials, ensuring that classroom content remains relevant and cutting-edge. Conversely, challenges and insights encountered during teaching can serve as a fertile ground for generating new research ideas. This dynamic interplay creates a productive cycle where teaching and research continuously inform and enhance each other [1, 5]. Such an approach not only benefits the educators' professional growth but also contributes to the overall academic environment by fostering innovation and relevance in both domains.

Furthermore, the open culture advocated by SoTL provides a collaborative platform for young teachers' professional development. By engaging in activities such as teaching seminars, curriculum design workshops, and the publication of teaching-related papers, educators can refine their teaching practices through constructive peer feedback. This collaborative environment encourages continuous improvement and innovation in teaching methodologies. As a result, SoTL serves as a foundational framework for young teachers' professional growth while also acting as a catalyst for advancing teaching practices within universities. By fostering a culture of openness and collaboration, it supports the creation of a more dynamic and effective educational ecosystem.

2. Practical Dilemmas in the Development of Young University Teachers' Teaching Competency

2.1. Structural Imbalance between Teaching and Scientific Research

The phenomenon of prioritizing scientific research over teaching is a widespread issue in research-oriented universities globally, and this trend is particularly pronounced in Chinese universities due to systemic imbalances in resource allocation and evaluation mechanisms. In many institutions, the metrics used to assess professional advancement, such as promotions, appointments, and performance evaluations, heavily favor scientific research outputs over teaching contributions. For instance, the recognition and rewards

associated with publishing articles in high-impact journals often outweigh the efforts required to develop and deliver multiple courses. On the other hand, achievements in teaching, such as awards for excellence or the creation of high-quality curricula, typically involve lengthy evaluation processes and stringent criteria, making them less appealing in comparison to the relatively immediate and tangible benefits of research accomplishments [6, 7]. This disparity in institutional priorities creates a challenging environment for educators, where the incentives for focusing on teaching are significantly diminished. As a result, the structural imbalance perpetuates a cycle where scientific research is consistently prioritized, leaving teaching efforts undervalued and underfunded.

Within this framework, young university teachers encounter significant pressures that shape their professional choices and priorities. The institutional emphasis on research productivity often translates into stringent requirements for publishing and meeting research targets within specified assessment periods. Failure to fulfill these expectations can result in negative performance evaluations or even job insecurity, creating a survival-driven approach to academic work. In contrast, teaching responsibilities are frequently perceived as secondary, with basic compliance deemed sufficient to meet institutional standards. This dynamic incentivizes young educators to allocate the majority of their time and energy toward research activities, as these are more directly tied to career advancement and job stability. Consequently, teaching efforts are often limited to meeting minimum requirements, which can hinder the development of innovative pedagogical practices and the overall quality of education. The systemic prioritization of research over teaching not only affects individual career trajectories but also has broader implications for the academic environment, potentially undermining the cultivation of well-rounded educators and the holistic development of students [7].

2.2. Deficiencies and Limitations of the Teaching Evaluation System

Teaching evaluation is intended to serve as a mechanism to encourage educators to prioritize and enhance their teaching practices [8]. However, the current evaluation framework exhibits significant shortcomings that not only fail to inspire young teachers to improve their teaching skills but may also inadvertently lead to adverse consequences. These deficiencies undermine the system's ability to fulfill its developmental and motivational purposes, leaving educators disillusioned and disengaged from the process.

One of the most critical issues lies in the oversimplification of evaluation indicators. Many universities predominantly rely on quantitative metrics such as students' exam scores, course pass rates, and student evaluation scores to assess teaching effectiveness. While these metrics are straightforward and easy to implement, they fail to capture the nuanced aspects of teaching quality. For instance, innovative teaching methodologies, the integration of ideological and political education into course content, and the cultivation of students' critical thinking skills are often overlooked [5, 9]. This narrow focus on quantitative data creates a superficial understanding of teaching performance and neglects the broader, more qualitative dimensions of effective education. As a result, the evaluation system does not provide a comprehensive or accurate reflection of the true state of teaching efforts, thereby limiting its utility as a tool for meaningful improvement.

The methods employed in teaching evaluation also suffer from notable flaws. The two primary approaches—student evaluations and peer classroom observations—each have inherent limitations. Student evaluations, for example, are frequently influenced by factors unrelated to teaching quality, such as the perceived difficulty of the course, the timing of classes, and the size of the class. Additionally, junior students often lack the expertise needed to critically assess teaching design and instructional strategies. On the other hand, peer observations, while more professional, are hindered by infrequent observation opportunities, varying pedagogical philosophies among observers, and potential biases stemming from interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the feedback provided to teachers is often superficial, consisting merely of scores or grades without actionable recommendations for improvement. This lack of detailed, constructive

feedback severs the connection between evaluation and professional development, reducing the process to a form of rigid administrative oversight [10, 11]. To address these challenges, it is imperative to establish a scientific and multi-dimensional teaching evaluation system that not only enhances young teachers' teaching competencies but also fosters greater job satisfaction and professional growth.

2.3. Inadequate Systematic Teaching Training and Support

University training programs for young teachers exhibit significant deficiencies in their content, structure, and focus, which hinder the enhancement of teaching competencies. Regarding content, these programs often emphasize foundational skills such as lesson planning and classroom management, while neglecting more advanced and specialized areas. For example, topics like educational psychology, the latest developments in learning sciences, innovative blended teaching methodologies, and modern academic assessment strategies are rarely included. This narrow focus limits the ability of young educators to address complex challenges or advance beyond basic teaching proficiencies. Without exposure to these critical areas, young teachers are unable to develop the nuanced skills required to excel in diverse and evolving educational environments [12].

In terms of structure, the predominant reliance on intensive lecture formats places participants in a passive learning mode, which is not conducive to effective skill acquisition. These sessions often lack interactive components such as simulated teaching exercises, peer evaluations, and reflective practices, which are essential for fostering practical teaching expertise. Research indicates that adult learners benefit most from experiential learning and constructive feedback, yet these elements are conspicuously absent in many training programs. This one-directional approach fails to engage participants actively, thereby limiting the practical applicability of the training content and reducing its overall effectiveness in real-world teaching scenarios [13].

Additionally, the training programs lack customization to address the diverse needs of young teachers. Significant variations exist in training requirements based on factors such as academic discipline, teaching experience, and course type. For instance, educators in science and engineering disciplines often require specialized training in experimental design and laboratory safety protocols, whereas those in humanities and social sciences benefit more from guidance on facilitating discussions and critical thinking. Similarly, first-year teachers may need foundational support, while more experienced educators might seek advanced strategies for curriculum innovation. Despite these differences, many universities employ a uniform training model that fails to incorporate modular or hierarchical structures. This generalized approach overlooks the unique challenges faced by educators in different contexts, thereby limiting the relevance and impact of the training programs.

3. Construction of a Support System for Young University Teachers' Teaching Competency Development

The three aforementioned dilemmas are interconnected, forming a systemic challenge that requires comprehensive solutions. Biased evaluation systems often emphasize research output over teaching quality, which inadvertently discourages educators from dedicating sufficient time and effort to improving their teaching practices. This imbalance is further exacerbated by the lack of adequate financial and institutional investment in teaching-related resources, which limits opportunities for educators to gain practical experience and refine their teaching competencies. Additionally, the absence of robust training programs and professional development initiatives leaves significant gaps in the skillsets of young university teachers. To address these issues effectively, a coordinated support system must be established, integrating evaluation reforms, resource allocation, and targeted training mechanisms to foster holistic competency development.

3.1. Policy Guidance and Institutional Guarantee

The primary task at the policy level is to adjust the guiding role of evaluation and promotion mechanisms. Universities should significantly increase the emphasis on teaching performance in professional title assessments and post appraisals. Teaching achievements, such as contributions to teaching research, textbook development, teaching competition awards, and curriculum-related projects, should be integrated into a unified evaluation framework to ensure balanced and fair assessments. A classified evaluation approach can be adopted: for positions primarily focused on teaching, teaching achievements may partially substitute for research requirements. For roles requiring a balance between teaching and research, minimum standards for both areas should be established, allowing for flexible recognition of achievements across these domains. This approach ensures that diverse academic contributions are valued and appropriately recognized within institutional frameworks.

A comprehensive evaluation system involving multiple stakeholders, diverse assessment dimensions, and varied methods should be established to enhance teaching evaluation. Key participants in this system include students, peer educators, teaching supervisors, the teachers themselves, and curriculum portfolio reviewers [14]. Evaluation dimensions should encompass teaching design, classroom delivery, academic assessment, reflective practices, and overall teaching contributions. The methods employed should integrate both quantitative scoring and qualitative feedback to provide a holistic view of teaching performance. The curriculum portfolio system is particularly valuable, as it encourages educators to systematically compile materials such as syllabi, lesson plans, student assignment samples, evaluation feedback, and reflective journals. These materials serve as evidence of teaching growth and development. Although this approach requires more time and effort compared to single-round evaluations, it offers significantly stronger diagnostic and developmental benefits, fostering continuous improvement in teaching practices.

The teaching mentor system is an effective strategy to support young educators in adapting to their roles. Each newly recruited teacher should be paired with an experienced mentor who demonstrates both expertise and a strong sense of responsibility. Mentors play a crucial role in observing and guiding classroom practices, assisting in the development of personalized teaching plans, and addressing teaching-related challenges. They should also open their own classrooms for observation and collaborate on lesson preparation to provide practical insights. To ensure the success of this system, mentors' contributions should be formally recognized as part of their workload, with appropriate remuneration provided. This structured support system not only facilitates the professional growth of young teachers but also strengthens the overall quality of education within the institution.

3.2. Systematic Provision of Professional Development Opportunities

Sustained and diversified professional development opportunities are essential for the improvement of teaching competency [15]. In terms of training, universities should move away from the traditional model of one-time induction training and instead establish a phased and modular advanced training system. The first stage involves foundational training for new teachers, emphasizing classroom management, essential teaching design, and university-specific teaching guidelines. The second stage focuses on thematic training for teachers with initial experience, addressing interactive teaching methods, technology-enhanced teaching strategies, and approaches to academic evaluation. The third stage is designed for experienced educators, concentrating on leadership skills such as designing teaching research projects, developing curriculum systems, and managing teaching teams. Training methods should be varied to ensure engagement and practical application. Beyond traditional lectures, universities should incorporate teaching workshops, micro-teaching sessions, peer observation, and case studies to foster active participation and hands-on learning experiences.

Academic exchanges play a pivotal role in broadening teachers' perspectives on teaching methodologies. Universities should allocate dedicated resources to enable young

educators to participate in both domestic and international conferences focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning. Equally important is the establishment of regular internal and regional exchange platforms, such as monthly teaching salons, semesterly forums on teaching innovation, and annual conferences on teaching practices. These platforms should prioritize meaningful dialogue, where educators can share their teaching experiences, discuss challenges, and receive constructive feedback from peers. Such interactions can create an environment akin to academic defenses, fostering a culture of critical reflection and collaborative problem-solving in teaching practices.

Teaching practice projects serve as a crucial mechanism for translating theoretical teaching competencies into practical applications. Universities should introduce small-scale grants to support young educators in conducting action research on specific teaching challenges. These projects could address issues such as enhancing student interaction in large classroom settings or redesigning curricula to incorporate project-based learning approaches. Typically spanning one semester or an academic year, these initiatives should include clearly defined research questions, detailed implementation plans, methods for evaluating outcomes, and reflective analyses of the results. This problem-focused research approach aligns with the principles of the scholarship of teaching and learning while ensuring that the workload remains manageable for young educators. By integrating research with practice, these projects can significantly contribute to the professional growth of teachers and the overall improvement of educational quality.

3.3. Compound Design of Incentive Mechanisms

Effective incentives require a combination of material and spiritual rewards, as well as coordination between short-term and long-term incentives. In terms of material incentives, apart from establishing special teaching awards such as Outstanding Young Teacher Award and Teaching Innovation Award with competitive bonuses, teaching performance should be integrated into the regular salary system. For instance, a teaching quality coefficient can be incorporated into performance-based pay, adjusted dynamically based on comprehensive teaching evaluation results over a three-year period. This mechanism sends a clear message that dedication to teaching can yield stable and predictable economic benefits, comparable to those derived from scientific research. Additionally, such integration ensures that teaching excellence is recognized as a core component of professional growth, fostering a balanced approach to academic responsibilities.

Spiritual incentives generate more enduring motivation for intellectual workers. Universities should actively recognize and promote excellent teaching practices through institutional channels. For example, they can launch dedicated columns on official newspapers, websites, and digital platforms to share inspiring teaching stories of young educators. Furthermore, organizing teaching achievement exhibitions and model classes during Teachers' Day can serve as a platform to celebrate pedagogical innovation. Compiling teaching accomplishments into university yearbooks and development reports further reinforces the value of teaching within the academic community. These measures contribute to cultivating an organizational culture that respects and values teaching, while addressing any misconceptions that teaching is less rewarding compared to other academic pursuits. By fostering a supportive environment, universities can enhance the overall morale and motivation of their teaching staff.

Incentive plans should also be tailored to accommodate individual differences among educators. Young teachers often have diverse preferences and priorities: some may focus on financial rewards, others may emphasize career advancement, and some may seek peer recognition. To address these varying needs, universities can offer menu-style incentive options, allowing educators to select benefits that align with their personal goals. For instance, teachers could choose from options such as performance pay raises, reduced teaching hours, or financial support for attending high-level teaching conferences when their contributions are acknowledged [16]. This flexible approach not only enhances the effectiveness of incentive mechanisms but also improves overall satisfaction among

educators. By recognizing individual preferences, universities can create a more inclusive and motivating environment that supports professional development and personal fulfillment.

4. Challenges and Countermeasures in Implementing the Support System

All institutional adjustments encounter practical challenges during implementation [13, 17]. Two primary obstacles exist for the system aimed at enhancing young teachers' teaching competency.

The first obstacle pertains to limitations in resource allocation. Universities operate within finite budgets, constrained campus facilities, and staffing capacities, while initiatives to improve teaching quality demand sustained investments. For instance, small-class teaching necessitates additional classrooms and instructors, while revising teaching evaluation methods requires the development of new assessment tools and training programs for evaluators. Similarly, implementing a teaching mentorship system involves financial incentives for mentors [18]. Given that scientific research often yields tangible and immediate outputs such as publications, research projects, and institutional rankings, university administrators frequently prioritize funding for research activities over teaching development. To address this issue, educational authorities could increase the emphasis on teaching-related metrics in university and discipline evaluations, thereby incentivizing institutions to prioritize teaching improvements. Concurrently, universities could establish dedicated funds for teaching development, supported by tuition fees, social contributions, and government grants specifically allocated for teaching enhancement. This approach would ensure consistent financial backing for initiatives aimed at strengthening teaching support systems.

The second obstacle involves varying levels of personal initiative among young teachers. Some prioritize research activities and meet only the minimum teaching requirements, while others exhibit a passive attitude toward professional development programs. This behavior is not solely a matter of work ethic but often reflects a rational response to the pressures associated with research responsibilities. For early-career educators, the need for job security often outweighs the pursuit of professional growth [6]. To address this, institutions could adopt a strategy with low initial barriers and gradually increasing expectations. For example, basic requirements could be minimal at the outset, such as attending a few teaching workshops to fulfill initial training obligations. As educators gain experience and confidence, they could be encouraged to engage in more advanced activities related to the scholarship of teaching and learning. Additionally, participation in teaching development programs could be moderately linked to career advancement opportunities. Instead of imposing rigid criteria, such as requiring teaching awards, institutions could request educators to maintain teaching portfolios that document their ongoing engagement and reflective practices. This process-oriented approach emphasizes continuous development rather than focusing solely on outcomes.

5. Conclusion

The perspective of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning provides a powerful theoretical framework for re-examining the development of young university teachers' teaching competency in a more systematic and practice-oriented manner. From this perspective, teaching competency should not be understood as a fixed personal trait or as a narrow set of classroom techniques, but as a dynamic and continuously developing capacity shaped by institutional arrangements, professional learning opportunities, evaluative standards, and everyday academic practice. This study indicates that the dilemmas currently faced by young university teachers do not primarily stem from individual inadequacy or lack of commitment. Rather, they emerge from the combined influence of imperfect institutional environments, evaluation systems that place disproportionate emphasis on research output, and support structures that remain fragmented, limited, or insufficiently responsive to teachers' developmental needs. To

address these issues effectively, universities should correct the institutional tendency to privilege research over teaching, strengthen the academic status of teaching, and establish a more balanced governance logic that recognizes teaching quality as a core dimension of academic work. At the same time, institutions should provide progressive, diversified, and sustained opportunities for professional development, including pedagogical training, peer exchange, reflective practice, mentoring, and context-sensitive support. In addition, a compound incentive mechanism that integrates material and spiritual rewards, while also respecting individual differences in career stage, disciplinary background, and professional aspiration, is essential for promoting long-term engagement in teaching improvement.

Furthermore, the effectiveness and sustainability of any support system depend on a deeper transformation of university organizational culture. Institutional reform cannot rely solely on formal policies, administrative directives, or short-term training programs. Its success requires a broader cultural shift in which teaching is widely recognized as a rigorous academic activity that involves inquiry, reflection, evidence-based improvement, and professional responsibility. Only when such a consensus becomes embedded in the daily values, communication patterns, and decision-making processes of the university can relevant institutional designs produce their intended outcomes in a stable and meaningful way. In this sense, the enhancement of young teachers' teaching competency is not merely a technical issue of skill acquisition, but also an organizational issue concerning recognition, legitimacy, and academic identity. Future research may further examine differentiated development paths for young teachers across disciplines, since teaching tasks, knowledge structures, and pedagogical expectations vary considerably among fields. It may also compare the conditions faced by young teachers in different types of universities, where missions, resource allocation, and performance expectations often differ substantially. In addition, the growing application of information technology deserves closer attention, particularly regarding how digital platforms, data-informed teaching practices, and technology-enhanced learning environments may reshape the implementation and practical value of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in contemporary higher education.

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