

# Research on the Professional Development Path of University Teachers from the Perspective of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Lili Yin <sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aviation University of Air Force, Changchun, Jilin, 130022, China

\* Correspondence: Lili Yin, Aviation University of Air Force, Changchun, Jilin, 130022, China

**Abstract:** With the rapid advancement of higher education in the twenty-first century, the professional development of university teachers has gradually become a central issue of concern in educational research and institutional practice. In this context, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), as an emerging academic orientation within higher education studies, has opened up a new and systematic research perspective for understanding and promoting university teachers' professional growth. From the perspective of SoTL, the professional development of university teachers should not be limited to the accumulation of teaching experience or the improvement of instructional skills, but should instead emphasize a fundamental transformation in teachers' disciplinary cognition, teaching values, and professional orientations. This transformation requires teachers to regard teaching as a form of scholarly inquiry, to continuously reflect on instructional practices, and to integrate teaching, research, and learning into a coherent professional framework. At the institutional level, the SoTL perspective highlights the importance of strengthening academic exchange mechanisms, fostering sustainable teaching communities, and establishing structured and specialized teaching development programs that support long-term professional learning. Through collaborative inquiry, peer communication, and systematic training, university teachers can gradually enhance their instructional scholarship competence, including the ability to design evidence-based teaching, conduct reflective analysis, and disseminate teaching outcomes in academically recognized forms. Ultimately, by embedding the principles of SoTL into the professional development system of university teachers, higher education institutions can promote the continuous improvement of teaching quality, support the sustainable development of teaching cultures, and contribute to the overall enhancement of talent cultivation in higher education.

**Keywords:** Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL); teachers' professional development; path selection

Published: 17 January 2026



**Copyright:** © 2026 by the authors.  
Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) movement emerged in the 1990s as an important academic initiative aimed at reexamining the relationship between teaching and research in higher education. By integrating teaching activities into the broader scholarly framework, this movement redefined traditional understandings of academic work and promoted a more holistic view of teachers' professional development. Within the SoTL framework, teaching is no longer regarded as an auxiliary or purely practical task but as a form of intellectual inquiry that possesses scholarly value comparable to conventional research. As this perspective gradually gained recognition, it marked a significant shift in the orientation of teachers' professional development, encouraging educators to reflect systematically on teaching practices and to view instructional improvement as an essential component of academic growth. Subsequent

theoretical explorations further enriched the conceptual foundations of SoTL, expanding the scope of teachers' professional development and providing sustained theoretical support for research in this field.

## **2. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: A New Perspective on Teachers' Professional Development**

The SoTL movement has broadened the connotation of academic work in universities by proposing a more comprehensive classification of scholarship. From this perspective, academic activity can be understood as encompassing multiple interconnected dimensions, including the generation of new knowledge, the integration of knowledge across disciplines, the practical application of knowledge, and the systematic exploration of teaching and learning processes [1]. Among these dimensions, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning places particular emphasis on the educational mission of universities, focusing on how teachers cultivate learners through purposeful and reflective teaching practices. It highlights the process by which teachers transform their accumulated disciplinary knowledge into accessible, meaningful learning experiences through appropriate pedagogical strategies. Rather than emphasizing one-way knowledge transmission, SoTL underscores continuous interaction between teaching and learning, in which teachers remain active learners who constantly refine their understanding and improve their instructional approaches [2].

From the SoTL perspective, excellent teaching involves sustained reflection, intentional design, and ongoing improvement. Teachers are encouraged to critically examine their educational practices, assess learning outcomes, and adjust instructional strategies based on systematic evidence. Teaching activities are therefore viewed as dynamic processes that require careful planning, continuous monitoring, and thoughtful evaluation [3]. In this sense, teaching becomes a creative and developmental endeavor through which teachers achieve professional growth while enhancing student learning experiences. As emphasized in relevant scholarship, teachers engaged in SoTL are expected not only to transmit existing knowledge but also to possess the capacity to reinterpret, reorganize, and expand knowledge within instructional contexts [4]. This process requires educators to maintain active intellectual engagement, cultivate habits of scholarly inquiry, and integrate teaching into their broader academic responsibilities. Through such practices, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning provides a theoretical foundation and practical pathway for advancing teachers' professional development and elevating the academic status of teaching within higher education [5].

## **3. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: The Fundamental Path for Teachers' Professional Development**

Firstly, research on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and the professional development of university teachers share fundamental points of convergence in both objectives and practical orientations. As an emerging teaching philosophy, SoTL promotes a systematic reexamination of traditional perceptions of teaching and academic work, encouraging both institutional management structures and individual teachers to reconsider the academic value embedded in teaching activities. Through the SoTL perspective, teaching is gradually recognized as an inquiry-oriented and research-based process rather than a purely routine task. This shift enables teachers to engage more deeply in educational research grounded in classroom practice, to reflect critically on teaching effectiveness, and to continuously refine pedagogical approaches [6]. At the same time, the professional development of university teachers follows the intrinsic laws of knowledge transmission and learner cultivation, emphasizing the continuous improvement of professional competence, teaching awareness, and reflective ability. The alignment between SoTL research and teachers' professional development thus provides

a shared pathway for enhancing instructional quality and promoting the overall improvement of higher education teaching.

Secondly, SoTL theory further enriches and improves the theoretical system underlying the professional development of university teachers. In practical contexts, the understanding of academic work has often been limited to a narrow scope, with academic value primarily associated with disciplinary research, knowledge production, and scientific discovery [7]. This restricted perception has led to an imbalance in which teaching is sometimes regarded as secondary to research activities. Within such an environment, the academic attributes of teaching are insufficiently recognized, and the intellectual labor involved in teaching design, implementation, and evaluation tends to be underestimated. SoTL theory challenges this limited view by emphasizing that teaching itself involves processes of exploration, analysis, integration, and innovation [8]. It highlights the creative dimension of teaching and affirms that instructional practice requires systematic inquiry and scholarly reflection. By incorporating teaching into the broader academic framework, SoTL provides a more comprehensive theoretical foundation for teachers' professional development and helps to correct misconceptions that separate teaching from academic scholarship.

Thirdly, SoTL research and teachers' professional development are organically unified and mutually reinforcing within educational practice. Teaching practice constitutes the fundamental environment in which teachers' professional growth occurs and evolves. As educational contexts continue to change, teaching practice remains dynamic, constantly generating new challenges and problems that require thoughtful responses [9]. Through sustained engagement with SoTL research, teachers are better equipped to analyze emerging issues in teaching, explore effective solutions, and reflect on the outcomes of their instructional decisions. This process allows teachers to integrate newly acquired experiences into updated teaching concepts and pedagogical strategies. Over time, such reflective and inquiry-based practice supports the continuous renewal of professional knowledge and promotes sustainable professional development [10]. In this sense, SoTL not only provides theoretical guidance but also serves as a practical mechanism through which teachers can achieve long-term professional growth and adapt to the evolving demands of higher education.

#### **4. Improving SoTL Competence to Promote Teachers' Professional Development**

The unique functions of modern universities, the professional nature of university teachers, and the expanded connotation and extension of academic activities determine that the professional development of university teachers includes both the development of scientific research and teaching, as well as the development of disciplinary professionalism and teaching professionalism. [11].

##### *4.1. Clarify the SoTL Concept and Correct Teachers' Attitudes and Orientations Towards Disciplines and Teaching*

The professional development of university teachers is the result of the joint development of multiple internal factors such as professional knowledge, professional competence, professional ethics, and professional reflection. The development of these factors relies not only on "disciplinary professional" scholarship that explores and innovates knowledge but also on "teaching professional" scholarship that disseminates knowledge. The traditional view of university education holds that university teaching is simply the transmission of knowledge and skills, and it seems to be a purely indoctrinative activity of knowledge transfer. The proposal of SoTL theory has completely subverted the inherent nature of teaching activities [12]. As Shulman stated: "To regard teaching as a form of scholarship means to treat it not only as an activity but also as a process of inquiry." When teaching is regarded as an academic research endeavor, it becomes a scholarly work that requires the application of advanced intellectual abilities,

and teachers need to carefully study the challenging problems faced in teaching. Therefore, university teachers should abandon the traditional cognition that "teaching is knowledge transmission", attach importance to SoTL, and regard teaching research as an important path to enrich their professional knowledge, improve their teaching ability, and develop professional sentiment and morality. Through SoTL forms such as teaching and research activities, writing teaching reform papers, teaching summaries, and research on teaching projects, teachers can deepen their understanding and construction of educational and teaching theories, and further transform from passive and simple participation in teaching to active inquiry and creative teaching- that is, based on their own educational beliefs, educational experience, and personal knowledge, form their own understanding of teaching and achieve innovation on this basis [13].

#### *4.2. Establish and Improve Academic Exchange Systems and Actively Display Sotl Achievements*

Boyer pointed out that teachers' work can only be deemed fruitful if it "is understood by others". Shulman argued that only when teachers' teaching achievements are transformed from "personal private property" into "common wealth" that can be constructed by other academic groups or peers can they be recognized by the academic community [14]. Therefore, SoTL possesses the characteristics of being "public, evaluable, and shareable", and is a kind of "common wealth" that can be constructed by others. This means that SoTL must make research results public, allowing them to be judged, evaluated, constructed, and exchanged with others [15]. However, for many years, the publication of achievements has been a major obstacle affecting the in-depth development of the SoTL movement. Teaching is a holistic and dynamic process, and the traditional achievement publication mechanism has always been unable to accurately, comprehensively, and objectively convey all the content and valuable information contained in dynamic and complex teaching activities. In recent years, emerging online learning resources such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and micro-lectures, which have attracted much attention, are pushing the SoTL movement to a new stage, creating new platforms and forms for the publication of SoTL achievements, and urging teachers to carry out teaching in a scientific research-oriented manner. High-level and high-quality new online learning resources must rely on cutting-edge achievements in three different fields-learning science, information technology, and instructional design-and realize the internal integration of the three. This makes teaching activities in the information age a frontier of interdisciplinary humanities and technology. Therefore, leveraging the new educational platforms created by the Internet to display SoTL achievements is one of the important paths to promote teachers' professional development. Currently, the key is to summarize and standardize these new forms of achievement publication from the perspective of SoTL, establish a corresponding set of institutional rules as soon as possible, and improve the quality of teaching achievements and the level of teaching resource construction. Teachers should be encouraged to publish their syllabi, lesson plans, and teaching videos to accept evaluations from peers and students around the world, so that excellent teaching achievements can be quickly transformed into three-dimensional, omni-media teaching resources that are reusable, expandable, and jointly constructible and shareable.

#### *4.3. Establish University Teachers' Teaching Development Centers and Build Teaching Communities*

The cooperation among teachers who grow together by mutually creating and exchanging practical experience, known as 'collegiality', is the most important factor determining the success or failure of school reform." The establishment of university teachers' teaching development centers is a product of the institutionalization and organization of teachers' teaching development, and serves as a platform and carrier for prospering SoTL [16]. Establishing university teachers' teaching development centers

based on teaching, guided by research, and centered on academia, and realizing the integration of teaching research and talent training, is an important aspect of integrating grass-roots academic organizations in institutions of higher education. Summarizing the construction experience at home and abroad, teachers' teaching development centers should be independent institutions directly managed by the vice president in charge of teaching. On this basis, they should actively integrate resources from relevant functional departments, form their own organizational resource advantages, create a good teaching culture atmosphere, and better promote the development of teachers' teaching ability. From the perspective of SoTL, the construction goal of teachers' teaching development centers is to organize the scattered SoTL activities in various grass-roots academic organizations into teaching communities. The construction of teaching communities is a common trend in teachers' teaching development. Steiner's research shows that teachers' development methods should shift from formal individual learning to informal group learning represented by communities of practice. In fact, teaching communities are conducive to creating a collaborative culture in universities, enhancing teachers' internal growth momentum, and providing an inexhaustible driving force for teachers' professional development. Some scholars have pointed out that teachers' teaching development centers should focus on cultivating three types of learning communities: learning communities for new teachers, technology-supported learning communities, and learning communities related to teaching construction projects [17]. Under the background of "Internet +", with the help of various network platforms, establish teachers' professional development centers and build teachers' professional learning communities. Following the concept of participation, cooperation, mutual sharing, and exchange, teachers can carry out online collaborative learning through the following steps: a. Form teachers' online learning communities; b. Conduct platform training; c. Divide into groups; d. Expert guidance and leadership; e. Independent learning; f. Professional practice; g. Intra-group discussions; h. Group achievement reporting and display; i. Group evaluation and feedback; j. Teachers' personal reflection. The cooperation and exchange within the community need to endow ordinary teachers with sufficient rights, and the cooperation and exchange should focus on effective teaching, teaching innovation, and creative teaching practice.

#### *4.4. Organize Specialized Teaching Training to Realize the Development of Teaching Professionalism*

The proposal of SoTL theory has elevated the status of specialized teaching training for university teachers and transformed the way of teacher training. When teaching becomes a form of scholarship, specialized teaching training will have an equal, or even more important, status compared with academic training in teachers' respective disciplines. Summarizing the experience of teaching training in China over the years, pre-service training for university teachers tends to be a theoretical, short-term, and intensive training [18]. Due to limitations in goal setting and time, this kind of curriculum training on education and psychology is difficult to meet the fundamental requirements of modern universities for teachers. In response to this situation, universities should carry out practical and effective courses according to their own actual conditions, enabling teachers to establish correct concepts and awareness of academic development, and gradually strengthen their professional, psychological, and educational teaching qualities, thereby improving their SoTL competence. Under the background of "Internet +", MOOCs have spread rapidly and developed rapidly on an international scale, providing high-quality, efficient, and convenient educational resources and learning opportunities for teachers and students, and also offering new ideas and good support for university teacher training under the background of educational informatization. Based on this, the training model from the perspective of SoTL can rely on MOOCs, effectively combining online independent learning with offline centralized face-to-face teaching. In other words, it

integrates large-scale open educational resources represented by MOOCs with traditional face-to-face training, consisting of three main links: independent learning of MOOCs, centralized face-to-face teaching, and training assessment and certification. This mixed online-offline learning method combined with internal and external evaluation can effectively improve teachers' participation, promote in-depth interaction among teachers in learning, and truly achieve the purpose of training [19].

## 5. Conclusion

From the perspective of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, the professional development of university teachers should be understood as a comprehensive and dynamic process that integrates teaching, research, and reflective inquiry. This study has systematically examined the theoretical foundations and practical implications of SoTL, clarifying its value as a key pathway for promoting teachers' professional growth in the context of contemporary higher education. By redefining teaching as a form of scholarly activity, SoTL provides a new perspective for understanding the academic nature of teaching and reshaping teachers' professional identities.

The analysis demonstrates that teachers' professional development cannot rely solely on disciplinary research or individual experience accumulation. Instead, it requires the coordinated development of teaching concepts, academic exchange mechanisms, organizational support structures, and specialized training systems. Improving teachers' SoTL competence plays a central role in this process, as it enables teachers to engage in systematic reflection on teaching practice, transform experiential knowledge into sharable academic outcomes, and continuously enhance instructional quality. Through the construction of academic exchange systems, teaching development centers, and teaching communities, as well as the implementation of diversified training models, universities can create supportive environments that foster sustainable professional development.

Overall, integrating SoTL into the professional development system of university teachers contributes to the elevation of teaching quality and the optimization of talent cultivation in higher education. It also promotes the balanced development of teaching and research, helping universities form a more holistic academic ecology. Future efforts should continue to explore context-sensitive implementation strategies for SoTL, so as to further strengthen its practical effectiveness and long-term impact on teachers' professional development.

## References

1. L. Feng, and J. Qiang, "Discussion on the Party Building Work in Colleges and Universities from the Perspective of" Rules of Law," 2019.
2. T. R. Anderson, T. U. Daim, and F. F. Lavoie, "Measuring the efficiency of university technology transfer," *Technovation*, vol. 27, no. 5, pp. 306-318, 2007. doi: 10.1016/j.technovation.2006.10.003
3. J. Murray, "Towards a new language of scholarship in teacher educators' professional learning?," *Professional development in education*, vol. 36, no. 1-2, pp. 197-209, 2010. doi: 10.1080/19415250903457125
4. K. C. Culver, A. Kezar, and E. R. Koren, "Improving access and inclusion for VITAL faculty in the scholarship of teaching and learning through sustained professional development programs," *Innovative Higher Education*, vol. 48, no. 6, pp. 1071-1094, 2023.
5. H. Zhang, and Q. Zhong, "Curriculum studies in China: Retrospect and prospect," In *International handbook of curriculum research*, 2003, pp. 256-273.
6. Y. Steinert, "Faculty development: from workshops to communities of practice," *Medical teacher*, vol. 32, no. 5, pp. 425-428, 2010. doi: 10.3109/01421591003677897
7. M. D. Cox, and L. Richlin, "Building faculty learning communities: new directions for teaching and learning, number 97," *John Wiley & Sons*, vol. 15, 2004.
8. V. Vescio, D. Ross, and A. Adams, "A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning," *Teaching and teacher education*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 80-91, 2008. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2007.01.004
9. T. Alghamdi, W. Hall, and D. Millard, "A classification of how MOOCs are used for blended learning," In *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Information and Education Innovations*, July, 2019, pp. 1-7. doi: 10.1145/3345094.3345107

10. S. M. Ginsberg, "Getting to the scholarship of teaching and learning: Professional development in university faculty," *The ASHA Leader*, vol. 15, no. 10, pp. 14-17, 2010. doi: 10.1044/leader.ftr2.15102010.14
11. Y. Zheng, "University teachers' scientific research innovation incentive based on the three-party evolutionary game of the state, the colleges, and scientific researchers," *Frontiers in psychology*, vol. 13, p. 973333, 2023. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.973333
12. S. K. W. Chu, R. B. Reynolds, N. J. Tavares, M. Notari, and C. W. Y. Lee, "Teachers' professional development," In *21st century skills development through inquiry-based learning: From theory to practice*, 2016, pp. 109-129. doi: 10.1007/978-981-10-2481-8\_6
13. T. D. Zakrajsek, "Scholarly teaching: suggestions for a road more traveled," *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, vol. 7, no. 1, p. 2, 2013. doi: 10.20429/ijstol.2013.070102
14. X. Zhu, and M. Wang, "Universalization of Teacher Education: Reflection and Reconstruction," *Journal of East China Normal University (Educational Sciences)*, vol. 40, no. 3, p. 75, 2022.
15. F. Dong, and S. Dong, "Research on the optimization of ideological and political education in universities integrating artificial intelligence technology under the guidance of curriculum ideological and political thinking," *ACM Transactions on Asian and Low-Resource Language Information Processing*, 2023. doi: 10.1145/3611012
16. H. M. M. Al-Zyoud, "The role of artificial intelligence in teacher professional development," *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 8, no. 11B, pp. 6263-6272, 2020.
17. Z. Wang, and N. Meltzoff, "Self-Experience and Pedagogical," *Sociomateriality in Children with Typical and/or Atypical Development*, 2021.
18. C. A. L. Giraldo, and M. P. D. Cañon, "Modern conception of business judgment rule: a case study on delaware jurisprudence," *International Law: Revista Colombiana de Derecho Internacional*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2005.
19. L. E. Beyer, "The reconstruction of knowledge and educational studies," *Journal of Education*, vol. 168, no. 2, pp. 113-135, 1986. doi: 10.1177/002205748616800209

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of the publisher and/or the editor(s). The publisher and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.