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Original Paper

Research on the Path of Improving the Scientific Research Ability of Foreign Language Teachers in Higher Vocational Colleges: Literature Review and Policy Enlightenment

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Abstract

The issuance of the Three-year Action Plan for Vocational Education, Teaching and Scientific Research (2025-2027) in 2025 (hereinafter referred to as the Plan) marks that China's vocational education, teaching and scientific research has entered a new strategic stage of building a strong country serving education, and puts forward higher requirements for foreign language teachers' scientific research ability in higher vocational colleges. This study adopts the narrative literature review method to systematically sort out the conceptual evolution, influencing factors and promotion paths of foreign language teachers' scientific research ability along the academic history, and on this basis, combined with the practical difficulties of higher vocational teachers, refine the policy enlightenment applicable to higher vocational foreign language teachers. The findings are as follows: firstly, the concept of foreign language teachers' scientific research ability has undergone three stages: general skills, practical reflection and policy response; Secondly, the development of scientific research ability is influenced by three factors: individual motivation and experience, organizational atmosphere and support, and institutional evaluation and incentive; Thirdly, the promotion path presents four generations of progressive characteristics: training and research, community building, system incentive

and policy docking. However, most of the above studies focus on foreign language teachers in undergraduate colleges, and the discussion on foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges is relatively scarce. Foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges face practical difficulties such as heavy teaching tasks, weak scientific research foundation and insufficient institutional support. The Plan puts the ability of policy response at the core, and endows teachers with complex ability requirements such as research on integration of production and education, digital research and international research. The tension between high expectations of policies and practical difficulties constitutes the core challenge of policy implementation in the next three years. On the basis of pointing out the shortcomings of existing research, this paper puts forward the future research direction in order to provide academic reference for policy implementation and scientific research development of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges.

Keywords

Foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges, Scientific research ability, Teachers' professional development, Vocational education teaches scientific research, Three-year action plan

1. Introduction

In 2025, the Vocational Education Development Center of the Ministry of Education issued the Three-year Action Plan for Vocational Education, Teaching and Scientific Research (2025-2027) (hereinafter referred to as the Plan), which clearly stated that by 2027, "a complete teaching and scientific research service chain will be formed with theoretical research, standard development, decision-making consultation, practice verification and popularization and application", and efforts will be made to address the issues of fragmentation, weakness, and superficiality in vocational education, teaching and scientific research. The Plan contains new expectations for teachers' scientific research ability in key tasks such as research on the integration of production and education, artificial intelligence empowering teaching scientific research, research on Vocational Education Going Abroad and research on the "Five Gold" Construction (Construction of Gold Majors, Gold Courses, Gold Teachers, Gold Bases, and Gold Textbooks), which means that teachers not only need to have traditional paper writing ability, but also need to develop composite abilities such as service industry, cross-border cooperation and digital transformation.

However, there is a significant tension between the high expectations of the policy and the practical difficulties faced by teachers. The development of teachers' scientific research ability is one of the core topics in the field of foreign language teachers' professional development. Internationally, Borg (2010) proposed that teachers' participation in scientific research includes two dimensions: "participation in research" and "interaction with research", which provides an important theoretical framework for understanding teachers' scientific research ability. Nassaji (2012) surveyed 201 ESL/EFL teachers, and found that most teachers agree with the promotion of research on teaching, but trust the knowledge accumulated by teaching experience more. Tabatabaei and Nazem (2013) further revealed that teachers'

understanding of research concepts is still limited to traditional scientific concepts, while time, knowledge and institutional support are the main factors restricting research participation.

Domestic scholars have carried out a lot of research on foreign language teacher' scientific research ability. Zhang et al. (2025) conducted a large-scale survey based on 22,258 questionnaires of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities, and found that the common obstacles for foreign language teachers in colleges and universities to carry out scientific research are: great pressure on scientific research (76.8%), lack of expert guidance (69.1%), caring for families (70.1%), heavy teaching tasks (64.1%) and lack of time (61.4%). This shows that although teachers have generally recognized the importance of scientific research, they still face multiple constraints such as personal energy, professional support and cooperative environment in practical operation. Wang and Han (2011) revealed the structural bottleneck of foreign language teachers' scientific research development from the perspective of discipline construction, and pointed out that foreign language disciplines obviously lagged behind other humanities and social sciences in terms of doctoral training scale, number of key disciplines and academic journal resources. Meng et al. (2019) discussed the role of academic community in promoting the development of teachers' scientific research ability from the perspective of social and cultural theory.

This problem is particularly prominent among foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges. Compared with undergraduate colleges, foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges have long been in a more severe scientific research ecology. Huang (2010) survey of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges shows that as many as 74% of teachers think that heavy teaching tasks are the primary factor restricting their career development, and the weekly class hours of teachers are generally between 14 and 22, which seriously occupies the scientific research time and energy. In addition, there are many problems in higher vocational colleges, such as weak scientific research atmosphere, lack of professional leaders and insufficient training in scientific research methods (Guo, 2012; Zhao, 2012). These structural dilemmas make it difficult for foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges not only to meet the requirements of compound ability put forward in the Plan, but also to enter a stable and continuous research state. However, most of the above studies focus on foreign language teachers in undergraduate colleges, and the discussion on foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges is relatively scarce. There are significant differences between foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges and undergraduate teachers in teaching tasks, scientific research foundation and system support, and the particularity of their scientific research ability development has not been fully paid attention to.

Based on the above background, this paper focuses on a core issue: how to effectively improve the scientific research ability of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges under the policy background of the Plan? Focusing on this core issue, this paper tries to answer the following three sub-questions: first, how the concept of scientific research ability of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges has evolved and what stages its core connotation has gone through; Secondly, what

factors restrict the development of scientific research ability of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges, and what kind of gap exists between policy and reality; Thirdly, what promotion paths have been put forward by the existing research, and how do these paths connect with the policy requirements of the Plan?

In order to answer the above questions, this paper adopts the method of narrative literature review and organizes the literature according to the context of academic history. The reason for choosing this method is that the concept of scientific research ability is not static, but evolves with the change of educational concept and policy orientation. By combing the concept evolution track, we can more clearly reveal the special connotation of scientific research ability of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges under the current policy background, and provide academic reference for the implementation of the Plan. Literature retrieval covers the database of core journals within China and internationally, and the inclusion of research follows the standards of theme relevance, academic standardization and content originality.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in: by combing the development context of the research on foreign language teachers' scientific research ability, it reveals the deep logic of concept evolution and provides theoretical reference for the research on foreign language teachers' development; By summarizing the multi-layer structure of influencing factors, the theoretical explanation of the generation mechanism of teachers' scientific research ability is enriched; By integrating the evolution characteristics of the promotion path, it lays a foundation for building a framework for the development of teachers' scientific research ability. The practical significance of this study lies in: providing an operable path reference for improving the scientific research ability of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges under the background of the Plan, an empirical basis for higher vocational colleges to formulate teachers' scientific research support policies and a direction guidance for the personal professional development planning of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges.

2. Conceptual Evolution

To understand the path to improve the scientific research ability of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges, we need to clarify the theoretical connotation of the core concept of "scientific research ability" at first. Looking at the existing literature, scholars have defined the scientific research ability from different perspectives. Chen (2004) linked the scientific research ability with the thinking quality from the perspective of cognitive psychology, and thought that the core of it was that teachers could "extract the ubiquitous essential and regular things from a large number of perceptual materials", and accordingly distinguished "experiential thinking teachers" and "theoretical thinking teachers". Zhu (2004) put the scientific research ability into the framework of college English teachers' comprehensive quality from the perspective of teachers' quality structure, and pointed out that it is the "weakness" of teachers' various qualities. Wang and Han (2011) revealed the structural connotation of scientific research ability from the perspective of discipline development, and pointed out that the structural

disadvantages of foreign language disciplines in the number of key disciplines, the scale of doctoral education, and the platform of academic journals constitute the macro-restrictive factors for the development of teachers' scientific research ability. Xu and Yang (2024) put forward the concept of "teaching and research literacy" from the perspective of foreign language pedagogy, and defined it as a comprehensive quality including five elements: teaching and research consciousness, theoretical literacy, teaching and research skills, teaching and research will and ethical literacy. Based on the above definition, scientific research ability includes at least four core dimensions: cognitive dimension (abstract generalization ability, theoretical thinking ability), skill dimension (research method, thesis writing), structural dimension (discipline ecology, institutional environment) and subject dimension (teaching and research consciousness, teaching and research will). However, this concept is not static. Looking at the relevant research globally, the connotation of foreign language teachers' scientific research ability is constantly enriched and developed with the change of educational concept, teachers' role and policy orientation. From the historical context, its connotation has roughly experienced three stages of evolution from "general skills" to "practical reflection" and then to "policy response".

2.1 The First Stage (1990s-2000s)

From the 1990s to the early 21st century, the understanding of scientific research ability was mainly influenced by the trend of technological rationality, and it tended to be regarded as a set of universal technologies that could be disassembled, measured and trained, covering technical aspects such as literature review, research design, data analysis and academic writing. Under this paradigm, researchers began to construct a theoretical framework for the quality of foreign language teachers. Gu (2002) further expanded this framework, and incorporated learning ability and scientific research ability into the elements of teachers' quality. Li, Liu and Zhang (2007) used the competency theory for reference to construct the KASIB model, which provided an analytical framework for understanding the position of scientific research ability in the overall quality structure of teachers. Wang and Han (2011) revealed the structural bottleneck of foreign language teachers' scientific research from the perspective of discipline development: there are only 18 foreign language CSSCI journals, with a total of 1932 articles published each year. According to the calculation of 119,400 full-time teachers, it takes 62 years for each person to publish one article. This discovery reveals the fundamental influence of college types and subject ecology on teachers' scientific research ability. Borg and Liu (2013) surveyed 725 college English teachers in China, and found that the frequency of teachers' reading and doing research is limited, and the promotion of professional titles is an external motivation that can not be ignored. This research puts the scientific research ability in the overall framework of teachers' professional development.

Looking at this stage, its core contribution lies in transforming the scientific research ability from a vague empirical description into a conceptual framework that can be analyzed and discussed. However, the skill-based view also has obvious limitations: it pays too much attention to the operational level of research, but not enough attention to deep research literacy such as problem consciousness and academic judgment. Chen (2004) pointed out that most English teachers are "experiential thinking

teachers" who are satisfied with the accumulation of knowledge points, but lack the ability to independently propose research topics. This criticism reveals the inherent dilemma of skill-based view, and pure technical training is unable to cultivate the real "problem consciousness", which is the soul of scientific research ability. It is this dilemma that promotes the shift of research paradigm to practical reflection view.

2.2 The Second Stage (2000s 2010s)

In the 21st century, with the rise of action research and reflective practice theory, researchers began to re-examine the relationship between scientific research and teaching, emphasizing the internal integration of scientific research and teaching, and regarded teacher research as the core mechanism of professional growth rather than an extra burden. The key driving force for this shift stems from a deep understanding of the differences between "experiential thinking teachers" and "theoretical thinking teachers". Chen (2004) pointed out that experiential thinking teachers "talk about perceptual knowledge, but can't grasp the essence through phenomena", while theoretical thinking teachers can "extract the universal and essential regularity from a large number of perceptual materials". He exemplified that in the face of students' language mistakes, teacher A compiled a lot of exercises based on experience, while teacher B classified them from the perspective of linguistics and psychology and put forward six teaching countermeasures. This contrast vividly reveals the internal relationship between scientific research ability and reflection on teaching practice. Teachers' research ability is generated and developed in the process of solving real teaching problems, and this generation requires the intervention of theoretical thinking.

In this theoretical turn, teachers' independent professional development has become a key concept. Jiang (2013) pointed out that teachers' independent professional development refers to teachers' ability to consciously make plans, select contents and monitor the process according to their own development status. Teaching reflection and action research are effective ways to realize this independent development. Xin (2006) defined teachers' on-the-job self-development as autonomous learning, reflection, action and research in English proficiency, language theory and teaching skills, emphasizing that this is a lifelong dynamic process of growing up in skills, experience and attitude. Barkhuizen (2012) conducted a narrative study of 83 college English teachers in China, and found that the problems that teachers want to study mainly focus on practical classroom problems such as insufficient student participation and lack of motivation. The purpose of the study is not to simply publish papers, but to better understand students' needs and improve teaching methods. This discovery confirms Chen's view that the real scientific research ability is generated in the process of responding to teaching practice problems.

It is worth noting that the concept of practical reflection is also echoed in the research of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges. Huang's (2010) survey of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges found that 87% of teachers have a strong sense of career development, and 81% are engaged in career development mainly to promote their professional titles, but as high as 74%

are unable to carry out career development due to heavy teaching tasks. This contradiction reveals the particularity of higher vocational teachers, who agree with the value of research, but the heavy teaching burden makes it difficult for them to turn their will into action. Huang emphasized that the key to the career development of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges lies in "teaching research", and teachers should become "research teachers" through observation, reflection, research and exploration.

Looking at this stage, the core contribution of the concept of practical reflection lies in breaking the binary opposition between "teaching" and "scientific research" and revealing the generative relationship between them. It makes researchers realize that scientific research ability is not an "additional ability" for teachers to complete teaching tasks, but a professional quality that is born in the process of continuous reflection, exploration and improvement in teaching practice. However, the concept of practical reflection mainly focuses on the cognitive transformation of teachers at the individual level, while the discussion on macro factors such as institutional environment and policy orientation is relatively insufficient.

2.3 The Third Stage (2020s to present)

In recent years, with the issuance of the Three-year Action Plan for Teaching and Scientific Research in Vocational Education (2025-2027), the understanding of teachers' scientific research ability has entered the stage of "policy response". Different from the previous two stages, the policy response view puts teacher research in the macro background of national strategy and industrial development, and discusses how teachers can respond to the needs of the times through scientific research.

The most systematic theoretical expression of policy response comes from the definition of foreign language teachers' scientific research literacy by Zhang et al. (2025). Based on a large-scale survey of 22,258 questionnaires, they defined the scientific research literacy of foreign language teachers as "the comprehensive quality of teachers who can conduct research with appropriate methods around the phenomena and problems in foreign language disciplines or teaching activities", and decomposed it into four elements: correct values, core knowledge, key ability and necessary character. The breakthrough of this definition lies in bringing values and character into the category of scientific research literacy, which embodies the core concern of policy response view. Teachers' research is not only related to personal development, but also to national strategy and social needs.

The five-dimensional framework of teaching and research literacy proposed by Xu and Yang (2024) includes teaching and research consciousness, theoretical literacy, teaching and research skills, teaching and research will and ethical literacy, which further deepens the theoretical connotation of the policy response view. Among them, teaching and research consciousness refers to teachers' cognitive tendency to actively pay attention to teaching problems and seek teaching improvement, and teaching and research will refer to teachers' persistent psychological quality in the process of research. The research of these two scholars brought consciousness and will into the category of literacy, which responded to the question raised by Chen (2004) many years ago. Why do most teachers stay at the

level of empirical thinking? The answer lies not only in the lack of skill training, but also in the lack of teaching and research consciousness and will.

Another important theoretical resource of policy response view comes from re-examining the relationship between teaching and scientific research. Zhuang and Qi (2017) put forward the concept of "academic research of teaching", advocated teaching-oriented and scientific research to promote teaching, and believed that teaching and scientific research were mutually nourishing symbiotic relationships. Wang (2017) put forward five-dimensional goals for the development of foreign language teachers, including professional development, teaching development, personal development, curriculum development and organizational development, which provides a multi-dimensional perspective for understanding the policy response ability.

It is worth noting that as early as 2011, Wang and Han revealed the structural bottlenecks restricting the development of foreign language teachers' scientific research by comparing the statistical data of foreign language disciplines with those of Chinese and history, such as the serious lag in discipline construction, the slow development of doctoral education, the lack of academic leaders and academic backbones, and the backward construction of academic journal platforms. They put forward that a strategic management organization for the development of foreign languages should be set up from the national strategic level, the development plan of foreign languages should be scientifically formulated, development of academic leadership should be established, and the platform construction of foreign languages academic journals should be accelerated. These forward-looking policy suggestions echo the policy thinking of the Plan after more than ten years, and also confirm the deep dependence of foreign language teachers' scientific research ability development on the institutional environment.

Looking at the three stages of evolution, we can clearly see the theoretical trajectory of the concept of foreign language teachers' scientific research ability, from scientific research as technology to scientific research as practice and then to scientific research as response to the policies. Every turn is not a denial of the former, but a transcendence of its limitations and an expansion of its connotation. For foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges, it is of great practical significance to understand this evolution. The compound requirements put forward by the Plan for teachers' scientific research ability, including the integration of production and teaching research ability, digital research ability and international research ability. However, how to respond to these requirements in the case of heavy teaching tasks and weak scientific research foundation is the core issue to be discussed in the following chapters.

3. Analysis of the Influencing Factors

On the basis of clarifying the concept and historical evolution of scientific research ability, we need to further ask: what factors restrict the development of scientific research ability of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges? Looking at the existing research, teachers' scientific research ability is not a simple problem of individual skills, but a complex product generated and developed in

the multiple interactions of individual cognition, organizational environment and institutional structure. Factors at different levels are intertwined and jointly shape teachers' research behavior and development path.

3.1 Individual Level

At the individual level, scientific research motivation, cognitive concept and experience accumulation constitute the core elements that affect teachers' scientific research ability. These three factors are not isolated, but intertwined, which jointly determine whether teachers are willing to engage in research, how to participate in research, and whether they can grow from research experience.

Research motivation is the internal engine that drives teachers to engage in research. Zhang et al. (2025) conducted a large-scale survey based on 22,258 questionnaires of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities nationwide, and found that the obstacles for foreign language teachers in colleges and universities to carry out scientific research showed multi-level characteristics. The top six are: great pressure of scientific research, lack of expert guidance, caring for family, heavy teaching tasks, lack of time, and lack of support and cooperation from colleagues, and the recognition ratio is between 56% and 77%. These data reflect an intriguing phenomenon: teachers' recognition of scientific research is not low (the proportion of teachers who think their research ability is insufficient and are afraid of scientific research is less than 50%), but the gap between willingness and conditions is extremely significant. In other words, teachers are not unwilling to do it, but they are willing but lack the necessary capabilities.

The structure of motivation is far more complicated than it seems. Li et al. (2012)' s qualitative research on foreign language teachers in China universities reveals that teachers' cognition of the value of scientific research has formed a continuum from personal benefits and teaching benefits to professional contributions and psychological satisfaction. Teachers in research universities believe that scientific research has multidimensional value, while teachers in teaching colleges mainly believe in the teaching value and tool value of research. This discovery reminds us that the types of colleges and universities are not simply classified labels, but have a subtle influence on their research investment and research orientation by shaping teachers' value cognition. The research by Zhang and wang (2008) also confirms this point: the motivation of teachers to participate in scientific research mainly comes from external factors such as professional title evaluation, and few teachers can actively realize the importance of scientific research to career development.

Cognitive concepts largely determine how teachers understand and approach research. Tabatabaei and Nazem (2013) surveyed 150 EFL teachers and found that teachers' understanding of research concepts is still limited to traditional scientific concepts, and the lack of time, knowledge and institutional support is the main factor restricting research participation. Jokhio's (2022) survey of teachers in Pakistan also found that most teachers think that knowledge gained from teaching experience is more effective than knowledge gained from research. These studies reveal a cross-cultural common dilemma: when teachers regard research as "another discourse system" alienated from daily teaching, and when

research is understood as unattainable profound knowledge, they will naturally return to their familiar experience world.

Looking at the influencing factors at the individual level, we can extract a basic judgment: individually, research capacity is driven by motivation, mediated by cognitive beliefs, and grounded in experiential learning. The three are intertwined and jointly shape teachers' research behavior. For foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges, external motivation often dominates, while internal motivation still needs to be stimulated; At the cognitive level, there is a general tendency that "teaching experience is better than research knowledge"; The experience level is limited by insufficient method training and lack of scientific research time.

3.2 Organizational Level

If individual factors explain why teachers are willing to do research, then organizational factors answer whether teachers can continue to do research in their environment. Scientific research atmosphere, teacher structure and academic community constitute the organizational conditions for the development of teachers' scientific research ability.

The influence of scientific research atmosphere on teachers' research participation often exceeds expectations. The research by Zhang et al. (2025) reveals an intriguing phenomenon: 56% of teachers think that "scientific research lacks the support and cooperation of colleagues", 57.1% of teachers don't think that there is no scientific research atmosphere in their departments, but only 12.3% of teachers think that department leaders don't support them to do scientific research. These three sets of data outline a subtle organizational picture: the support at the leadership level is not equal to the cooperation at the colleague level, and the formal system statement is not equal to the informal cultural atmosphere. Even if the leaders express their support, if there is a lack of substantive cooperation between colleagues and if the atmosphere of research is not felt in daily work, it is still difficult for teachers' research will be transformed into sustained action. Allison and Carey (2007) surveyed teachers in a language center of a university in Canada and found an alarming phenomenon: teachers generally feel lack of encouragement and motivation to engage in research, and some teachers are even explicitly told not to "act like professors and publish research". This case reminds us that the implicit culture of an organization is sometimes more influential than the explicit policy.

Teacher structure is the basic factor that restricts the development of scientific research ability. Guo (2012) surveyed three universities in Gansu shows that more than 40% of teachers have the need for further study, nearly 40% think that the teaching burden is too heavy, and more than half of them lack scientific research methods and leaders. The proportion of foreign language teachers with high professional titles and high academic qualifications in colleges and universities in underdeveloped areas in western China is generally low, and the stability of the teaching staff is poor. Zhao (2012) did a survey about colleges and universities in Guangxi reveals a more severe reality: only 6.11% of foreign language teachers in undergraduate colleges are professors and 19.89% are associate professors; Professors in higher vocational colleges account for only 0.64%, and associate professors account for

15.23%. The proportion of teachers with doctoral degrees is extremely low, only 2.87% in undergraduate colleges and 0 in higher vocational colleges. The average ratio of students to teachers is 24.67:1, and teachers have 14-22 classes per semester. Behind these figures is a simple and cruel fact: when teachers are trapped by heavy teaching tasks, when the academic leadership is seriously broken, and when teachers with high academic qualifications and titles are scarce, the improvement of scientific research ability becomes a luxury talk.

Academic community is the key mechanism to break through individual limitations. Meng (2019) tracked the development of scientific research ability of three teachers with different academic backgrounds in an inter-school foreign language academic community based on social and cultural theory, and found that the "collective experts" formed by scientific research experts and novices in the community can significantly improve the overall scientific research ability of the team. The study further reveals that systematic and continuous environmental support can play an incubation role, but teachers are the closest environment to each other and need to take the initiative to undertake the mission of team building in order to promote the formation of a nurturing research environment. This discovery reveals the dual logic of community construction: external support is indispensable, but teachers' subjectivity is more critical-the community is not an "incubator" that waits passively, but a "co-construction project" that requires each member to actively participate.

Based on the analysis at the organizational level, we can extract three core propositions: the research climate constitutes the enabling environment, faculty structure the structural parameters, and community building the transformative pathway. For foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges, the imbalance of teacher structure and the heavy teaching burden are more prominent problems, and the construction of academic communities across schools and institutions may be an effective way to break through the resource limitations.

3.3 System Level

Individual motivation and organizational conditions are important, but the development of teachers' scientific research ability is finally embedded in a broader institutional environment. Scientific research evaluation mechanism, incentive policy and discipline ecology together constitute the institutional framework for the development of teachers' scientific research ability, and their influence is often beyond the controllable range of individuals and organizations.

Scientific research evaluation and incentive mechanism are the core elements at the institutional level. Wang and Han (2011) compared the statistical data of foreign languages and literature with those of Chinese, history and other humanities and social sciences, and revealed four structural bottlenecks restricting the development of foreign language teachers' scientific research: discipline construction is seriously lagging behind (the first-class key discipline of foreign languages and literature is 0); The development of doctoral education is slow (only about 520 foreign language doctors are enrolled in China a year); Lack of academic leaders and academic backbones (only 347 foreign language tutors, only 4.72% teachers with full or senior titles); The platform construction of academic journals is

backward (the total number of articles published in 18 CSSCI source journals is only 1932, and it takes 62 years for each person to publish one article according to the calculation of 119,400 full-time foreign language teachers). These data raise the problem of teachers' scientific research ability from the individual level to the discipline ecological level, and reveal the structural disadvantages of foreign language disciplines in the allocation of academic resources.

The simplification of evaluation criteria directly leads to the simplification of research types. Huang and Chen (2016) made a bibliometric analysis of 389 papers of foreign language teachers in some colleges and universities in Shanghai, and found that only 37% of papers originated from CSSCI journals, only 10% were from empirical research, the proportion of interdisciplinary research was low, and there was less cooperation among researchers. The study points out that academic competence evaluation should respect the characteristics of foreign languages, explore classified evaluation and "representative work" system, improve peer review system and cultivate academic community.

The gap between system expectation and support is a dilemma that teachers generally feel. Borg and Liu (2013) found that college English teachers in China generally feel the obvious gap between institutional expectations and support: 87.8% of teachers think that management expects them to do research, but only 66.1% of teachers think that management supports them to do research, and only 30.4% of teachers think that research time is included in the workload. These three sets of data outline a depressing institutional picture: the management has high expectations for teachers, but the supporting support is seriously insufficient; Research is included in the assessment, but not in the workload; Teachers are required to produce results, but they are not given the conditions for output.

A systemic approach to institutional reform is very important. Mehrani (2014) focused group interview with Iranian English teachers found that bridging the gap between research and practice requires reconstructing the reward system for teachers and researchers, encouraging teachers to move towards evidence-based practice and encouraging researchers to move towards problem-oriented research. The study puts forward multi-level strategies: establishing professional and social networks, establishing institutions to promote cooperation between researchers and practitioners, supporting teachers to participate in academic activities, and revising and updating educational materials. This study reminds us that the reform at the institutional level needs a systematic approach, and a single policy is difficult to work.

Looking at the influencing factors at the institutional level, it can be summarized as three interrelated propositions: disciplinary ecology provides the foundational conditions, evaluation mechanisms establish the directional orientation, and support systems ensure the enabling infrastructure. For foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges, the structural disadvantage of foreign languages in the allocation of academic resources is a macro constraint that is difficult to change in the short term, but the diversification of evaluation standards and the improvement of support system are the links that can be broken through in the existing institutional framework.

4. Paths to Improve the Scientific Research Ability

By systematically sorting out the concept evolution and its influencing factors of foreign language teachers' scientific research ability in higher vocational colleges, a more practical-oriented key question gradually emerges: under the constraints of multiple factors such as individuals, organizations and systems, what path should teachers follow to improve their scientific research ability? Looking back at the existing research, we can find that the path to improve teachers' scientific research ability is not a single linear model, but an evolutionary trend from "skill training" to "community building" and then to "institutional incentive". More importantly, with the official promulgation of the Three-year Action Plan for Teaching and Scientific Research in Vocational Education and the introduction of a series of supporting policies, policy factors have become the core variables to reshape the conditions for the generation of teachers' scientific research ability, which has injected new institutional impetus into the integration and promotion path.

4.1 Training and Research Path

The training of traditional scientific research methods is the basic path for the development of teachers' scientific research ability. Xin (2006) divides teacher development into two dimensions on-the-job self-development framework: individual efforts and group collaboration, and emphasizes that training should be embedded in the continuous context of teacher development rather than isolated events, which is still enlightening today.

Based on large-scale investigation, Zhang et al. (2025) put forward systematic suggestions from three levels: teachers, colleges and educational authorities. At the teacher level, they specifically emphasize that teachers need to develop the habit of tracking cutting-edge research and actively participate in academic writing training to make up for the lack of key literacy such as literature review and research design. More importantly, they advocate returning to the teaching site through practical methods such as action research and lesson study, and cultivate scientific research sensitivity and capture in daily practice.

Under the policy context of Three-year Action Plan, digital scientific research ability training has become a new focus. Wang (2017) pointed out that the deep integration of information technology and foreign language teaching put forward higher requirements for teachers' educational technology ability. The teaching standards for vocational education issued by the Ministry of Education in 2025 clearly require "digital transformation of curriculum teaching by combining artificial intelligence and other technologies"; The English Curriculum Standard for Higher Vocational Education (2021 Edition) also emphasizes the construction of a "real, open, interactive and cooperative teaching environment". These policy requirements not only point to the teaching level, but also expect teachers' digital scientific research literacy-keen information awareness, solid information knowledge, strong information ability and good information morality.

Mukhatova et al. (2024) reveals the key variables of training effectiveness in the systematic review: the training effect depends not only on the content design, but also on the cooperation structure, emotional

factors and resource accessibility. In other words, the effectiveness of the training and research path depends on whether it can be embedded in the real working situation of teachers, activate the cooperation network between teachers and provide continuous emotional support. This suggests that training should transcend mere skill transmission and serve as a catalyst for teachers' cognitive restructuring and identity reconfiguration.

4.2 Community Construction Path

Teachers' scientific research community is not only a platform for academic interaction, but also an important source of emotional support and cognitive support. Meng et al. (2019) revealed the deep mechanism of community construction based on social and cultural theory: it is very important to conform to the adjustment of teachers' recent development areas; Scientific research experts and novices benefit from the same interests in the community, forming a "collective expert", which significantly improves the overall scientific research ability of the team; Systematic and continuous environmental support can play an incubation role, but teachers are the closest environment to each other. Only by taking the initiative to undertake the mission of team building can we promote the formation of a benign scientific research ecology.

On this basis, Zhang et al. (2025) further suggested that teachers should build a cooperative network, and through in-depth cooperation with colleagues, students and research partners, scientific research resources can be shared and emotional support can help each other, thus improving the quality and quantity of scientific research output. At the same time, they advocate teachers to actively participate in all levels and types of offline professional learning communities and virtual teaching and research sections, and deepen scientific research literacy in continuous interaction with peers. The research shows that the value of professional learning community is far more than skill improvement, and it can also promote the all-round development of teachers' morality, teaching and emotion.

As a new form, online community also shows unique value. Wang and Duan (2017) analysis of iResearch's "I'll read the literature" activity shows that the community has the characteristics of high disciplinary relevance, strong community interaction and deep practice. The careful design of preset thinking questions and activity cycle inspires members to think deeply, and the organic combination of independent study and forum discussion urges members to mobilize existing knowledge resources to reflect deeply, thus realizing the substantial improvement of scientific research ability.

The diachronic dimension of community construction is also worthy of attention. Yang and Han (2025) conducted a narrative research on Chinese teacher candidates who participated in the "embedded teacher education project in research-oriented schools", and found that the identity initiative of teachers as researchers experienced three stages of evolution: germination, reinforcement and sustainability. The interaction between internal motivation and external support profoundly affects teachers' participation in the knowledge community, and then guides the dynamic evolution of their identity initiative. This discovery provides an important theoretical reference for understanding the diachronic process of teachers' scientific research ability development.

4.3 Institutional Incentive Path

Individual training and community building are important, but without institutional support, teachers' enthusiasm for scientific research will eventually be difficult to sustain. Therefore, the reform of scientific research evaluation has become the core issue of institutional incentive path.

Zhang et al. (2025) put forward systematic suggestions from two levels: college management and education authorities. At the college level, managers should create a cooperative cultural atmosphere, so that teachers' research motivation and innovation can be continuously respected. Specific measures include: organizing expert workshops in the hospital to play the role of mentors and cultivate scientific research models; Invite project winners to share their application experience and create a project incubation platform to enhance teachers' competitiveness; Regular academic salons are held to recognize and reward cooperative achievements. The core of these suggestions is to promote the institutional incentive to shift from "result-oriented" to "process-oriented" and from "individual competition" to "win-win cooperation". At the level of education authorities, the team advocates designing scientific research literacy improvement projects, adding the dimension of foreign language pedagogy to the national project catalogue, and increasing the number of research projects such as foreign language teaching and teacher development; At the same time, encourage the establishment of more foreign language pedagogy journals, especially those for international academic circles. Subject setting and periodical platform are the two institutional levers that help shape teachers' research behavior.

Huang and Chen (2016) put forward more targeted suggestions from the perspective of evaluation mechanism based on bibliometric analysis. They advocate that the evaluation of academic ability should take the value orientation of respecting the characteristics of foreign languages and promoting teachers' professional development; Explore classified evaluation and "representative work" system; Perfecting peer review system and cultivating academic community; Guide teachers to carry out diversified research based on the characteristics of colleges and disciplines. These suggestions face the structural dilemma of foreign language subjects in the academic evaluation system and try to release teachers' research potential through the diversification of evaluation criteria.

It is noteworthy that in 2025, the Ministry of Education clearly stated in its reply to the CPPCC proposal that "teachers should be encouraged to innovate teaching methods, carry out interdisciplinary and multi-perspective research on China culture, and cultivate a number of high-quality research results". This policy signal shows that institutional incentives not only pay attention to the methodological problem of "how to study", but also begin to attach importance to the value orientation of "what to study". For foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges, this means that the research of integrating Chinese excellent culture into foreign language teaching will gain more policy support and institutional recognition.

4.4 Policy Docking Path

The three paths discussed above, namely, training and research, community building and system

encouragement, mainly focus on the methodology of "how to do it", which provides specific operational directions and strategies for improving the scientific research ability of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges. However, in the current tide of the development of vocational education, foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges are faced with a more critical and contemporary problem: how to cross the gap between macro-policy requirements and their own scientific research practice, and accurately and effectively transform the macro-requirements put forward in the Plan and Scientific Research and a series of related supporting policies into concrete practices to effectively improve their scientific research ability? The solution of this problem is the core concern of the policy docking path, which is related to whether the policy can really take root and play a leading and promoting role in improving teachers' scientific research ability.

The essence of policy docking is not to passively implement policy instructions, but to actively find research space in the policy framework and turn policy requirements into research topics. In order to systematically present the specific requirements of the Three-year Action Plan and related supporting policies for teachers' scientific research ability, and the corresponding docking paths of each requirement, the corresponding relationship between policy tasks and teachers' scientific research ability can be sorted out as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Alignment of Policy Tasks with Teacher Research Capacity Requirements and Pathways

Policy Task	Requirements for Teachers' Research Capacity	Corresponding Pathway
Research on Integration of Industry and Education	• Formulating research questions from industrial needs • Collaborating with enterprise personnel in research	Policy Docking Path (School-Enterprise Collaboration)
AI-empowered Educational Research	• Using AI tools for literature analysis and data processing • Exploring AI-driven teaching and research models	Policy Docking Path (AI Empowerment)
Research on "Vocational Education Going Abroad"	• Participating in international comparative and cross-cultural education research • Engaging in projects such as the Luban Workshop	Policy Docking Path (Going Abroad)
Research on "Five Gold" Construction (Gold Majors, Gold Courses,	• Transforming curriculum development, textbook compilation, and training base construction into research topics	Policy Docking Path (Five Gold Construction)

Gold Teachers, Gold Bases, Gold Textbooks)		
Integrating Excellent Chinese Culture into Teaching	• Conducting interdisciplinary, multi-perspective research on Chinese culture • Transforming cultural research outcomes into educational resources	Policy Docking Path (Cultural Research)
Addressing "Fragmentation, Weakness, Superficiality"	• Participating in organized research • Integrating into academic communities	Community Building Path
Enhancing Teachers' Digital Competence	• Possessing information awareness, information knowledge, information skills, and information ethics	Training and Research Path (Digital Training)
Reform of Research Evaluation	• Adapting to diversified evaluation mechanisms such as classified evaluation and the "representative work" system	Institutional Incentive Path

Note. This table aligns the key tasks of the "Three-year Action Plan for Vocational Education Research (2025-2027)" with the corresponding research capacity requirements for foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges, and specifies the respective implementation pathways.

4.4.1 The "Five Gold" Construction

On the surface, the construction of "Gold Teacher, Gold Course, Gold Textbook, Gold Specialty and Gold Base" is a teaching task, but in fact it contains rich research resources. He and Ma (2025) reveal a key contradiction: 55.39% of teachers think that there is no academic community, and 78.31% of teachers think that organized scientific research has great influence the support that teachers need most and it is precisely the scarcest resource. The solution lies in the research of teaching problems and the teaching of research results: teachers can turn curriculum development into action research, textbook compilation into case study, and training base construction into practical research of integration of production and teaching. Wang (2017) emphasized the curriculum consciousness including subject consciousness, goal consciousness, resource consciousness, generation consciousness, evaluation consciousness and reflection consciousness is the cognitive premise of this transformation.

4.4.2 Vocational Education Going Abroad

The Plan clearly puts forward "to promote the upgrading and upgrading of vocational education brand projects represented by Luban Workshop". By virtue of their language advantages, foreign language teachers can participate in the research on the standard system, cross-cultural adaptation or international comparison related to vocational education, and turn their language ability into research resources. Li and Hudson (2011) show that foreign language teachers have a positive attitude towards teaching and research (86% of teachers think that research and teaching promote each other), which

provides a cognitive basis for teachers to participate in vocational education research.

4.4.3 AI Technology

The Plan clearly requires “exploring the construction and application of vertical large-scale models in the field of vocational education”, which indicates that AI technology is expanding from teaching AIDS to teaching and research empowerment platforms. Wang (2017) pointed out that the deep integration of information technology and teaching is an inevitable trend; Zhang et al. (2025) suggested that teachers should follow the cutting-edge research and make up for the lack of scientific research literacy. The combination of the two technologies with AI technology can produce greater efficiency for AI can assist literature tracking, data analysis and academic writing, significantly lowering the entry threshold for scientific research. In 2025, when the Ministry of Education responded to the CPPCC proposal, it emphasized the construction of a “real, open, interactive and cooperative teaching environment”, which is also applicable to the field of scientific research: the core of AI-enabled scientific research lies in the construction of an open, interactive and cooperative scientific research ecological environment.

4.4.4 Cultural Studies

In 2025, the Ministry of Education clearly stated in the reply to the CPPCC proposal that “teachers should be encouraged to innovate teaching methods, conduct interdisciplinary and multi-perspective research on China culture, and cultivate high-quality research results”. This policy signal has opened up a new research field for foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges: how to integrate Chinese excellent culture into foreign language courses from the perspective of curriculum ideology and politics; How to cultivate students’ cultural consciousness and self-confidence from the perspective of cross-cultural communication; From the perspective of teaching resources development, how to develop digital cultural resources with the help of AI technology; From the perspective of teacher development, how to improve teachers’ own intercultural teaching ability. This direction organically combines the improvement of teachers’ scientific research ability with the fundamental task of moral education.

Looking at the above four paths, we can extract the core judgment: the improvement of teachers’ scientific research ability is a systematic project driven by training, community, system and policy. Each path has a clear division of labor and mutual support-training and research can solve the problem of “can't do it” and provide teachers with the knowledge and skills needed for scientific research; Community construction solves the problem of “who to do it with” and provides emotional support and cognitive support; Institutional incentives solve the problem of “willing to do it” and stimulate motivation through evaluation reform; Policy docking solves the problem of “what to do” and transforms macro-policy requirements into specific research topics. For foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges, these four paths together build a complete support system from individual to collective, from skills to system, from policy to practice. In this system, teachers’ scientific research ability is no longer an isolated individual variable, but a compound ability that is constantly generated and evolved in a multi-level and multi-dimensional support network.

5. Conclusion and Prospect

This study finds that the concept of scientific research ability of foreign language teachers has undergone three stages of evolution: general skills, practical reflection and policy response, which profoundly reflects the theoretical shift of foreign language teachers' development research from technical rationality to practical wisdom to policy-driven. At the level of influencing factors, individual motivation and experience, organizational atmosphere and support, system evaluation and encouragement interact to jointly shape the development track of teachers' scientific research ability. At the level of promotion path, from training and research to community construction, to institutional incentives and policy docking, there is a clear evolution of four generations. The issuance of the Three-year Action Plan for Teaching and Scientific Research in Vocational Education in 2025 marks the institutionalization of the policy-driven path, which pushes the policy response ability to the front, and requires foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges to have composite abilities such as integration research, digital research and international research.

However, the tension between high policy demands and practical difficulties is still remarkable. Although college foreign language teachers actively participate in various academic activities and have achieved remarkable results, the number of high-quality journal papers, high-level scientific research topics and international conference exchanges still needs to be improved; Teachers' overall confidence in their own scientific research literacy is relatively general, and their familiarity with literature, translation education, testing, foreign language education policy and planning needs to be strengthened. The pressure of scientific research, lack of expert guidance, family care, heavy teaching tasks, lack of time, lack of support and cooperation from colleagues and other factors constitute the main obstacles that restrict the development of teachers' scientific research ability. This finding is highly consistent with international research, and language teachers' research participation is still a minority activity, which is influenced by multiple factors of individuals, interpersonal relationships and systems.

Looking at the existing research, there are four obvious shortcomings. First, skills are more important than motivation. Most studies focus on the technical level of "how to train", but pay insufficient attention to the motivation of "why do you want to do it", especially the qualitative discussion on the scientific research identity of higher vocational teachers. Secondly, the research on the integration of production and education focuses on the individual rather than the interaction, which mostly stays in policy advocacy and macro-model introduction, and lacks in-depth analysis of the micro-process of how teachers and enterprise personnel interact to carry out research. Thirdly, short-term is emphasized over long-term. Most of the existing studies are short-term project effect evaluation, and the long-term trajectory and key turning points of teachers' scientific research ability development are not tracked. Fourthly, the research on foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges is still scarce, and the special situation of "heavy teaching tasks and weak scientific research foundation" is not taken care of enough. The above shortcomings point out the direction for future research.

Future research can be further developed in the following directions. Firstly, the research on teachers'

scientific research identity and internal driving force is carried out, and the narrative research framework of Yang and Han (2025) and the activity theory perspective of Lu and Zhang (2025) are used for reference to explore the process of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges becoming "teachers-researchers" driven by policies and their differences in regions, institutions and disciplines. Secondly, we should explore the micro-mechanism of school-enterprise collaborative research, and reveal the interactive process of building trust, transforming problems and feedback practice between teachers and enterprise personnel by means of participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Thirdly, the follow-up study of the Three-year Action Plan is carried out, and based on the conditional framework proposed by Borg (2010), the effect of policy implementation is systematically evaluated from the aspects of teacher satisfaction, knowledge improvement, skill development, classroom practice, student achievement and organizational influence. Only through the concerted efforts of many parties, policy support and individual growth can we truly achieve the strategic goal of building a contingent of foreign language teachers in higher vocational colleges and developing foreign language education with high quality.

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