

## Original Paper

# Research on Teacher Disposition at Home and Abroad: Current Status and Implications

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### Abstract

*Adopting the literature research method, the core studies on teacher disposition in the past 40 years at home and abroad are systematically sorted out and analyzed. On the theoretical level, scholars at home and abroad focus on the connotation, content dimensions, main features and their importance of teacher disposition; on the practical level, scholars focus on the status of teacher disposition development, influencing factors, evaluation tools and the impact on students' learning through many empirical studies. Future research should focus on the multiple factors affecting the development of teacher disposition, expand the research objects and enrich the research methods, and construct the evaluation system of teacher disposition. In-depth research on teacher disposition can help teachers develop and improve teacher education.*

### Keywords

*Teacher disposition, Status, Evaluation system, Teacher development, Teacher education*

## 1. Introduction

Teachers, as drivers of educational reform and development, are fundamental guarantees for promoting students' comprehensive development and improving the quality of education. In addition to possessing rich professional knowledge and skills, a good teacher must also have good disposition. Teacher disposition refers to the tendency of teachers to act in specific educational contexts (Katz & Rath, 1985), and teachers with certain disposition will naturally exhibit corresponding behaviors. Therefore, disposition influences teaching through determining teachers' actions or decisions, thereby positively or negatively impacting the entire teaching process (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007). Katz and Rath (1985) proposed "disposition" as a goal of teacher education programs, advocating for the enhancement of desirable disposition and the mitigation of undesirable traits, which significantly influenced

subsequent innovations in teacher education programs. Teacher disposition provides a new direction for the development of teacher education, serving as an integral part of teacher professional development (Carroll, 2007) and a focal point in the field of teacher education (Wang Kai, 2011). Consequently, it is necessary to comprehensively review research on teacher disposition to grasp the overall progress in this area and provide insights for its development. In this regard, foreign scholars have reviewed research on teacher disposition from 1985 to 2007, focusing on demonstrating various scholars' definitions of teacher disposition and its role in teacher education (Freeman, 2007). Some scholars have outlined the origin of the concept of teacher disposition and addressed three sets of dialectical viewpoints on teacher disposition in practice, namely whether it is "entity" or "incremental", "separate" or "holistic", and whether "screening individual" or "building a professional community" (Diez, 2007). Additionally, some scholars have conducted a review of evaluations of teacher disposition abroad (Diez, 2006), suggesting the necessity of conducting multidimensional evaluations of teacher disposition. Domestically, some scholars have reviewed studies on the disposition of certain groups of teachers abroad, such as a retrospective study on pre-service teacher disposition in the United States (Lan Ying, Yan Liang, & Huang Tingmei, 2013) and an overview of research on standards of teacher disposition in the United States (Wang Kai, 2011; Zhang Jianqiao, 2011). It is evident that comprehensive and systematic reviews of research on teacher disposition domestically and internationally are currently lacking, particularly in terms of reviews spanning the last two decades. This paper systematically reviews core research on teacher disposition over the past four decades domestically and internationally, analyzing the main topics and overall trends in teacher disposition research, aiming to further promote research in this field and contribute to the comprehensive development of teacher professionalism.

## **2. The Status of Research on Teacher Disposition**

### *2.1 Theoretical Research into Teacher Disposition*

#### *2.1.1 Conceptual Definitions*

Katz and Raths (1985) were the first to propose that teacher disposition refers to the attitudes, beliefs, and values demonstrated by educators in their professional practice. It is observable behavioral tendencies, representing the "behavioral trends of teachers in specific contexts (Katz & Raths, 1985: 1), indicating that disposition points to behavior and reflects the frequency characteristics of behavior occurrence. Subsequently, Katz defined teacher disposition as a behavioral pattern of teachers, considering this pattern as "a tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed to a broad goal" (Katz, 1993). The American Teacher Education Accreditation Council defines teacher disposition as "a specific behavioral tendency based on a teacher's personal attitudes, beliefs, and values, and incorporating professional ethical concepts". Villegas conceptualizes teacher disposition as teachers' belief-based tendencies, i.e., "acting in specific ways in specific situations", and adds that this "tendency implies a behavioral pattern that can predict future actions" (Villegas, 2007: 3). It is evident that foreign scholars share a common understanding of this concept as a

manifestation of observable values that influence teachers' behavioral patterns. Domestic scholars have also provided different perspectives on the concept of teacher disposition. Some scholars believe that teacher disposition refers to "the unique professional spirit, professional autonomy, and professional literacy demonstrated by teachers in educational practice activities, which comprehensively embody teachers' professional ethics, professional knowledge, and teaching skills" (Jiang Yin, 2012: 1). Other scholars consider teacher disposition as "a typical response or behavioral trend of teachers to teaching events in different teaching contexts" (Liu Fei, 2021: 1), which is consistent with the definition of other scholars, namely that teacher disposition is "the behavioral tendencies and preferences of teachers in specific educational contexts" (Liu Fei, Liu Yunyan, & Zhu Haixue, 2021). Domestic scholars' definitions of this concept are basically inspired by the thoughts of foreign scholars, but they more directly point to specific educational teaching scenarios. Overall, scholars both domestically and internationally have two main viewpoints on this concept: teacher disposition is either a manifestation of teachers' values or the behavioral experience of teachers in specific teaching practices. In general, scholars emphasize that teacher disposition is a stable behavioral trend influenced by cognitive consciousness and manifested in specific situations. At the same time, this behavior is observable, predictable, continuously evolving, and reflects and influences teachers' performance.

#### 2.1.2 Content Dimensions

Teachers possess various dimensions of disposition, including moral, intellectual, cultural, ethical, cognitive, and teaching abilities. Sockett (2009) proposed that "character is virtue" and further categorized the virtue of professionalism into character virtue, rational virtue, and caring virtue (Sockett, 2009). Some scholars argue that the values and cognitive disposition of teachers can help strengthen their professional identity, clarify professional expectations, and quickly position themselves in teaching practice (Jiang Yin, 2012). Teachers also demonstrate various disposition traits such as care, appreciation, execution, adaptation, and teaching methods in their teaching practice (Männikkö & Husu, 2020). The disposition of teachers encompasses elements such as kindness, justice, responsibility, belief, love for teaching, temperament, sensitivity, and communication, among others (Zhang et al., 2020), which reflect different aspects of disposition. For instance, when a teacher possesses a just disposition, it promotes educational equity and ensures students have access to equal resources and fair treatment (Villegas, 2007). Some scholars believe that teacher disposition can be broadly categorized into three dimensions: teaching, cognitive, and social (Li Hailong, 2017). Different dimensions of disposition promote multidimensional professional development for teachers in teaching practice and everyday life. In summary, all the positive qualities teachers possess can be encompassed within the content dimensions of teacher disposition, making it multidimensional.

#### 2.1.3 Primary Characteristics

Teacher disposition exhibits primary characteristics such as externality, multidimensionality, and situational adaptability. Manifested in daily practice, teacher disposition serves as an external manifestation of their internal beliefs and values, which are observable (Thornton, 2006). Hence, this

underscores the fundamental characteristic of teacher disposition, namely its externality (Liu Fei, 2021). It represents a comprehensive quality demonstrated by teachers in their professional practice, involving various dimensions such as cognition, thinking, beliefs, and morality, while also being influenced by multiple factors including the teacher's agency, teaching environment, teaching experience, and interactions (Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw, 2010). Consequently, it possesses multidimensionality. Teacher disposition also demonstrates situational adaptability, as teachers adapt their dispositions according to different teaching contexts to facilitate teaching (Denner & Salzman, Newsome, 2001). As a behavioral tendency, teacher disposition is influenced both by inherent factors such as innate beliefs, personality, morality, and values, as well as by external factors including teaching practice, reflection, and professional development activities (Notar et al., 2009; Cummins & Asempapa, 2013). Thus, teacher disposition is shaped by both inherent and acquired factors. Furthermore, the development of teacher disposition is closely linked to their knowledge and skills. Skills refer to the mastery of specific behaviors or knowledge, while disposition involves the adoption of patterns of behavior (Schussler, 2006). Specifically, teachers' diverse and complex disposition enables them to translate their knowledge and skills into concrete actions. Carr and Claxton (2002) pointed out that abilities cannot generate the necessary disposition, and vice versa — one may know how to do something but not be inclined to do so, or one may have a behavioral tendency but not know how to implement it (Carr & Claxton, 2002). Therefore, the inclination of teachers to apply their own disposition in teaching, transitioning from conscious use to personal habituation, is crucial (Hoadley & Ensor, 2009).

#### 2.1.4 Importance

Teacher disposition plays a crucial role in enhancing the educational and instructional capabilities of teachers and their effectiveness. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) emphasized the importance of teacher disposition twice in 2002 and 2008, explicitly stating the need to cultivate the disposition of prospective teachers. Teacher disposition represents a shift in teacher education from a focus solely on skills to an integration of skills and ethics, embodying both theoretical standards and practical implementation of teacher moral education (Shi Dongfang, 2022). Teacher disposition serves as a driving force behind decision-making and the adoption of specific teaching strategies (Dottin, 2009). Consequently, teachers with positive disposition have been shown to possess greater abilities to select and adjust their teaching methods to meet the needs of students (Parrott & Da Ros-Voseles, 2004). Additionally, positive disposition can have a beneficial impact on instructional practices, assisting teachers in enriching curriculum content, effectively imparting knowledge, improving classroom teaching performance, stimulating students' motivation to learn, and promoting academic achievement (Dottin, 2009). Furthermore, as role models for students, teachers demonstrate their disposition through their words and actions, thereby playing a crucial role in students' academic performance, character development, and social adaptability (Sokkett, 2009).

In conclusion, scholars both domestically and internationally have conducted in-depth research on the theoretical aspects of teacher disposition, including conceptual definitions, content dimensions, primary

characteristics and importance. This has provided us with a clearer understanding of the importance of teacher disposition in educational and instructional practices, laying a solid theoretical foundation for future research endeavors.

## *2.2 Practical Research into Teacher Disposition*

While advancing theoretical research on teacher disposition, scholars have also conducted extensive empirical studies. These studies primarily focus on aspects such as the status of teacher disposition development, influencing factors, assessment tools, and its impact on students.

### *2.2.1 Status*

As the topic of teacher disposition gains momentum, an increasing number of scholars have undertaken comprehensive research on this subject. Some scholars, starting from the perspective of effective teaching, have summarized the five standards of effective teaching and the corresponding structural elements of teacher disposition (Wang Yuanyuan & Zhou Chenghai, 2020). Others have delved into exploring the elements that continually promote the development of pre-service teacher disposition from the perspective of activity theory (Fang Biyue & Zhang Zhijiang, 2023). Foreign scholars, on the other hand, have summarized five types of teaching disposition from narratives of teaching incidents by teachers (Männikkö & Husu, 2020). Studies have revealed that different teachers' exhibit varied dispositions when faced with similar teaching demands or situations, and that the critical thinking disposition of teachers from different disciplines varies according to gender, class level, and subject (Bilen, Ercan, & Akcaozoglu, 2013). Furthermore, numerous scholars have expanded the scope of their research to focus on the investigation of teacher disposition in different regions. For instance, some scholars have studied the disposition of teachers in border areas, asserting that teacher education should cultivate the disposition and skills necessary for designing and implementing effective courses in such regions (Cline & Necochea, 2006). The state of vocational education for English teachers in Iran indicates the cultivation of a cohort of knowledgeable, well-qualified, and professionally adept teachers (Soleimani & Zanganeh, 2014). However, in Chile, teacher understanding and comprehension of disposition are still in a nascent stage, and the standards for teacher education by the Ministry of Education hardly mention them (Fonseca-Chacana, 2019). Domestically, scholars have concentrated on rural areas, where they have identified issues such as the slow process of professionalization among rural teachers (Jiang Yin, 2012; Li Qiongfeng & Xie Qinglin, 2010).

### *2.2.2 Influencing Factors*

Teachers' cognition, culture, experience, and their teaching ethics, among other intrinsic and extrinsic factors, all influence the shaping and development of their disposition (Yi Nayi & Guo Guizhou, 2022). Wake and Bunn's research concludes that the disposition exhibited by pre-service teachers depends on their self-perception as well as the demands of their work and family (Wake & Bunn, 2016). Additionally, specialized guidance and training can assist pre-service teachers in altering and forming correct disposition (Stewart & Davis, 2005; Kindall, Crowe, & Elsass, 2017). Furthermore, external environmental factors such as family, school, and neighborhood play a significant role in nurturing

teacher intellectual and emotional disposition. Moreover, individual teachers' lifestyle habits such as traveling, reading, hobbies, etc., may contribute to the formation of disposition that supports effective teaching and habits of thinking in their teaching practices (Altan & Lane, 2018). Research has also found that students' family backgrounds can to some extent influence teacher disposition. When teachers interact with students from different social classes, they may exhibit different dispositions. For instance, teachers tend to prioritize discipline and care needs when dealing with students from working-class backgrounds, whereas they prioritize learners and their cognitive development when dealing with students from middle-class backgrounds (Hoadley & Ensor, 2009). Additionally, gender factors also have a significant impact on the development of teachers' disposition. For example, research by foreign scholars indicates that male teachers exhibit significantly higher levels of disposition in technical aspects compared to female teachers (Jung, Rhodes, & Vogt, 2006), while female teachers demonstrate higher levels of disposition in teacher efficacy, interpersonal communication skills, teaching planning, and strategies compared to male teachers (Ehrich, Woodcock, & West, 2020). This finding contradicts the results of domestic scholars, who suggest that the development of teacher disposition does not manifest significant gender differences (Li Jie & Wang Changjiang, 2019).

### 2.2.3 Assessment Tools

Teacher disposition can be measured through effective and reliable data outcomes (Lang, W. S., Wilkerson, 2006). Scholars have designed models such as the Disposition Assessment Aligned with Teacher Standards (DAATS) battery and the Eastern Teacher Disposition Index (ESTDI) (Singh & Stoloff, 2007) to ensure that teacher disposition aligns with the ten principles of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). Since most evaluation scales are mostly self-assessments, Bradley and colleagues (2020) developed a teacher-led professional character assessment scale for pre-service teachers (Bradley, Isaac, & King, 2020). Domestic scholars have constructed a structural model of kindergarten teacher disposition through interviews and classroom observations, aiming to utilize this model for assessing kindergarten teacher disposition in the future (Liu Fei, Liu Yunyan, & Zhu Haixue, 2021). Scientific evaluation contributes to the development of teacher disposition. Jung et al. (2006) developed the Pre-Service Teacher Technology Survey (PTTS) instrument to determine whether teacher disposition is personality-oriented or skill-oriented. However, they found discrepancies between actual data and expected results in practice, leading to the development of the more accurate the Technology Disposition Scale for Teacher Education Student (TDS-T) for measurement purposes (Jung et al., 2006). Bilen et al. (2013) employed the Turkish version of The California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory (CCTDI) to examine teacher critical thinking disposition (Bilen, Ercan, & Akcaozoglu, 2013). Stooksberry et al. (2009) proposed the Teacher Disposition ICM Framework to assess the disposition influencing teachers' tendencies and behaviors (Stooksberry, Schussler, & Bercaw, 2009). Subsequently, Schussler and Bercaw further validated the effectiveness of the Teacher Disposition ICM Framework, demonstrating that the model

can assist pre-service teachers at different stages in enhancing their disposition (Schussler & Bercaw, 2022). With the development of online classrooms, foreign scholars have developed the Virtual Teacher Disposition Scale (VTDS) (Welch et al., 2014). Chinese scholars, on the other hand, have established an online teacher disposition model based on situational awareness, integrating the actual development of online education in China, to assess teacher disposition in online classrooms (Li Hailong, 2017).

#### 2.2.4 Impact on Students

In the context of schools, disposition denotes that teachers are not only tasked with imparting predetermined knowledge but also with nurturing and instructing each individual student (Collier, 2005). There exists a strong correlation between teacher disposition and the quality of student learning, as the former can influence, and even determine, how content knowledge and teaching skills manifest in the classroom (Notar et al., 2009). Research indicates that while teachers possessing commendable disposition may adhere strictly to specific teaching rules and procedures, this approach may aid students in achieving favorable outcomes in standardized assessments, yet it may fall short in fostering problem-solving skills and methodologies among students (Thompson, Ransdell, & Rousseau, 2005). Conversely, teachers endowed with high-quality teaching disposition, effectively applied in practice, engender a greater focus on learning itself, enabling them to guide and assist students in problem-solving, thus facilitating their growth (Thornton, 2006). In instructional practice, teacher disposition contributes to enhancing students' sense of achievement in classroom learning (Li Luchuan, et al., 2023) and prompts teachers to assume diverse roles in classroom instruction to meet the varied learning needs of students (Johnson & Reiman, 2007). Furthermore, teacher disposition contributes to the creation of a conducive learning environment, wherein students feel affirmed, supported, and secure, thereby enhancing their motivation towards learning (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

In conclusion, scholars have conducted varying degrees of research on four aspects concerning the status, influencing factors, assessment tools, and impacts on students of teacher disposition. These studies not only serve to deepen the understanding of disposition among teachers and researchers but also offer practical guidance and experiential sharing for the cultivation and development of teacher disposition, thus facilitating improvements and innovations in educational practices.

### 3. The Implications of Research on Teacher Disposition

#### 3.1 On the Theoretical Level

With the increasing attention paid to teacher disposition both domestically and internationally, there is an urgent need to establish a concept definition universally recognized within academia. Existing definitions appear to be all-encompassing, covering virtually every aspect, yet they are somewhat vague and generic (Zhang Jianqiao, 2011). It is imperative to further deepen our exploration and understanding of the connotation, dimensions, and characteristics of teacher disposition. Present research predominantly focuses on the individual level of teachers, whereas future endeavors could extend to multiple levels including teacher teams, school organizations, and educational systems.

Teaching constitutes a complex and diverse system, and teachers themselves are complex and unique individuals. Future research should aim to explore broader dimensions of teacher disposition and delve into the mechanisms underlying its formation, offering guidance for the cultivation and enhancement of teacher disposition. Furthermore, there is a need for gradual development of comprehensive theoretical models of teacher disposition, coupled with empirical research and validation. This will further elucidate the inherent mechanisms and modes of operation of teacher disposition, providing scientific theoretical support for the professional development of teachers.

### *3.2 On the Practical Level*

In advancing theoretical development, it is particularly important in China to strengthen practical research on teacher disposition. Future practical research should delve into exploring the diverse factors and key elements influencing the development of it. Moreover, in future practice, we can focus on the entire group of teachers, exploring methods to establish virtual teacher collaborative communities, analyzing the similarities and differences in teacher disposition across different subjects and cultural backgrounds. This facilitates the sharing of practical experiences, mutual learning, and reflection among teachers, collectively exploring models for cultivating teacher disposition, promoting innovation and improvement in educational practices (Carroll, 2005; Warren, et al., 2021). From the perspective of teacher education and policy, evaluating disposition in educational programs poses challenges (Jung & Rhodes, 2008). Research in China on issues such as the structure, cultivation, and evaluation criteria of teacher disposition is still relatively lacking (Zhang Jianqiao, 2011). Future research should accelerate the development of a more detailed assessing system for teacher disposition, which would enhance the development of teacher disposition, and actively conduct empirical tests. This will objectively measure the level and development of teacher disposition, providing accurate feedback and guidance for disposition development. Currently, there is limited discussion in China on the impact of teacher disposition on students. Therefore, extensive empirical research is still needed to validate effective strategies and implementation effects of cultivating teacher disposition. Longitudinal studies are also necessary to understand the long-term development trajectory of teacher disposition and its impact on student development.

## **4. Conclusion**

This study systematically reviews the core research on teacher disposition both domestically and internationally over the past 40 years, providing a comprehensive description and analysis of the current research status in this field from theoretical and practical perspectives. In terms of theoretical research, scholars have started from conceptual definition, content dimensions, and primary characteristics of teacher disposition, enriching the understanding of this construct and laying the foundation for further research. Regarding practical research, scholars have explored the status of the development of teacher disposition, influencing factors, assessment tools, and the impact on student learning, thus constructing a basic framework for the empirical study of teacher disposition. In the

future, it is necessary to further deepen the theoretical research on it, increase empirical tracking research in actual teaching contexts, construct an effective evaluation system for assessing teacher disposition, and study the impact of it from a perspective of multiple subjects, to provide more effective theoretical support and practical guidance for teacher development.

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