

# Exploration on the Research Process of "Master Teacher Studios" of Basic Education in China

Panjing Feng<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Education Science, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China.*

*E-mail: 1121695526@qq.com*

*\*Corresponding author*

**Abstract:** *The Master Teacher Studio of basic education came into being with the new curriculum reform, which has become a new mechanism for the construction of teaching faculty in a social situation in China. As a brand-new way of the construction of teaching faculty in the new era, through reviewing the relevant research, it's found that the focus of academic research on Master Teacher Studios is mainly in four aspects: clarifying the boundary of the concept, seeking the support of the theory, defining the function and positioning, exploring the status-quo of development. The exploration of the research process is not only a process of summary but also a process of reflection. By reviewing the relevant research, reflecting on the problems still to be solved in the construction of the Master Teacher Studio in basic education, and summarizing the development process of the Master Teacher Studio in stages, which will help to clarify the development path of the Master Teacher Studio, and further affirm its advantages to the construction of teaching faculty in China contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Master Teacher Studio, Master teacher, Construction of teaching faculty, Teacher's professional development*

## 1. Introduction

The 21st century is an era dominated by the knowledge economy, and also an era of competition in education quality. With the intensification of international competition, teachers, as the first-hand resource to promote the sustainable development of education and a key link to build an educational ecosystem, play a more diversified role in the new era, and no longer appear in a separate image. Therefore, strengthening the construction of teaching faculty has become the top priority of educational reform in all countries and the construction of teaching faculty from a group perspective has become a research hot-spot in the world.

At the beginning of the century, China has realized that "building a high-quality teaching faculty is the key to solidly promoting the quality of education". In the process of boosting the construction of high-quality teaching faculty, the Teacher Education Department of the Ministry of Education has repeatedly proposed that "the construction of teaching faculty should explore a new path of combining top-level promotion with the grassroots initiative". Under the guidance of high-quality teaching faculty building policy, researchers and practitioners from their respective research perspectives, trying to strengthen the national teaching faculty building through theoretical exploration and combined with specific practice at the grass-roots level, to cope with the wave of global education reform. The Master Teacher Studio has been accompanied by the curriculum reform of basic education and has gradually become one of the new mechanism of the construction of teaching faculty and the normalization model of teachers' professional development in China contexts, which is doomed to be closely watched by academic circles since its birth.

In the past two decades, the establishment of Master Teacher Studio has gradually changed from the initial unilaterally promoted by the education administrative department to the development pattern of official promotion, school self-built and teacher self-organized. As an important measure of the construction of teaching faculty in the new century, the Master Teacher Studio has played an extremely important role in China's educational reform and development. But the construction mode and operation mechanism of Master Teacher Studios are still under constant exploration. The actual operation of Master Teacher Studio also breeds a bad trend against the development of education, which should be given early warning and attention. So how to better develop the Master Teacher Studio in basic education to promote the construction of a national high-quality teaching faculty is a topic

worth exploring.

## 2. The Review of some existing researches

### 2.1 *The Discussion on the Concept of Master Teacher Studios*

Discuss "What a Master Teacher Studio is?" We first need to review the development process of Master Teacher Studio. The earliest document for the establishment of Master Teacher Studio is the Notice on "Establishing the Studio of Master Teachers and Principals" issued by the Education Bureau of Luwan District on September 8, 2000. The release of this local government document marks the official emergence of the new thing of 'Master Teacher Studio' in the basic education system. Subsequently, in 2002, the Education Bureau of Baoshan unveiled 18 Master Teacher Studio; in 2004, the Education Bureau of Luwan District held the first round-table forum seminar on "Clarifying the Contemporary Mission of the Master Teacher Studio". With the successful establishment of various Master Teacher Studio in Shanghai, the educational administrative departments of Jiangsu, Shandong, Fujian, Anhui, Hebei, and other provinces have also issued policy documents, such as "Measures for the Development, Construction and Management of Master Teacher Studio (Trial)", which have made corresponding regulations on the basic properties, construction objectives, work priorities, organizational construction, basic responsibilities and guarantee mechanisms of Master Teacher Studio. The relevant mechanisms of Master Teacher Studios have been gradually improved with obvious organizational characteristics. So far, the Master Teacher Studio of basic education has blossomed all over the country.

Since the birth of Master Teacher Studio, how to accurately define 'Master Teacher' has become the primary issue, which is also the core problem of the construction and research of Master Teacher Studio. Academic circles have set off a research upsurge of Master Teacher Studio centered on 'Master Teacher'. There is a wave of research in Master Teacher Studio centered on 'Master Teacher'. Therefore, most scholars start from the concept of 'Master Teacher' and defined the connotation and function of Master Teacher Studio by expounding the characteristics and functions of Master Teacher. Among them, Wang et al. (2013) believed that "the key to Master Teacher lies in their teaching effect, the quality of cultivation of students, and the leading, exemplary role and social impact produced, which can be divided into three types: teaching, teaching-research, and research". Zeng et al. (2016) held that "Master Teachers shoulder the heavy responsibility of leading the development of teaching faculty and educational innovation, and are the leaders expected by the policies and the leaders in teachers' learning". So related studies have tried to descriptively define the Master Teacher Studio. Zheng (2016) perceived that "the Master Teacher Studio is a new form of professional development for teachers in mainland China in recent years. Master Teachers are influential teachers or research-oriented teachers within a certain area. The Master Teacher Studios take the Master Teacher as the core and recruits a certain number of members to achieve the purpose of promoting the professional growth of teachers and serving the development of regional education within in a regional scope". The Report on the Development of Master Teacher Studio in China, published in 2016, considered that "the Master Teacher Studio led by the excellent teachers in a certain area, pursue the brand of educational talents, take educational research, base activities and network exchanges as the carrier to organize a group of outstanding teachers with common educational ideals and pursuits, professional backgrounds and achievements of the same disciplines to carry out a professional development community of innovative and constructed education and teaching research".

Given the phenomenon that most researchers defined the Master Teacher Studio from the 'Master Teacher', some researchers thought that the identities of master-teachers, subject-backbones and ordinary-teachers are strictly distinguished, and the hierarchical phenomenon is serious. The bureaucratic atmosphere is not conducive to the identification of young teacher's self-identity and hinders the continued development of master teachers. Zhang (2012) thought that "it's necessary to name Master Teacher Studio as Teacher Studio. The Master Teacher Studio separates a few so-called Master Teachers from each other, and forces the teacher group to be hierarchical, which not only tramples on educational fairness but also is not conducive to the continued development of a few master teachers".

In summary, most of the existing studies have been carried out from the personal characteristics, social influence, professional quality, leadership role, dynamic evolution process of Master Teacher, etc., then described the composition, activity form, functional role, dynamic evolution, and other aspects of Master Teacher Studio, and defined the concept of the Master Teacher Studio.

## ***2.2 The Theoretical Framework of Master Teacher Studios***

The theoretical framework is the basis and purpose of all research. Thus, researchers are trying to find an appropriate theoretical perspective to analyze the construction process of Master Teacher Studio. According to relevant literature and monographs, the commonly used theoretical analysis perspectives in existing studies include: Professional Learning Community, Learning Organization Theory, Cooperative Learning Theory, situational learning theory, Group Dynamics Theory, or some adopt Professional Capital Theory, Distributed Leadership Theory, Action Learning Theory, etc.

From the further review of relevant literature, it can be seen that most researchers tend to position the theoretical basis of Master Teacher Studio in the community model, that is, the Master Teacher Studio is essentially a kind of professional learning community, which is the localization practice in China. Among them, Quan(2009) argued that "the Master Teacher Studio can be regarded as a community of teachers based on common goals, organized by experts to promote the professional growth through dialogue, cooperation and sharing of activities". Zhu (2014) thought that "the essential attribute of Master Teacher Studio is the community of practice. The common or shared vision is the core symbol that distinguishes the Master Teacher studio from the traditional hierarchical teacher organization. The common vision is accompanied by frequent interpersonal interaction and the characteristics of self-organization structure of non-administrative, which together constitute the organizational situation of knowledge transfer in Master Teacher studio". Xu (2015) perceived that "the Master Teacher Studio is a typical professional learning community with the characteristics of common values and concepts, sharing, support, cooperation, collaborative learning and growth." Wang (2016) believed that "through the community reshaping of common vision, system, peer and practice, Master Teacher Studio can not only effectively promote the development of member teachers, but also promote the development of Master Teachers, which are more conducive to the demonstration and radiation of Master Teacher Studio". Sun (2017) deemed that "the concept of Teacher Studio comes from the professional community of teachers, and the Master Teacher Studio has evolved from the Teacher Studio, which is also essentially a kind of professional learning community".

To sum up, although there are differences in expression among many researchers, most of them advocated that the theoretical basis of Master Teacher Studio should be located in the community model, that is, the construction of Master Teacher Studio should be discussed from the perspective of the professional community, which is also the theoretical perspective recognized by many researchers at present.

## ***2.3 The Function Orientation of Master Teacher Studios***

Due to the differences in regional education development and the emphasis on local characteristics, there are differences in target positioning of Master Teacher Studio across the country, and many researchers also defined the characteristic functions of various Master Teacher Studio from different angles. Among them, Han (2014, 2015) concluded that "in the existing research text, the researchers focus on the in-depth discussion of the functionality of Master Teacher Studio from three aspects, namely, the function of a teacher's growth, the function of teaching activities, and the function of systematic. Teacher's growth is the primary function created by Master Teacher Studio; actively carrying out effective teaching activities are the basic link in the operation of Master Teacher Studio. As an open platform with systematic functions, the Master Teacher Studio should be a combination of multiple functions".

From the further combing of the literature, researchers are paying more concerned about the function of Master Teacher Studio to promote the professional growth of teachers. The professional growth of teachers not only refers to the professional growth of individual teachers but also the professional growth of group teachers. For example, Quan (2009) summarized that "the significance of Master Teacher Studio lies in providing learning resources for teachers' professional development, promoting the sharing of professional knowledge and experience, building a platform for teachers' exchange, and promoting teachers' reflection". He (2013) deemed that "the Master Teacher Studio is an important platform for implementing teacher professional training and improving teachers' professionalism". Zhang et al. (2014) held that "as a newly emerging community of professional development for teachers, the Master Teacher Studio focuses on promoting the professional development of teachers. The operational practice is to improve the entrance of Master Teacher Studio and give full play to their leading and radiation functions; strengthen the operation mechanism of Master Teacher Studio and improve the pertinence and effectiveness of their activities; expand the

boundaries of Master Teacher Studio and strive to promote the growth of the "teach-learning-research" community. "Sun (2015) thought that "the Master Teacher Studio provides a broader space for the development of Master Teachers. It also provides a platform for other teachers to grow, which has become a new way to promote the professional development of teachers". Yang (2019) believed that "the Master Teacher Studio, as an important platform for the professional development of teachers, has created a good atmosphere of discussion around the common goals, which is convenient for members to learn from each other, communicate with each other, inspire each other and make progress together, which is conducive to strengthening the construction of teachers' team and promoting the professional development of teachers". Dong (2019) proposed to "the Master Teacher Studio will be built into a community of teaching, research and training that truly promote the professional development of teachers, full play to the role of leading, demonstration and radiation, make Master Teacher Studio become a platform and grasp for the professional development of teachers, especially young teachers". Zheng et al. (2016, 2019) perceived that "the Master Teacher Studio, as a form of promoting the professional growth of teachers, reflects the core issue of current teacher research: how teachers can achieve further professional growth in schools and other diverse environments."

In a word, at the present stage, many researchers focus on the aspect of teacher training, which is to promote the professional growth of teachers as the basic function and primary function created by Master Teacher Studios.

#### ***2.4 The Development Status of Master Teacher Studios***

After more than 20 years of development, the Master Teacher Studio in basic education has become a useful attempt to cultivate teachers in a regional and even national way. However, the Master Teacher Studio in operation is still a new thing in the tide of educational reform and development. Its newborn characteristics determine that there's no ready-made experience for reference in the construction of Master Teacher Studio, so it will inevitably face many difficulties and problems in the process of development. Many researchers have deeply analyzed the current development status of Master Teacher Studio, examined the difficulties and problems in the development process of Master Teacher Studio with a positive attitude, and tried to summarize many problems highlighted in the construction and operation process of Master Teacher Studio from different angles, and tried to put forward corresponding solutions.

Li (2015) thought that "the construction of Master Teacher Studio in primary and secondary schools needs to focus on solving the problems of a brand without organization, an organization without activities, activities without value, value without direction, and proposed that the construction of Master Teacher Studio needs to establish advanced guidance concepts, form clear construction ideas and concrete construction strategies, and put them into practice". Han (2015) summarized that "on the one hand, the problem about 'Master Teacher' is the biggest resistance in the operation of Master Teacher Studio. Firstly, many Master Teachers' distance from the front line of teaching is more serious. Secondly, the teaching process of 'Master Teacher' shows strong particularity and cannot form radiation power. Thirdly, many Master Teacher Studio can't clarify the status of "Master Teacher", which leads to great risks hidden in Master Teacher Studios. On the other hand, there are institutional obstacles in the operation of the Master Teacher Studio. First, the functions played by Master Teacher Studios in the growth of teachers' professional growth cannot be guaranteed. Second, there is a conflict in time arrangement between the collective activities of the studio and the work of its members. Third, various endogenous contradictions are superimposed on the Master Teacher Studio". Wang (2016) believed that "the development of Master Teacher Studio is formalized rather than institutionalized, bureaucratic rather than colleague-oriented, performing rather than practical, and proposes that realizing the connotative development of Master Teacher Studio requires the remodeling of a community (common vision, institutional, colleague-oriented and practical)". The Report of the Development of Master Teacher Studio in China (2016), summarized some common problems faced by the development of Master Teacher Studios. First, the positioning of Master Teacher Studios is not very clear. Second, the construction of the Master Teacher Studios shows an unbalanced state in the continuity of regions, courses, and activities. Third, the foundation of Master Teacher Studios is not very stable, some lack long-term planning or lack development motivation. Fourth, the team collaboration mechanism, communication and interaction mechanism, evaluation and assessment mechanism of Master Teacher Studios are not mature enough. Sun (2017) deemed that "the entity teacher studio based on administrative organization and the exhibition platform teacher studio based on network support, which is organized and implemented by the education authorities, have problems such as solidified operation mode, imperfect operation system, loose daily management and insufficient high-end guidance, which

hinder the achievement of the goals of the Master Teacher Studio. It puts forward a new model of Master Teacher Studio integrating entity studio and network studio, and display the new Master Teacher Studio in the way of the case".

Therefore, based on the development commonness of Master Teacher Studio and the development characteristics of some cases Master Teacher Studio, many researchers put forward targeted solutions to many problems highlighted in the operation of various Master Teacher Studio. At the same time, the Master Teacher Studio is still in the context of the policy of the times and is in the organic interaction and mutual adaptation with the surrounding environment. Facing the problems highlighted in the development, we need to study deeply and actively seek solutions, and constantly adjust its development model and explore a suitable development path.

### 3. Retrospect and Prospect

After 20 years of construction, the Master Teacher Studio of basic education has been widely existing on a large scale, and its importance in promoting the construction of teaching faculty in the new era is self-evident. The establishment of Master Teacher Studio is not only an active response to the new round of basic education curriculum reform in China but also an expectation for the construction of the cross-century high-quality teaching faculty.

Over the past 20 years, the practice construction and related research on Master Teacher Studio have blossomed in all parts of the country, and there are many Master Teacher Studio with characteristics. Then the Master Teacher Studio with characteristics have tried to summarize and share the construction experience, but the construction mode and operation mechanism of Master Teacher Studio is still in constant exploration. The existing studies tend to explore the development mode of Master Teacher Studio from the perspective of community and position the basic function of Master Teacher Studio to promote the professional development of teachers. Nevertheless, in the specific research, the existing research rarely from the perspective of the professional development of ordinary teachers in the Master Teacher Studio to explore the overall practice of the Master Teacher Studio, a research on the micro-level operation mode of the famous teacher studio is rarely involved, lack of narrative research on the growth process of ordinary teachers in Master Teacher Studio; lack of attention to the social and cultural place where Master Teacher Studio are generated.

Besides, in the existing research literature, most of them share the experience of the more successful Master Teacher Studio of basic education in the comparatively developed-areas, and put forward the operational difficulties and solutions of the Master Teacher Studio as cases, while the researches on Master Teacher Studio of basic education in the less developed areas are relatively few. However, due to the differences in the level of economic and social development in different regions, it will inevitably lead to an imbalance of educational development level. Therefore, the formation elements, operation modes, and affiliated mechanisms of Master Teacher Studio will be different, and the formed Master Teacher Studio will have certain regional characteristics, which also provides space for the follow-up research.

However, everything has two sides. Due to the limitation of the social and cultural field generated by Master Teacher Studio, the Master Teacher Studio has lost the intensity of promotion, to a certain extent. Even if there is something to learn from, it may lead to mechanical imitation. Academic research also should pursue both particularity and commonality. Therefore, if it's necessary to give fuller play to the driving force of Master Teacher Studio in promoting the construction of high-quality teacher teams, we need to rise from case study to find out the common internal mechanism of Master Teacher Studio, and constantly enhance the educational research-value carried by Master Teacher Studios.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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