

Enhancing Human Resource Management in Educational Institutions: A Study of Teacher Recruitment, Professional Development, And Leadership Succession

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ABSTRACT

In the context of global educational reform, effective human resource management (HRM) has become essential for enhancing educational quality. Yet, institutions worldwide face persistent challenges in three critical areas: teacher recruitment, professional development, and leadership succession. This study investigates primary and secondary schools, universities, and vocational institutions across three representative Chinese regions, including the eastern coastal area (Zhejiang), the central region (Hunan), and the western frontier (Guizhou). Employing a rigorous mixed-methods approach, it combines quantitative questionnaires (300 teachers, 80 HR staff, 40 leaders), semi-structured interviews (25 participants), and case studies of six diverse institutions. By triangulating teacher needs, institutional practices, and regional policy constraints, the research systematically examines HRM challenges within China's specific educational context, including the "Double Reduction" policy and vocational education reform. Unlike general HRM studies, it highlights China-specific issues, such as urban-rural talent disparities and the tension between traditional teaching practices and modern educational technology. The findings inform targeted strategies, enriching HRM theory with Chinese characteristics and providing practical guidance to improve institutional efficiency and educational quality.

Keywords: Human resource management, educational institutions, teacher recruitment, professional development; leadership succession

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the landscape of education in China has undergone profound transformation, driven by policy reforms, technological advancements, and increasing societal demand for high-quality education. As the front-line architects and implementers of educational practice, teachers are central to the success of these reforms, and their effectiveness is closely tied to the strategies of human resource management within educational institutions (Jewell et al., 2022). Teacher recruitment ensures that schools and universities attract and retain competent and motivated educators (Blackmore et al., 2024); professional development enhances instructional capacity and adapts teacher competencies to evolving educational technologies and methodologies; and a systematic leadership succession mechanism ensures the continuity of institutional vision and strategic direction (Lee & Mao, 2023). Despite these critical functions, Chinese educational institutions face structural challenges that hinder the optimal management of human resources. Rural and economically underdeveloped regions struggle

to attract and retain highly qualified teachers due to disparities in resources and living conditions. Traditional professional development models, such as centralized or standardized training, often fail to address the diverse needs of teachers in different disciplines, levels, and regions. Similarly, the mechanisms for selecting and grooming institutional leaders are frequently marred by informal practices, favoritism, and an overemphasis on short-term performance, leading to organizational instability and discontinuity. These challenges collectively impede the balanced and sustainable development of education in China, highlighting the urgency of research aimed at optimizing human resource management practices in educational institutions.

The human resource challenges in Chinese educational institutions manifest across three interrelated dimensions: teacher recruitment, professional development, and leadership succession. In recruitment, the mismatch between selection criteria and institutional needs, limited and homogeneous recruitment channels, and underdeveloped talent pipelines often prevent institutions from attracting individuals whose skills and motivations align with organizational goals. In terms of professional growth and retention, inequitable compensation structures, unclear promotion pathways, and generic training programs diminish teachers' engagement and restrict the development of their professional competencies (Iqbal & Ali, 2024). Leadership succession is similarly constrained by ad hoc selection procedures, insufficient planning for talent continuity, and evaluation systems focused predominantly on immediate outcomes rather than long-term institutional vitality (Patil, 2023). Together, these problems form a complex barrier to educational progress, as deficiencies in any single dimension may compromise the effectiveness of the others. Understanding the interactions among these dimensions is therefore critical to designing a comprehensive and contextually relevant approach to educational human resource management.

This study is designed to investigate the current practices, challenges, and optimization opportunities for human resource management in Chinese educational institutions, with a specific focus on teacher recruitment, professional development, and leadership succession. The objectives are threefold: first, to identify the key bottlenecks and constraints that limit the effectiveness of teacher recruitment and retention, taking into account regional differences, institutional characteristics, and policy contexts; second, to explore the design of professional development systems that are targeted, adaptive, and responsive to both teachers' individual needs and broader educational reforms; and third, to examine practical and theoretically informed strategies for improving leadership succession processes, ensuring continuity, fairness, and the development of a robust talent pipeline. These objectives are operationalized through research questions that probe not only the symptoms of current HRM challenges but also their root causes and potential solutions, aiming to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the management of human capital in education.

The significance of this research is both theoretical and practical. From a theoretical perspective, it contributes to the literature on educational human resource management by contextualizing HRM frameworks within Chinese cultural, policy, and institutional realities. This localized perspective expands the dominance of Western HRM models and provides empirical evidence for designing HRM strategies that are culturally and structurally appropriate. Practically, the study offers actionable insights for educational institutions across primary, secondary, vocational, and higher education settings. By improving teacher recruitment, enhancing professional development, and streamlining leadership succession, the research supports the creation of more effective, motivated, and stable educational teams. Ultimately, these improvements contribute to better educational outcomes, operational efficiency, and the equitable development of the national education system.

The scope of the study covers primary and secondary schools, vocational colleges, and universities in selected regions of Eastern and Western China. The focus is on the three interrelated dimensions of human resource management (recruitment, development, and succession) and on how these dimensions interact to influence institutional effectiveness. Nevertheless, the research is subject to limitations. First, the selection of regions may limit the generalizability of the findings across the entire country. Second, institutional privacy and sensitivity concerns may constrain data collection, leading to incomplete or biased information. Third, the mixed-methods

approach requires careful integration of qualitative and quantitative findings, demanding rigorous triangulation to ensure validity. Finally, as educational policies and reforms evolve, some conclusions may require adjustment over time to maintain their relevance and applicability. Despite these limitations, the study provides a comprehensive, empirically grounded, and theoretically informed examination of human resource management practices in Chinese educational institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Research Field

Educational human resource management (HRM) represents the intersection of education and HRM practices, focusing on the acquisition, development, retention, and effective utilization of talent in educational institutions. In China, research has predominantly focused on three key areas: ensuring equity and efficiency in teacher recruitment, innovating professional development models, and reforming leadership systems. However, these studies generally examine each dimension separately and lack an integrated perspective that considers the interaction among recruitment, professional development, and leadership succession. Regional disparities, particularly between urban and rural schools and between public and private institutions, have also received limited systematic analysis. Internationally, HRM in education has been explored in diverse contexts. In the United States, research has highlighted urban-rural differences in recruitment and retention, showing the importance of multiple recruitment channels and supportive school culture (Smith et al., 2020). In Europe, vocational education reforms and participatory professional development models, such as collaborative lesson planning and action research, have been shown to enhance teacher engagement, instructional quality, and student outcomes (Mishra & Patel, 2023; Jones & Brown, 2021). These international experiences provide comparative insights that inform localized HRM strategies in China while demonstrating the contextual nature of educational HRM.

Key Theories and Frameworks

The theoretical foundations of educational HRM span multiple frameworks addressing recruitment, development, and leadership. Teacher recruitment and retention are guided by human capital theory, which emphasizes the strategic value of high-quality teachers and the need for targeted investment in their acquisition and retention (Becker, 2018). Motivation theories, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory, provide a basis for designing incentive systems, combining compensation and working conditions with career development opportunities to enhance satisfaction, engagement, and commitment (Akuffo-Aduamah, 2025). For professional development, lifelong learning theory (UNESCO, 2021) stresses continuous knowledge renewal, while reflective practice theory promotes critical self-reflection, peer mentoring, and practical experimentation to improve teaching effectiveness. Leadership succession draws on leadership life cycle theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 2020), emphasizing adaptive leadership aligned with organizational maturity, and balanced scorecard theory (Kaplan & Norton, 2019), which enables multi-dimensional assessment across financial, stakeholder, process, and growth perspectives. Collectively, these frameworks offer actionable guidance for designing recruitment, development, and succession mechanisms that are theoretically grounded and practically relevant.

Related Empirical Studies

Empirical evidence from both international and domestic contexts illuminates best practices and challenges. International studies suggest that diversified recruitment strategies, such as partnerships with universities, online platforms, and teacher residency programs, combined with supportive, collaborative school cultures, significantly improve teacher retention (Smith et al., 2020). Participatory professional development models,

including workshops, action research, and collaborative lesson planning, enhance teacher engagement, teaching quality, and student learning outcomes (Jones & Brown, 2021). In China, research highlights context-specific constraints: rural teacher retention is highly sensitive to compensation and professional development opportunities, with urban teachers earning approximately 30% more than rural counterparts, creating strong incentives for rural departures (Li et al., 2022). In universities, evaluation systems emphasizing research output and administrative efficiency may prioritize short-term performance over long-term institutional growth, limiting sustainable development (Wang et al., 2023). These studies underscore the importance of aligning HRM strategies with local contexts and highlight the interplay between structural, financial, and institutional factors in shaping HR outcomes.

Research Gaps

Despite extensive prior research, three critical gaps remain in the study of educational HRM in China. First, regional and institutional differences have not been systematically examined, leaving questions about how urban-rural disparities and public-private distinctions influence HRM practices. Second, teacher recruitment, professional development, and leadership succession are rarely integrated into a unified analytical framework, preventing a holistic understanding of their interactions and combined impact on institutional effectiveness. Third, existing research often lacks actionable strategies aligned with contemporary policies, such as the “Double Reduction” policy, which has altered teacher workloads, professional growth needs, and recruitment practices (Zhang et al., 2022). Addressing these gaps requires context-specific, mixed-method research capable of producing theoretically informed and practically implementable insights. By integrating the three HRM dimensions and accounting for regional variations, the current study aims to provide a comprehensive framework for improving human resource management in Chinese educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Justification for Mixed Methods

This study adopts an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, characterized by an initial quantitative stage followed by a qualitative stage. The selection of this research design is grounded in the complexity of human resource management (HRM) issues in Chinese educational institutions, which require both breadth and depth to fully understand. The first rationale is complementarity. Quantitative methods, through structured questionnaires, enable the collection of large-scale data, capturing general patterns and trends. For example, such methods can reveal differences in teacher recruitment satisfaction across regions, identify variations in professional development opportunities based on institution types, or quantify the influence of demographic factors on teacher retention. However, these broad patterns cannot explain the underlying reasons for observed outcomes. Therefore, qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews and case studies are incorporated to gain deeper insights into institutional contexts and individual experiences. For instance, interviews can clarify why rural teachers may leave despite competitive salaries or reveal obstacles faced by HR managers in implementing innovative recruitment strategies (Biea et al., 2024).

The second rationale is triangulation. By integrating multiple data sources (questionnaires, interviews, and institutional documents), the study reduces the potential bias of any single method. Triangulation allows for cross-validation of findings; for instance, if quantitative data indicate widespread dissatisfaction with professional development programs, qualitative interviews and document analysis can identify whether the programs are too theoretical, lack practical relevance, or are inconsistently implemented, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the results.

The third rationale is contextual adaptation. Quantitative data provide a macro-level overview of HRM practices, while qualitative data explore context-specific factors, such as institutional culture, regional socio-economic conditions, and local policy environments. This dual approach ensures that findings are both theoretically grounded and practically applicable. For example, policy impacts such as China's "double reduction" initiative and vocational education reforms may affect HRM differently across regions; the mixed-methods design allows both the identification of broad patterns and an understanding of contextual nuances (Zhang et al., 2022). Overall, the explanatory sequential design enables a comprehensive understanding of multi-dimensional HRM issues in Chinese educational institutions, balancing generalizability with contextual specificity.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprises teachers, human resource (HR) managers, and institutional leaders from primary and secondary schools, universities, and vocational colleges across three distinct regions of China: the eastern coastal area (Zhejiang Province), the central region (Hunan Province), and the western region (Guizhou Province). These regions were purposefully selected to capture a spectrum of economic development, educational infrastructure, and HRM challenges. Zhejiang, as an economically advanced region with developed educational infrastructure, faces intense competition for talent and high expectations regarding teacher competencies. Hunan represents a mid-level development context with a mix of urban and rural schools, where resources are unevenly distributed. Guizhou, in contrast, is a less developed region, characterized by teacher shortages, limited professional development opportunities, and challenges in leadership succession. This diversity ensures that the study captures variations in HRM practices and the influence of contextual factors, enhancing the external validity of the findings.

A total of 300 teachers, 80 HR managers, and 40 institutional leaders participated in the quantitative survey. Teachers were evenly distributed across regions (100 per region) and represented different teaching experience levels (≤ 5 years, 6–15 years, ≥ 16 years) and subject areas, including core academic subjects and vocational skills. HR manager participants were selected based on their responsibility for recruitment, training, and employee relations, ensuring that their perspectives reflected operational realities. Leadership participants included principals, deans, and senior administrators with strategic decision-making authority, ensuring insights into institutional HRM policies and leadership succession processes. For qualitative interviews, 25 participants were selected, including 10 teachers, 8 HR managers, and 7 institutional leaders, all with a minimum of five years of experience. The sample ensured diversity in institution type (public/private), location (urban/rural), and role responsibilities, enabling a rich understanding of HRM experiences. Six institutions were selected for in-depth case studies, with two institutions from each region, including both public and private schools, primary/secondary and vocational/university-level institutions. This selection allowed for the identification of best practices and challenges across diverse institutional contexts.

A two-stage sampling strategy was employed. First, stratified sampling ensured regional representation by selecting two cities in each region based on economic development and educational resource density (e.g., Hangzhou and Ningbo in Zhejiang; Changsha and Xiangtan in Hunan; Guiyang and Zunyi in Guizhou). Second, purposive sampling selected representative institutions within these cities, focusing on those willing to provide access to HRM data, such as recruitment records, performance assessments, and training documentation. Institutions in remote or hard-to-reach areas were avoided to ensure feasibility, while efforts were made to include both urban and rural schools, capturing regional disparities in HRM practices.

Data Collection Methods

Three types of questionnaires were designed for teachers, HR managers, and institutional leaders. Teacher questionnaires included 30 items using a 5-point Likert scale to assess recruitment satisfaction, professional

development needs, retention factors, and demographics. HR manager questionnaires included 25 items covering recruitment processes, training programs, and retention strategies. Leadership questionnaires consisted of 25 items related to leadership succession, evaluation metrics, and policy adjustments. Content validity was ensured by a panel of five experts, including HRM scholars and senior education administrators. Minor revisions were made to optimize clarity, such as modifying “salary satisfaction” to “satisfaction with the matching degree of salary and workload” to better capture teacher perceptions. A pilot test with 50 teachers, 15 HR managers, and 10 leaders yielded Cronbach’s α coefficients above 0.8, indicating strong internal consistency. Questionnaires were distributed online (60%) and offline (40%), with reminders sent to achieve a minimum expected response rate of 70%.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 participants, following criteria: at least five years of professional experience, active engagement in HRM-related tasks, and voluntary participation. Interviews lasted 30–45 minutes and were conducted 80% face-to-face and 20% via video calls to include participants in remote areas. Open-ended questions addressed issues such as recruitment challenges, training effectiveness, and leadership succession. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for accurate thematic coding.

Six institutions were selected based on the diversity of HRM strategies, willingness to share internal data, and institutional stability. Data collection included document analysis (policies, training, and performance reports), on-site observations (classroom teaching, professional development, administrative meetings), and stakeholder interviews (teachers, HR managers, leaders, students). Triangulation across these sources ensured comprehensive and reliable insights into HRM practices and outcomes.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to conduct descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and ANOVA, enabling comparisons across regions, institution types, and teacher demographics. Prior to inferential analysis, key statistical assumptions (including normality, homoscedasticity, linearity, and multicollinearity) were examined using skewness and kurtosis statistics, residual plots, and variance inflation factors (VIFs). All variables met acceptable thresholds, with VIF values below 5, indicating no serious multicollinearity concerns. In addition to statistical significance, effect sizes were reported to assess the practical magnitude of observed relationships. Specifically, Cohen’s d was calculated for group comparisons, while standardized regression coefficients and partial eta squared (η^2) values were reported for regression and ANOVA results, following established methodological guidelines.

Qualitative data from interviews and case studies were analyzed using a systematic thematic coding process. An initial round of open coding was conducted to identify key concepts and recurring issues related to recruitment, professional development, and leadership succession. This was followed by axial coding to establish relationships among categories and selective coding to integrate core themes aligned with the research objectives. To enhance analytic rigor, two researchers independently coded a subset of transcripts, and inter-coder agreement was discussed and refined through iterative comparison. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus to improve coding reliability.

Validation strategies included member checking, whereby selected participants reviewed summary interpretations, and peer debriefing with experienced qualitative researchers to challenge assumptions and enhance reflexivity. Triangulation was applied by comparing quantitative and qualitative findings to validate results and explore contextual explanations for observed trends. This integrative analytic strategy strengthens methodological transparency and ensures that both statistical patterns and contextual meanings are robustly represented, capturing both general trends and the nuanced realities of HRM in Chinese educational institutions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured through pseudonyms, encrypted digital storage, and secure handling of physical records. Data integrity was maintained through detailed recording of collection and analysis processes, including SPSS syntax, coding records, and interview transcripts. Non-response bias was assessed, showing no significant differences between early and late respondents. The research team declared all potential conflicts of interest, maintained independence from participating institutions, and ensured that no funding from the institutions influenced the analysis or interpretation of results.

RESULTES

Bottlenecks and Constraints in Teacher Recruitment

The questionnaire achieved an effective response rate of 73.2%. A majority of respondents (68.3% of teachers and 75.0% of HR managers) reported that the main bottleneck is “mismatch between recruitment standards and institutional development needs.” For higher vocational colleges, 82.1% indicated that recruitment overly emphasizes academic qualifications and neglects practical experience, conflicting with vocational skill requirements.

Urban-rural differences are significant: 64.5% of rural institutions rely solely on centralized recruitment by the education bureau, while 23.8% of urban institutions adopt diversified channels such as school-enterprise cooperation or online platforms (one-way ANOVA, $p < 0.05$). Regionally, the eastern region (Zhejiang) experiences intense competition, with over 300 applicants per position in urban schools but few with both academic and tech skills. In the central region (Hunan), rural school applications are 42.3% lower than urban schools. In the western region (Guizhou), 60.0% of rural teachers report low salary satisfaction (2.1/5), and 70% cite low salary and limited career development as reasons for leaving (Li et al., 2022). A common problem is weak talent reserves: only 18.5% of institutions maintain pre-recruitment reserves, and 67.2% of HR managers' report emergency recruitment following turnover reduces candidate quality.

Deficiencies and Demand Characteristics in Professional Development

Teachers receive an average of 36.8 hours of professional training annually; only 31.7% rate this training as “good” ($\geq 4/5$). The main issue is the disconnect between training content and actual needs: 72.4% report training is mainly theoretical, with insufficient guidance on educational technology and post-“double reduction” after-school services.

Regional and institutional disparities exist: teachers in eastern institutions receive 2.3 times the per capita training funding of western teachers. Participation in participatory training (workshops, lesson planning) is 68.9% in eastern regions versus 40.7% in western regions. Public institutions offer 41.2 hours of training on average, while private institutions offer 28.5 hours; 45.6% of private institutions provide customizable training (independent sample t-test, $p < 0.05$). Qualitative data show experienced teachers (≥ 16 years) require advanced teaching method training, while young teachers (≤ 5 years) prioritize class management and technology application. However, 80% of training follows a one-size-fits-all model, and 63.5% report increased workload under the “double reduction” policy, limiting their professional development opportunities.

Issues and Constraints in Leadership Succession

Only 22.5% of institutions have formal leadership succession planning. Relationship-based selection is reported as a key issue by 69.0% of HR managers and leaders. Short-term indicators, such as enrollment rates and research output, dominate in 76.3% of institutions, while only 19.2% consider long-term indicators like cultural heritage and faculty development (Wang et al., 2023). Case studies further reveal gaps: Zhejiang public universities have standardized processes but rigid assessment criteria hinder selection of innovative managers. Guizhou rural schools lack succession plans, and temporary principal appointments disrupt continuity. Of seven interviewed principals, six noted a shortage of leadership reserves and insufficient systematic training for middle-level cadres.

Interrelationships Among Recruitment, Professional Development, and Leadership Succession

Correlation analyses show positive associations among the three dimensions: diversified recruitment channels correlate with higher teacher professional development participation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$). Scientific leadership succession is positively associated with teacher retention ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$) and training effectiveness ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$). These results indicate that improving recruitment practices and leadership planning can simultaneously enhance teacher development and retention.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Implications of Research Findings

This study provides empirical evidence that advances the understanding of educational human resource management (HRM) in the context of Chinese education. Regarding teacher recruitment and retention, the findings confirm and extend Becker's (2018) human capital theory: excellent teachers are critical assets, and only strategic investments in salary, benefits, and career development can effectively retain talent. Notably, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Armstrong, 2022) is contextually validated: hygiene factors, such as salary and working conditions, have a more pronounced impact on rural teachers' satisfaction, while motivational factors, including career growth and respect, influence urban teachers more significantly. These results highlight the importance of localizing theoretical frameworks to reflect China's urban-rural dual structure and institutional realities.

In the realm of teacher professional development, the ineffectiveness of the "one-size-fits-all" model underscores the practical relevance of lifelong learning theory (UNESCO, 2021) and reflective practice theory (Patel & Metersky, 2022). Teachers' needs evolve with experience and policy changes, such as the "double reduction" policy, requiring training that incorporates practical reflection, peer interaction, and contextualized guidance. Regional disparities further demonstrate that theoretical models must account for socio-economic and institutional variations.

For leadership succession, findings validate the Balanced Scorecard theory (Kaplan & Norton, 2019) and the Leadership Life Cycle theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 2020). Overemphasis on short-term indicators impedes institutional sustainability, while informal selection practices ("nepotism") and lack of formal succession planning create systemic bottlenecks unique to Chinese educational governance. This indicates that leadership theories derived from Western contexts cannot be directly applied; instead, they must be adapted to reflect China's cultural traditions, governance norms, and institutional characteristics.

Addressing Existing Research Gaps

This research fills three major gaps identified in previous studies. First, most prior work lacked a regional

perspective. By comparing the eastern, central, and western regions, this study highlights how economic development, geographical location, and institutional attributes (public/private, urban/rural) influence HRM practices, making conclusions more actionable and context-specific. Second, prior studies often examined single dimensions (recruitment, professional development, or leadership succession) without integrating them. This research develops a unified analytical framework linking these three dimensions, revealing their interdependence and the mechanisms by which improvements in one area (e.g., recruitment) can enhance outcomes in others (e.g., teacher retention and development). This approach addresses the limitation of fragmented understanding in existing literature. Third, the study aligns closely with contemporary Chinese educational policies, such as the “Double Reduction” policy and vocational education reform. By embedding policy context into the research design, it provides practical, policy-relevant recommendations, overcoming the disconnection between previous theoretical studies and real-world practice (Zhang et al., 2022).

Unique Value of Mixed Research Methods

The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design proved particularly valuable. Quantitative questionnaires captured large-scale patterns, such as regional differences in recruitment channels and the low perceived effectiveness of standard training programs. Qualitative interviews and case studies then elucidated the underlying reasons for these patterns, including rural teachers’ dissatisfaction with compensation and the challenges faced by HR managers implementing innovative recruitment strategies. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings enhanced both reliability and credibility. For instance, the survey finding that “60% of rural teachers report low salary satisfaction” was corroborated by interviews in which teachers explicitly mentioned that “the salary is too low to support our families.” This methodological combination ensured both breadth and depth, allowing the study to capture the complexity of HRM in Chinese educational institutions while producing actionable insights for policy and practice.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive examination of Chinese educational institutions across three core dimensions: teacher recruitment, professional development, and leadership succession. The findings indicate that teacher recruitment faces multiple challenges, including mismatched recruitment standards that do not fully align with institutional needs, limited and monotonous recruitment channels, and insufficient talent reserves that reduce the quality and stability of newly recruited staff. Regional disparities are prominent. The eastern region experiences intense competition for talent, which increases recruitment pressure for institutions and raises the standards for candidate selection, while the western region suffers from talent shortages and limited attractiveness for qualified teachers, and urban-rural gaps further constrain recruitment quality by limiting access to high-quality candidates in rural areas. Teacher professional development exhibits significant inefficiencies. Training content is often disconnected from the actual needs of teachers, training modes remain rigid, and teachers face difficulty participating due to workload pressures, particularly under the implementation of policies such as the “double reduction,” which have increased teaching responsibilities and after-school workload. There are significant differences in resource investment and training effectiveness across regions and institution types, with eastern and public institutions generally providing more hours, higher-quality resources, and more participatory training opportunities, while western and private institutions rely more heavily on centralized lectures and theoretical instruction. Leadership succession mechanisms generally lack formal planning, are influenced by non-market factors such as nepotism, and overly emphasize short-term performance indicators, which undermines continuity in institutional development strategies and restricts the cultivation of a high-quality leadership reserve. Correlation analyses reveal significant positive relationships among recruitment, professional development, and leadership succession, indicating that improvements in one dimension can promote better outcomes in the others. These findings highlight that coordinated optimization across all three dimensions is

critical for substantially enhancing the overall effectiveness of educational human resource management and ensuring the long-term development and sustainability of institutions.

Several limitations should be carefully considered when interpreting these findings. First, the study focuses on three provinces: Zhejiang, Hunan, and Guizhou. Although these provinces are representative of the eastern, central, and western regions in terms of economic development, educational infrastructure, and institutional types, generalizability of the research conclusions across China still requires caution and verification through expanded samples that include additional provinces and diverse regional contexts. Second, during data collection, some sensitive institutional information, such as detailed salary structures, benefits packages, and internal evaluation records, may have been underreported or avoided due to privacy concerns. This may have affected the depth and granularity of the analysis in certain dimensions, particularly regarding teacher retention and leadership succession. Third, the cross-sectional design of the study limits its ability to capture the long-term and dynamic effects of ongoing policy measures, such as the “double reduction” policy and vocational education reforms, which continue to influence workload, professional development needs, and institutional HRM practices over time. Future research should therefore expand the geographic scope to incorporate more provinces and institutional types, adopt longitudinal designs to track the effects of policies over time, and explore more deeply the mechanisms linking recruitment, training, and succession. Despite these limitations, this study provides rich localized insights into Chinese educational human resource management, offering both theoretical contributions to understanding HRM in education within the Chinese context and practical guidance for policy makers and institutional leaders to improve teacher recruitment, professional development, and leadership succession.

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