

Research on the Spirit of Educators in the New Era: A Systematic Review Based on Chinese Journals from 2023 to 2025

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Abstract: This study examines 304 literature pieces on the spirit of educators published in Chinese Core Journals and CSSCI journals from September 2023 to December 2025. Employing bibliometric analysis via R software (bibliometrix package) and LDA topic modeling using Python, it systematically reviews the current research landscape, core issues, and developmental trends in this field. Findings reveal that research on the spirit of educators has formed a distinct academic cluster, primarily centered around four themes: conceptual interpretation, practical pathways, target groups, and disciplinary integration. Existing studies exhibit significant policy-driven characteristics, a clear practice orientation, and preliminary interdisciplinary convergence. However, regional research remains uneven, and empirical studies constitute an insufficient proportion. Based on these findings, future research is recommended to conduct more empirical research, improve mechanisms for practical application, and establish evaluation systems.

Keywords: educator spirit; bibliometrics; LDA topic modeling; systematic review

1. Introduction

In September 2023, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of China, delivered a significant discourse on the spirit of educators, distilling the intellectual aspirations, distinctive character, and core competencies of the educational community. This discourse provides fundamental guidance for building the teaching workforce in the new era. Against the backdrop of building China into an education powerhouse becoming a national strategy, the Outline of the Plan for Building China into an Education Powerhouse (2024–2035) explicitly calls for “integrating the spirit of educators throughout the entire process of teacher training and development,” positioning the promotion of this spirit as a key measure for strengthening the teaching profession. This discourse is rooted in China’s outstanding traditional culture of teaching while responding to the practical demands for high-quality development of the teaching workforce in the new era. It has become an iconic concept in China’s distinctive educational discourse system and offers a “Chinese solution” for global innovation in teacher education theory.

In recent years, numerous scholars have conducted extensive research on the spirit of educators, encompassing diverse fields such as basic education, higher education, and vocational education, as well as multi-dimensional research clusters including teacher professional development, the cultivation of teacher ethics and conduct, and educational policy innovation. However, current research still suffers from fragmentation and redundancy, lacking systematic reviews of the research landscape and trend analysis. This hinders the full

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realization of theory's guiding role in practice and prevents the effective translation of China's indigenous research findings into core resources for international academic discourse.

Academic research on teachers' professional ethics and vocational spirit has a long history. For instance, Donald Schön's theory of reflective practice and Michael Apple's interpretation of teacher identity—all of which focus on the universal characteristics of the teaching profession within Western cultural contexts [1,2]. In contrast, the spirit of Chinese educators has been cultivated within a unique educational practice and cultural background. This study systematically examines the theoretical dimensions, generative logic, and practical pathways of the educator spirit based on 304 Chinese core and CSSCI-indexed articles published between September 2023 and December 2025, offering a case study for the international academic community to understand teacher spirit cultivation in a non-Western context. The research poses the following questions:

- (1) What are the bibliometric characteristics of research on the spirit of educators? (Including publication trends, author distribution, institutional distribution, journal sources, etc.)
- (2) What are the core issues and thematic clusters in research on the spirit of educators?
- (3) What are the directions for future research?

2. Methods

This study employs a systematic review approach, utilizing Bibliometrix for bibliometric analysis and Python for LDA thematic modeling. This study selected relevant literature published between September 2023 and December 2025 in Chinese core journals and CSSCI-sourced journals. It covered core educational publications such as Educational Research, Chinese Journal of Education, and Higher Education Research, which hold high academic authority in China's educational research field, ensuring the reliability of research conclusions. Search terms including educator spirit, educator-type teachers, and educator-type principals were used in the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database. Literature types were restricted to academic papers, excluding non-academic articles such as book reviews, editorials, and conference summaries.

The research theme centers on core issues such as the interpretation of the essence of the spirit of educators, its developmental logic, practical pathways, and contemporary value. Research content encompasses the promotion and implementation of the spirit of educators across all levels and types of educational fields. The selected source categories are Chinese Core Journals and CSSCI, with the timeframe set from September 2023 to December 2025. Database searches yielded 640 original documents. After screening based on article titles, abstracts, and keywords, and excluding literature predating the proposal of the spirit of educators in the new era, 304 articles were ultimately selected for inclusion in this systematic review.

This study employed the bibliometrix package in R to statistically analyze data including publication years, authors, institutions, and keywords from 304 documents. It presents trends in research intensity, core author groups, institutional collaboration networks, and high-frequency research themes, outlining the overall landscape of research on the spirit of Chinese educators. An LDA topic model was constructed using Python to cluster document titles and keywords, uncovering latent research themes and academic trajectories.

3. Results Analysis

3.1. Bibliometric Analysis

From September 2023 to December 2025, research on the spirit of educators demonstrated a significant upward trend (Figure 1). The concept of the spirit of educators was first proposed and elaborated in September 2023, with 25 publications accounting for 8.2% of the total literature volume. In 2024, the number of publications surged to 127, representing approximately 41.8% of the total—marking a peak period for research. By December 2025, 152 papers had been published, accounting for 50% of the total, indicating sustained high research activity. This trajectory reflects both the academic community's rapid response to policy directives and the enduring research value of the "educator spirit" concept.

The 304 publications involved 628 authors, among whom 23 high-output authors published three or more papers, accounting for 3.7% of the total authors. High-output authors primarily hailed from teacher training

institutions such as Beijing Normal University, East China Normal University, and South China Normal University, forming academic clusters led by core scholars. Regarding collaboration networks, intra-institutional collaboration dominated, with inter-institutional collaboration accounting for 35.2% and inter-regional collaboration for 18.7%. Overall, the collaboration network remained relatively loose, lacking large-scale inter-institutional and inter-regional research teams.

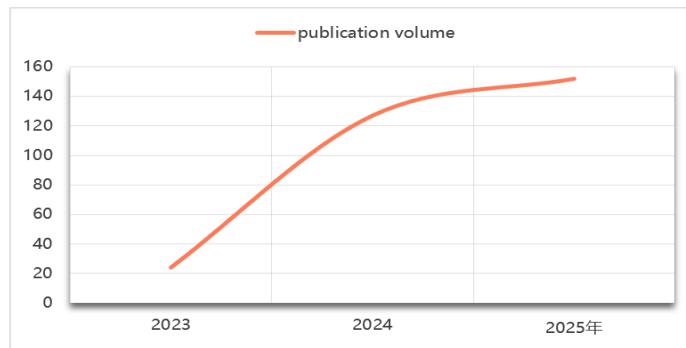


Figure 1. Annual average number of articles.

The institutions publishing these papers are primarily concentrated in teacher training universities and the education colleges of comprehensive universities. Beijing Normal University published 28 papers, ranking first; East China Normal University published 25 papers, ranking second; South China Normal University published 21 papers, ranking third; Northeast Normal University, Shaanxi Normal University, and other institutions also contributed significantly. Regionally, institutions in eastern China published 176 papers, accounting for 57.9%; central China published 83 papers, representing 27.3%; and western China published 45 papers, constituting 14.8%, revealing regional disparities.

The literature is primarily distributed across core educational journals (Table 1). Among these, Education Theory and Practice published 18 articles, Heilongjiang Higher Education Research published 15, Teaching and Management published 14, Chinese Journal of Education published 12, and Teacher Education Research published 11. These five journals collectively published 70 articles, accounting for 23.0% of the total literature. By journal discipline classification, education journals published 268 articles (88.2%); Marxist theory journals published 16 (5.3%); sports journals published 8 (2.6%); and other discipline journals published 12 (3.9%). This indicates research primarily concentrates within the education discipline, with insufficient interdisciplinary integration.

Table 1. Top Ten Journals for Educational Spirit Research Literature Sources.

Rank	Journal Name	Publication Volume	Proportion
1	Theory and Practice of Education	18	5.9%
2	Heilongjiang Research on Higher Education	15	4.9%
3	Teaching and Management	14	4.6%
4	Journal of The Chinese Society of Education	12	3.9%
5	Teacher Education Research	11	3.6%
6	Vocational and Technical Education	10	3.3%
7	Contemporary Educational Science	9	3.0%
8	School Party Building and Ideological Education	8	2.6%
9	Educational Science Research	7	2.3%
10	Journal of East China Normal University (Educational Sciences Edition)	6	2.0%

3.2. Thematic Clustering

The list of titles from 304 documents was imported into R for frequency analysis to identify core research points (Figure 2). Ultimately, the 32 most frequently occurring terms were identified. Given the inclusion

criteria for this study, the term educator spirit was added to the stopword list. Among the 304 titles, keywords such as teacher workforce development, education powerhouse, teacher ethics and conduct, teacher professional development and practical pathways each appeared over 20 times, emerging as core research hotspots that form the central framework of the study.



Figure 2. Word Cloud.

Based on word frequency analysis, LDA thematic clustering was performed on 304 documents. When $K = 10$, the LDA thematic model achieved optimal fit, with relatively clear distinctions between themes and minimal meaningless themes (Table 2). The core keywords corresponding to each theme encompass four dimensions: theoretical exposition, practical application, specific groups and disciplinary integration. This thematic distribution reflects the systematic nature of research on the spirit of Chinese educators and can also provide a topic checklist for global studies on the spirit of teachers, facilitating mutual learning from cross-cultural research findings.

Table 2. LDA Topic Clustering Results ($K = 10$).

Topic	Topic	Core Keywords
Topic 1	Connotation and Era Value of the Spirit of Educators	connotation, era value, cultural characteristics, core essence, generation logic
Topic 2	Teachers' Team Construction and Teachers' Morality and Ethics	teachers' team construction, teachers' morality and ethics, cultivating the soul and strengthening teachers, moral education and talent cultivation, teachers' literacy
Topic 3	Rural Teachers and Rural Education Revitalization	rural teachers, rural education, professional development, education revitalization, local sentiment
Topic 4	University Teachers and Higher Education Practice	university teachers, higher education, ideological and political theory teachers, counselors, moral education and talent cultivation
Topic 5	Vocational Education and Double-Qualification Teachers	vocational education, vocational colleges, double-qualification teachers, craftsmanship spirit, skilled talents
Topic 6	Teacher Education and Preservice Teacher Training	teacher education, preservice teachers, training paths, curriculum integration, pre-service education
Topic 7	Construction of a Strong Country in Education and Policy Practice	a strong country in education, policy logic, practical requirements, institutional guarantee, strategic orientation
Topic 8	Primary and Secondary School Education and Teaching Practice	primary and secondary school teachers, teaching practice, classroom teaching, education mode, student development
Topic 9	Historical Inheritance and Cultural Foundation	historical logic, cultural tradition, teacher ethics culture, traditional education, inheritance and innovation
Topic 10	Special Groups and Special Education	special education, ideological and political education, PE teachers, teachers in ethnic areas, professional development

4. Discussion

4.1. Characteristics of the Research on the Spirit of Educators

4.1.1. Policy Drives Sustained Growth in Research Interest

Bibliometric analysis indicates that from September 2023 to December 2025, the volume of research literature on the spirit of educators has shown a rapid upward trend, aligning closely with national policy directions. General Secretary Xi Jinping's exposition on the spirit of educators has provided guidance for research, while policies related to building an education powerhouse and enhancing teacher ethics and conduct have spurred a substantial number of research outcomes [3,4]. Research content has centered on core policy discourses such as cultivating the spirit and teachers' team construction, moral education and talent cultivation and building an education powerhouse clearly responding to educational policies [5,6]. While this policy-driven research model has accelerated the field's development, attention must also be paid to the potential for research homogenization [7].

4.1.2. Preliminary Formation of Academic Clusters with Regional Disparities

From the perspective of author and institutional distribution, research on the spirit of educators has formed academic clusters centered around teacher training universities. Institutions such as Beijing Normal University and East China Normal University stand as leading centers for this field of study [8,9]. Core scholars play a leading role in the field, driving continuous and in-depth research. However, research output remains unevenly distributed across regions, with higher output in eastern regions and relatively weaker contributions from central and western regions. This regional disparity may be related to factors such as the distribution of educational resources and the development of research teams.

4.1.3. The Research Themes Are Clearly Focused and Logically Coherent

The LDA thematic clustering results reveal that research on the spirit of educators unfolds across four categories: "Interpretation of Essence", "Practical Pathways", "Group Orientation", and "Disciplinary Integration". The themes are focused and logically coherent. Studies under "Interpretation of Essence" primarily explore the core tenets, contemporary characteristics, generative logic, and cultural foundations of the spirit of educators [10–12]; "Practical Pathways" research concentrates on core domains such as teacher workforce development, professional ethics, and educational practices [13–15]; "Target Groups" research focuses on rural teachers, university faculty, pre-service teachers, and vocational school educators [16–19]; "Disciplinary integration" research attempts to incorporate the spirit of educators into fields such as special education, ideological and political education, and physical education [20–22].

4.2. Core Theme Analysis

4.2.1. The Essence and Contemporary Value of the Educator Spirit

Based on the LDA thematic clustering results, this theme constitutes the foundation and core of research on the spirit of educators. Scholars have interpreted the essence of this spirit from diverse perspectives, forming a pluralistic consensus. Regarding its core tenets, researchers generally agree that the spirit of educators represents the organic unity of educational passion, professional competence, and sense of responsibility [23, 24]. Regarding contemporary value, research primarily focuses on aspects such as building an education powerhouse, modernizing the teaching workforce, and implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. It is recognized that the spirit of educators serves as the driving force for high-quality educational development [25], the core guiding principle for enhancing teachers' professional competence, and a crucial safeguard for cultivating new generations for the times [26,27].

Scholars have explored the logic of its emergence from three dimensions: historical, theoretical, and practical. Historically, the spirit of educators represents both the inheritance and innovation of China's outstanding traditional teacher-disciple culture [28] and the continuation and development of the spirit of modern educators [29]. Theoretically, it is rooted in Marxist educational theory and aligns with the intrinsic laws of educational development in the new era [30]. Its practical logic lies in being the synthesis and elevation of educational practice, addressing the real-world demands of teacher development and pedagogical implementation [31,32]. Regarding cultural

characteristics, research indicates that the spirit of educators possesses distinct Chinese features, embodying the triple value dimensions of people-centeredness, political orientation, and strategic significance. It constitutes a vital component of the Chinese educational discourse system [33–35].

4.2.2. Teacher Workforce Development and Professional Ethics

The theme of teacher workforce development and professional ethics constitutes one of the core practical domains in the study of the spirit of educators. Research primarily focuses on the intrinsic connection between the spirit of educators and teacher workforce development, as well as practical pathways for fostering professional ethics. Scholars contend that the intrinsic connection between the spirit of educators and faculty development lies in the former serving as the soul and core of the latter. It provides value guidance and spiritual support for teachers' professional growth, driving their transformation from instructor of academic knowledge to mentors of character [36–38]. Furthermore, existing research proposes integrating the spirit of educators throughout the entire process of teacher ethics education, evaluation, and practice, thereby constructing a teacher ethics development system encompassing value guidance, practical cultivation, and institutional safeguards [39,40].

Additionally, some studies have explored the practical challenges and breakthrough strategies for integrating the spirit of educators into teacher development. Key challenges include: distorted perceptions of the spirit among teachers, inadequate mechanisms for translating theory into practice, incomplete institutional safeguards, and the absence of evaluation and incentive systems [41,42]. Research suggests breakthrough strategies include: strengthening publicity and education on the spirit of educators to enhance teachers' understanding and identification; establishing a curriculum system integrating this spirit into teacher education, reinforcing both pre-service training and in-service professional development [43]; improving institutional safeguards by incorporating the spirit of educators into teacher evaluations, professional title assessments, and performance reviews [44]; and building practical platforms to promote the spirit's implementation and deep-rooted integration into educational practices [45].

4.2.3. Rural Teachers and the Revitalization of Rural Education

Rural teachers constitute a vital group in the practice of the educator spirit. Existing research primarily focuses on pathways for cultivating the educator spirit among rural teachers and the role of this spirit as a pillar in revitalizing rural education. Scholars propose enhancing rural teachers' educational dedication and professional competence through policy support, professional development, cultural immersion, and practical experience. Specifically, this involves strengthening compensation and benefits for rural teachers, refining mechanisms for professional title evaluation and promotion, and enhancing their sense of professional fulfillment [46]. Establishing a diversified professional development system for rural teachers through school-based training, urban-rural exchanges, and online courses to elevate their expertise [47]. Creating practical platforms for rural education to encourage teachers to embody the spirit of educators in their daily teaching practices [48].

Regarding the revitalization of rural education, research indicates that the spirit of educators serves as the core driving force for promoting high-quality development in rural education [49]. As the mainstay of rural education, the cultivation of this spirit among rural teachers directly impacts the effectiveness of rural education revitalization. By promoting the spirit of educators, we can inspire rural teachers' professional passion and sense of responsibility, enhance the quality of rural teaching and learning, foster the comprehensive development of rural students, and thereby advance the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy [50]. Some studies have also examined the practical challenges in cultivating the spirit of educators among rural teachers, such as scarce educational resources in rural areas, weak professional identity among teachers, and significant urban-rural educational disparities, while proposing targeted solutions [51].

4.2.4. Vocational Education and Double-Qualification Teachers

Research on integrating the spirit of educators into vocational education primarily focuses on the following aspects: the connotation of the spirit of educators among vocational school teachers, the development of double-

qualification teaching teams, and the integration of the spirit of craftsmanship with the spirit of educators. In terms of connotation, the spirit of educators among vocational school teachers is defined as the organic unity of educational passion and the spirit of craftsmanship. It encompasses the core elements of the traditional spirit of educators while highlighting the professional characteristics of vocational education, such as skill inheritance and practical innovation [52–54]. Regarding the development of double-qualification faculty, research proposes integrating the spirit of educators throughout the entire training process for such teachers, establishing a trinity training system encompassing professional ethics cultivation, specialized skills, and practical capabilities [55,56].

Regarding the integration of craftsmanship spirit and educator spirit, scholars argue that the two possess inherent compatibility. The qualities advocated by craftsmanship spirit—such as relentless pursuit of excellence, dedication to one's profession, and innovation—align closely with the core tenets of educator spirit [57,58]. Incorporating craftsmanship spirit into the cultivation of educator spirit can enhance vocational college teachers' practical abilities and skill levels, thereby improving the quality of talent cultivation in vocational education [59]. Some studies also examine practical challenges in cultivating the spirit of educators within vocational education, such as vocational school teachers prioritizing skills over professional ethics, imperfect training systems, and low corporate participation. They propose breakthrough approaches including strengthening professional ethics education, improving training mechanisms, and deepening school-enterprise collaboration.

4.2.5. Teacher Education and the Cultivation of Pre-Service Teachers

Existing research primarily focuses on pathways for integrating the spirit of educators into pre-service teacher training, curriculum system development, and practical teaching reforms. First, regarding training models for pre-service teachers, scholars propose establishing a four-pronged approach integrating value guidance, practical experience, curriculum integration, and cultural immersion [19]. For value guidance, courses such as ideological and political theory and teacher ethics education can enhance pre-service teachers' understanding and identification with the spirit of educators [60]. For curriculum integration, the spirit of educators can be woven into educational courses, specialized subjects, and practical training to achieve an organic unity of knowledge transmission and spiritual cultivation. Practical experience can be fostered through activities like educational observation, internships, and volunteer services, enabling pre-service teachers to embody the spirit of educators in practice [61]. Cultural immersion involves leveraging cultural resources such as the deeds of renowned educators and educational traditions to cultivate a campus culture that celebrates the spirit of educators [62].

Regarding the construction of teacher education curricula, existing research suggests optimizing course structures by adding modules related to the spirit of educators, such as special topics on educational philosophers and their achievements and ideas. Teaching methods can be reformed through case studies, group discussions, and field research to enhance course appeal and effectiveness [41]. Incorporating the practice of the spirit of educators into the comprehensive quality evaluation system for teacher education students is also recommended [63]. Some studies have also examined practical challenges in cultivating the spirit of educators among teacher education students, such as insufficient integration depth in curricula, lack of targeted practical teaching, and imperfect evaluation mechanisms, while proposing improvement strategies [61,64].

5. Conclusions

This study systematically reviews 304 scholarly articles on the spirit of educators published in Chinese Core Journals and CSSCI journals from September 2023 to December 2025, presenting the academic landscape and development trends in this field. Findings indicate that research on the spirit of educators has formed a distinct academic cluster characterized by significant policy-driven features, clear thematic focus, and pronounced practice orientation. Core studies revolve around themes including the essence and contemporary value of the spirit of educators, teacher workforce development and professional ethics, rural teachers and the revitalization of rural education, vocational education and double-qualification teachers, as well as teacher education and the cultivation of pre-service teachers. These studies provide crucial theoretical foundations for building an education powerhouse and strengthening the teacher workforce.

Future research can expand the scale of empirical studies by employing diverse methods such as surveys, experiments, and case studies to collect multidimensional data. It should strengthen longitudinal research to explore the long-term impact of the spirit of educators. Mechanisms for translating research into practice should be refined, focusing on concrete pathways for integrating the spirit of educators into teaching practices and developing actionable implementation plans and measures. An evaluation system for the practical outcomes of the spirit of educators should be established, creating a closed-loop mechanism that integrates theory, practice, and assessment.

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