



A Study on the Enhancement Strategies of Class Teacher Leadership in Higher Vocational Colleges from the Perspective of Attachment Theory

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Abstract. Based on attachment theory, this paper categorizes class teacher leadership in higher vocational colleges into three typical types: secure, avoidant, and anxious. It systematically elaborates on the core characteristics, behavioral manifestations, and impacts of each type on student development. For each of the three types, practical and quantifiable enhancement strategies are proposed. The study demonstrates that through systematic behavioral interventions and institutional support, guiding class teachers toward the transformation to secure leadership can effectively enhance class teacher leadership effectiveness and empower the quality of education.

Keywords: Attachment Theory; Secure Class Teacher Leadership; Avoidant Class Teacher Leadership; Anxious Class Teacher Leadership

1 Introduction

With the advancement of economic transformation and industrial structure optimization, the societal demand for vocational education continues to grow, leading to a sharp increase in the need for class teachers in higher vocational colleges. Many newly recruited teachers are transitioning into these roles, urgently requiring a deeper understanding of their functions in students' academic and daily lives. Simultaneously, against a rapidly changing socioeconomic backdrop, students in higher vocational colleges exhibit diverse characteristics—such as variations in family economic backgrounds, diversified personal values, and the complexity of the social environment—all of which pose new challenges to class teacher leadership. Applying attachment theory to explain the types and causes of class teacher leadership can facilitate a better understanding of the class teacher's role, thereby helping teachers guide students' personality development and enhance leadership effectiveness.

2 Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Origin and Development of Attachment Theory

The origin of attachment theory can be traced to the mid-20th century, when it was first proposed by psychologist Bowlby. Through observations of interactions between children and mothers, he revealed the profound impact of early attachment relationships on subsequent individual development. He suggested that the attachment relationship formed between infants and caregivers is part of the human survival strategy, and its quality significantly influences an individual's interpersonal relationships and emotional development throughout life [1]. Subsequently, Ainsworth and colleagues further developed attachment theory through the "Strange Situation" experiment, proposing three attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and anxious. Later, a fourth category—disorganized/disoriented attachment—was added, forming a more comprehensive attachment classification [2]. In recent years, attachment theory has been increasingly applied in fields such as psychology and organizational behavior, gradually permeating educational research. In higher vocational colleges, students come from diverse backgrounds with significant differences in their personal histories and traits, bringing varied career aspirations and goals. As class organizers and leaders, class teachers' leadership development not only affects the effectiveness of student affairs but also profoundly influences students' growth and the quality of national vocational talent cultivation [3].

2.2 Core Concepts and Classification of Class Teacher Leadership

In the specific organizational and educational context of the higher vocational college class collective, the relationship formed between the class teacher and students is not an equal intimate bond, but rather a developmentally oriented "quasi-attachment relationship" that combines institutional authority with emotional connection. Therefore, class teacher leadership is not merely an exercise of authority, but a more complex and multidimensional form of influence [4]. Drawing on the core concepts of attachment theory and taking into account the specificity of the educational context, this paper redefines class teacher leadership in higher vocational colleges as follows: a relational and comprehensive leadership that, through emotional responsiveness, the ability to create an open and inclusive communication environment, and conflict resolution skills [5], builds a stable "secure base" and "safe haven" [2] for students, thereby effectively guiding student growth, stimulating student potential, and fostering a positive class atmosphere.

The three attachment styles in classical attachment theory—secure, avoidant, and anxious—originate from the long-term, stable, and highly emotionally invested interaction patterns between infants and their primary caregivers. Although the class teacher is not the sole attachment figure for students, during collective life in higher vocational colleges, as the enforcer of class rules, the person responsible for daily management, and the guide for student development, the class teacher's behavioral patterns in areas such as emotional support are sufficient to evoke psychological representations similar to the attachment system among students. Compared to the family caregiving context,

the teacher-student relationship in the school context has stronger goal-orientation and role normativity; therefore, the class teacher's emotional expression and response constitute professional emotional labor rather than a direct projection of personal attachment style. The class teacher's leadership behaviors form identifiable patterns through long-term, stable classroom interactions, and these patterns are reinforced or modified through ongoing interactions with the collective needs of students.

Accordingly, based on the class teacher's emotional investment patterns in the teacher-student relationship, their approach to responding to student needs, and their own emotional stability, this paper categorizes their leadership into three typical types: secure, avoidant, and anxious.

Secure Class Teacher Leadership.

Secure class teacher leadership is centered on emotional availability, responsiveness, and relational stability. In contrast to supportive or inclusive leadership, which focus on unidirectional resource provision, assistance in times of difficulty, and the acceptance of diversity, secure class teacher leadership constructs a secure base model for the class community. Its psychological foundation lies in secure attachment from attachment theory, while its pedagogical principles deeply integrate psychological safety and student agency.

Under this leadership style, class teachers, through their own emotional stability, sustained attention to students, and appropriate responses, become a reliable emotional anchor for students facing academic and social challenges [6]. This is not about lowering standards or laissez-faire, but about maintaining high expectations while fostering a collective belief that encourages taking risks without fear of making mistakes. Its manifestations are highly systematic: in goal setting, it balances high encouragement with firmness on principles; in class governance, it emphasizes empowerment through systems such as rotating class leadership and group collaboration [7]; in communication, it facilitates open dialogue, balancing psychological safety with accountability, and encourages constructive conflict and diverse perspectives. Ultimately, this leadership shapes a warm, orderly, and exploratory class culture, characterized by strong intrinsic motivation among students, harmonious interpersonal relationships, and high collective cohesion, laying a crucial psychological foundation for students' personality development and lifelong learning. Specifically:

- ① In the class, I strive to create a warm and harmonious atmosphere, making students feel at ease;
- ② When students encounter difficulties, I always provide timely care and effective help;
- ③ I focus on building mutually trusting relationships with students, encouraging them to share their inner thoughts;
- ④ In the class decision-making process, I fully listen to students' opinions and respect their ideas;
- ⑤ I actively organize various class activities to enhance class cohesion and sense of belonging;
- ⑥ I pay attention to each student's unique characteristics and needs, providing personalized support and guidance.

Avoidant Class Teacher Leadership.

Avoidant class teacher leadership is a defensive leadership model characterized by emotional detachment, excessive routinization, and minimization of deep interpersonal interaction. Its psychological roots can be traced to avoidant attachment in attachment theory, manifesting as active inhibition of intimate emotional bonds [8]. At the organizational behavior level, it represents a leadership style that feels uneasy with uncertainty and therefore adheres to established procedures and formal authority.

Under this leadership style, class management is primarily viewed as a task-oriented job to be completed efficiently and flawlessly, rather than an educational process requiring emotional investment and relationship building. In terms of relationship construction, the teacher deliberately maintains psychological and physical distance from students, emphasizes absolute authority, and strictly limits interactions to academic tasks and disciplinary norms, avoiding emotional exchanges [9]. In class operations, there is extreme reliance on written rules and regulations, with highly proceduralized management that pursues superficial order and controllability, while neglecting the educational meaning behind rules and the special needs of individual students. When faced with student conflicts or emotional issues, they tend to adopt strategies of neglect or suppression, quickly quelling disturbances to restore surface calm rather than engaging in in-depth guidance and resolution, as this would evoke emotional involvement they find difficult to manage. This avoidant stance extends to home-school relationships, where communication with parents is largely one-way and transactional, lacking deep collaborative education. In the long run, avoidant leadership fosters a class atmosphere that appears orderly but is emotionally cold and lacks vitality. Students' intrinsic motivation weakens, interpersonal relationships become rigid, collective cohesion is poor, and students feel frustrated due to unmet emotional needs, indirectly affecting their academic engagement and social development. Specifically:

- ① When students invite me to participate in their extracurricular gatherings, I often make excuses to decline;
- ② When students confide their inner worries to me, I often change the subject;
- ③ When organizing class activities, I prefer to let the class leaders take charge on site while I remain an observer on the sidelines;
- ④ I do not actively seek to understand students' personal interests, hobbies, or living conditions;
- ⑤ When minor frictions occur between students, I usually wait for them to resolve on their own and rarely intervene proactively;
- ⑥ My communication with students mainly focuses on academic and class affairs, rarely involving emotional exchanges.

Anxious Class Teacher Leadership.

Anxious class teacher leadership is a volatile leadership model driven by the teacher's own insecurity, fear of being evaluated, and high anxiety about losing control, characterized by emotional instability, excessive intervention, and controlling behavior. Its psychological essence lies in the projection of anxious attachment onto the professional role, aligning with the theory of fear-based leadership, where the leader's decisions and

behaviors are driven more by personal fears—such as avoiding failure, criticism, or loss of authority—than by educational goals.

The core paradox of this leadership style is that the class teacher, driven by deep anxiety about losing control of the class and having their competence denied, attempts to gain a sense of security through micromanagement [10]; however, their unpredictable emotional reactions and directives become the class's biggest source of stress and instability. In terms of management style, they fall into the trap of micromanagement, finding it difficult to trust students' autonomy, excessively intervening in class affairs, thereby suppressing students' self-efficacy development. In emotional expression, they exhibit high emotional susceptibility, easily fluctuating in response to minor class issues or student behaviors—harshly reprimanding over small matters or overcompensating out of guilt—leading students to constantly gauge the teacher's mood and remain in a state of vigilance. In rule enforcement, standards often appear inconsistent and change with the teacher's emotional state, causing confusion and a sense of helplessness among students. This fear-driven leadership behavior severely damages the leader's own professional well-being and work effectiveness [11], while transmitting anxiety throughout the class. Ultimately, the class atmosphere becomes highly tense, and students generally feel immense pressure. Some students develop ingratiating, dependent behaviors, while others develop strong rebellious tendencies. The teacher-student relationship is consumed in the tug-of-war between control and resistance, resulting in poor class cohesion and negatively affecting students' academic engagement and social development. Specifically:

- ① When organizing class activities, I always worry that I will not do a good job;
- ② I often worry that I will be unable to help students when they encounter difficulties;
- ③ Before each class evaluation, I repeatedly check all preparatory work, fearing that mistakes may occur;
- ④ When the class performs poorly, I fall into prolonged anxiety;
- ⑤ I care greatly about class discipline; when conflicts arise, I feel anxious and uneasy;
- ⑥ Regarding important tasks assigned by the school, I worry that the class will not perform well enough, putting significant pressure on both the students and myself.

3 Strategies for Enhancing Class Teacher Leadership in Higher Vocational Colleges

3.1 Strengthening Strategies for Secure Class Teacher Leadership

Secure leadership is centered on emotional availability, responsiveness, and relational stability. The establishment of a secure base relies on the caregiver's consistent awareness and timely response to signals. Accordingly: First, establish a weekly one-on-one conversation system. Given that class sizes in higher vocational colleges are approximately 40–50 students, engaging with two students per week ensures that each student has at least one in-depth contact per semester, with each conversation lasting no less

than ten minutes. Such regular institutional arrangements transform the perception that "the class teacher is accessible" from an occasional occurrence into a stable expectation. Second, improve communication platforms. The class teacher should respond to student requests within 24 hours, hold a class feedback meeting every two weeks, and announce improvement measures within three working days. Psychological research indicates that response delays exceeding 24 hours significantly reduce students' sense of being valued, whereas high-frequency, short-cycle interactions reinforce the belief that "my voice will be heard" [12]. Third, organize at least one class team activity per month, covering over 90% of students. The secure base not only provides a "safe haven" during crises but also offers a secure starting point for exploration in daily situations. Regular, high-coverage collective activities can continuously activate students' exploratory system and sense of belonging.

3.2 Transformation Strategies for Avoidant Class Teacher Leadership

The core mechanism of avoidant class teachers lies in the active inhibition of emotional involvement, and the logic of transformation consists of breaking the avoidant inertia through behavioral activation. First, set a goal of actively mediating at least two student conflicts per month, accumulating to no fewer than eight per semester. Behavioral psychology indicates that a target behavior frequency of one to two times per week is an effective dose for establishing new habits, enabling class teachers to reduce their avoidance motivation toward conflicts through successful practice [13]. This should be complemented by at least six class hours of conflict management training per semester to enhance both skills and self-efficacy. Second, arrange at least one emotional topic conversation per week, each lasting no less than 15 minutes, with a semester goal of at least 15 sessions. This serves as an effective standard for establishing "selective intimate relationships," allowing avoidant class teachers to be compelled through repeated practice to experience the positive feedback of emotional connection. Third, conduct a monthly self-assessment against a checklist of avoidant behaviors, aiming to reduce one or two items per month. When avoidant behaviors are explicitly listed and regularly reviewed, unconscious patterns are transformed into conscious regulation, and progressive goals both avoid frustration and accumulate evidence of change. The core of transformation lies in enabling class teachers, through institutionalized emotional contact and behavioral monitoring, to gradually establish a new internal working model in which "emotional investment is safe."

3.3 Adjustment Strategies for Anxious Class Teacher Leadership

The core mechanism of anxious class teachers lies in their heightened sensitivity to loss of control and fear of being negated, and the logic of transformation consists of reducing emotional arousal through structured buffering. When an emergency occurs, the class teacher should be compelled to wait at least 30 minutes before responding. Research in emotional psychology indicates that intense arousal typically enters a natural dissipation period within 20 to 30 minutes; this cooling-off period allows the class

teacher to recover from an emotional outburst to a rationally dominant state. Furthermore, since a core source of anxiety is uncertainty, establishing a graded problem-response table with preset standard procedures for three levels—minor, moderate, and severe—can alleviate anxiety, as preset procedures transform the unknown into the known, thereby significantly reducing anxiety. Second, case discussion meetings should be held once every two weeks, with at least eight sessions per semester.

4 Research Conclusions

Attachment theory provides a solid theoretical foundation for the classification and interpretation of class teacher leadership in higher vocational colleges. The emotional response patterns, conflict coping styles, and emotional stability exhibited by class teachers in teacher-student relationships are intrinsically consistent with their attachment styles. The classification of leadership into secure, avoidant, and anxious types has both theoretical grounding and significant behavioral differences. It is worth emphasizing that the transformation of leadership styles is practically feasible and operable. Through the proposed enhancement strategies, avoidant and anxious class teachers can gradually transform toward secure leadership, thereby enhancing their leadership effectiveness and empowering the quality of education.

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