

Teachers' Professional Identity Model in Higher Vocational College in Shaanxi Province

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Abstract

This research aimed to 1) To study the level of teachers' professional identity in higher vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province; 2) To analyze the components of teachers' professional identity in higher vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province; and 3) To propose the teachers' professional identity model in higher vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province. It is a Mixed Methods Research. The sample used in quantitative research is the sample used in the research of administrators and teachers in vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province, China. The total number of vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province is 36 and the received questionnaires is 504. The statistics used in the research are percentage, frequency, mean, standard deviation, and multiple regression analysis. The qualitative research was conducted by in-depth interviews with 9 key informants and data were analyzed by descriptive content analysis.

The research results found that; 1. The study found that teachers in higher vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province exhibited a high to very high level of professional identity, with mean scores ranging from 3.84 to 4.19. The highest-rated dimension was Professional Competence Perception (PCP), while the lowest was Perceived Social Status (PSS). 2. An analysis of the components of teacher identity identified seven key dimensions: Professional Value Perception (PVP), Sense of Group Belonging (SGB), Professional Competence Perception (PCP), Perceived Social Status (PSS), Role Integration Ability (RIA), Perceived Development Opportunity (PDO), and School-Enterprise Collaboration Experience (SECE). All components significantly and positively influenced teacher identity. 3. A proposed model of teacher professional identity, developed through grounded theory and in-depth interviews with nine participants, was validated by

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expert review and found to align with theoretical frameworks. The model effectively represents the professional identity of vocational college teachers in the context of Shaanxi Province.

Keywords: Professional Identity; Model; Higher Vocational College in Shaanxi

Introduction

In an era marked by intensifying global competition, the driving forces behind national progress and development are increasingly rooted in science, technology, and talent cultivation. Education, therefore, stands as a vital pillar of national strength and prosperity (Marginson, 2011; World Bank, 2020). Over the past few decades, China has witnessed an extraordinary transformation in its higher education landscape, emerging as one of the world's largest and most rapidly expanding systems. As of 2022, China boasted over 2,800 higher education institutions, encompassing general undergraduate, postgraduate, and higher vocational programs (Zha & Shen, 2021). Among these, higher vocational education plays a crucial role by bridging education and employment. It focuses on cultivating practical skills and applied talents aligned with the evolving demands of industry. The Action Plan for Improving the Quality and Training of Vocational Education (2020–2023), issued by China's Ministry of Education, emphasizes quality enhancement, value creation, and empowerment as the cornerstones for strengthening the vocational education sector.

As China's economy continues to evolve and its industrial structure upgrades, the need for a highly skilled technical workforce becomes more urgent (Li & Yang, 2020; Wang, 2019). Higher vocational education has responded to this need by producing competent professionals who contribute directly to economic sustainability and social development. This strategic importance is reflected in various national policies, including the Outline of the National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2020–2025) and the Implementation Plan for Vocational Education Reform, which underscore the centrality of vocational education in driving modernization and inclusive growth (Ministry of Education, 2010; Zhao & Yu, 2020; Li, 2019).

However, despite its pivotal role, the high-quality development of China's higher vocational education system faces significant challenges foremost among

them, the development of a qualified and stable teaching workforce. At the heart of this issue lies the concept of teacher professional identity. This identity shapes how teachers perceive themselves, define their roles, and engage with their responsibilities. A strong and positive professional identity is critical for teacher retention, effective instruction, and sustained educational quality. Given its far-reaching implications, teacher identity formation has become a subject of growing interest in educational research globally (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Sachs, 2005; Yuan & Lee, 2016). Yet, despite increased attention, research on teachers' professional identity particularly within the context of vocational education remains underdeveloped. Internationally, studies tend to be fragmented, lacking a cohesive theoretical foundation (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). In China, while research interest is rising, empirical investigations that effectively integrate theory and practice are still scarce. A review of the existing literature reveals several key shortcomings (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006)

Conceptual ambiguity – Definitions of teacher professional identity vary widely, often lacking scientific precision. Terms are frequently used interchangeably without consistency, and conceptual boundaries remain unclear. Limited structural analysis Few studies delve into the structural components of professional identity, and those that exist are largely theoretical, with minimal empirical validation or statistical rigor. Fragmented focus and shallow depth – Research has predominantly centered on correlations with variables such as job satisfaction, burnout, and motivation, but often fails to explore underlying mechanisms or causality. Methodological imbalance Qualitative methods dominate the field, while quantitative approaches are limited by small sample sizes, weakly validated instruments, and underdeveloped mixed-method designs.

Overall, the current state of research on vocational teachers' professional identity both in China and globally is marked by conceptual vagueness, methodological inconsistency, and limited practical applicability. There is a pressing need for more robust, integrative studies that bridge theoretical insight with empirical depth. Addressing these gaps will be essential for informing policies and practices that strengthen the vocational teaching workforce and, by extension, the entire vocational education system.

Research Objectives

1. To study the level of teachers' professional identity in higher vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province.
2. To analyze the components of teachers' professional identity in higher vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province.
3. To propose the teachers' professional identity model in higher vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province.

Research Methodology

To comprehensively explore the professional identity of teachers in higher vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province, this study employed a mixed methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This methodological triangulation not only enhances the validity of the findings but also provides a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon by capturing both breadth and depth of perspectives.

1. Quantitative Research Phase

The quantitative component aimed to examine the overall level and structural components of teachers' professional identity across vocational colleges.

Population and Sample: The study population consisted of 504 university administrators and teachers from 36 higher vocational colleges across Shaanxi Province. A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure a representative distribution across institutions, disciplines, and roles.

Research Instrument: The questionnaire used in this phase comprised three main sections: Part I: Demographic information of respondents (e.g., age, gender, teaching experience, academic background). Part II: Likert-scale items measuring the overall level of professional identity. Part III: Structured items assessing key components of professional identity, such as self-perception, professional values, commitment, and emotional engagement.

Data Collection and Analysis: The researcher administered the questionnaires in both physical and online formats to increase response rates. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including percentage, frequency, mean, standard deviation, and multiple regression analysis to identify predictive relationships among professional identity variables.

2. Qualitative Research Phase

The qualitative phase aimed to deepen the understanding of how professional identity is formed, interpreted, and experienced by vocational teachers within specific institutional and cultural contexts.

Key Informants: A purposive sampling technique was used to select nine key informants, including senior administrators, experienced instructors, and educational development officers. These individuals were chosen for their in-depth knowledge and active roles in shaping or experiencing professional identity dynamics in their respective institutions.

Research Instrument and Procedure: An in-depth semi-structured interview protocol was developed based on themes emerging from the literature and the quantitative findings. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or via video conferencing, depending on the informants' availability and convenience.

Data Analysis: The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Transcripts were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns, insights, and contradictions in participants' narratives regarding the construction, challenges, and evolution of professional identity.

Results

From the study on Teachers' Professional Identity Model in Higher Vocational College in Shaanxi Province, the researcher can conclude the results of the study according to the objectives as follows:

Part 1. The professional identity level of teachers in vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province is at the high level. The mean and standard deviation are as follows.

Variable	\bar{X}	S.D.	level
Professional Value Perception (PVP)	3.98	0.67	high
Sense of Group Belonging (SGB)	4.03	0.68	high
Professional Competence Perception (PCP)	4.19	0.65	high
Perceived Social Status (PSS)	3.84	0.75	high
Role Integration Ability (RIA)	4.01	0.69	high
Perceived Development Opportunities (PDO)	4.15	0.66	high
School-Enterprise Collaboration Experience (SECE)	4.01	0.72	high

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Professional Identity

From Part 1 To study the level of teachers' professional identity, it was found that the overall variables had an average (\bar{X}) between 3.84-4.19 and a standard deviation (S.D.) between 0.65-0.72, which was at a very high and highest level. The variable at the highest level was PCP (\bar{X} = 4.19, S.D. = 0.65) and the variable with the lowest average was PSS (\bar{X} = 3.84, S.D. = 0.75).

Part 2 Analysis of the components of professional identity of teachers in vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province as follows:

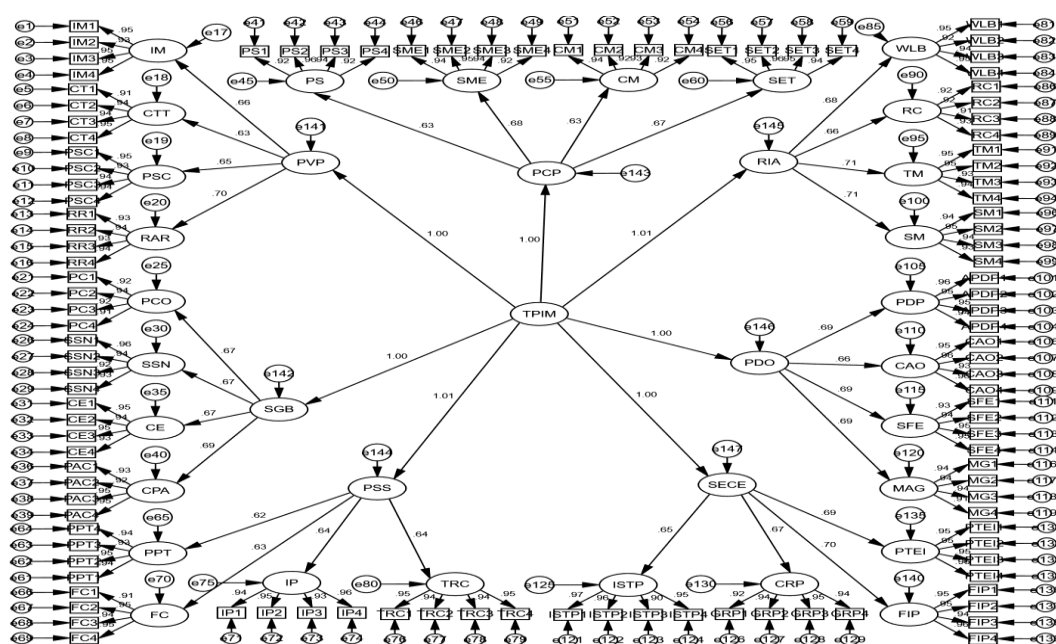


Figure 1 Full-CFA results

From part 2, it was found that teacher identity consists of seven main components: professional value perception, sense of group belonging, professional competence perception, perceived social status, role integration ability, perceived development opportunities, and school-enterprise collaboration experience. Each component has a high level and has a statistically significant positive effect on teacher identity, resulting in teachers having pride in their profession and striving for continuous self-development.

Part 3 The model of professional identity of teachers in vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province found that this research used confirmatory factor analysis using the Amos 26 program to confirm the validity of the model. It was found that the model was consistent with the standard criteria. Therefore, it can be proposed as a

reliable model. From in-depth interviews with 9 informants and analyzing data using the grounded theory technique with the NVivo program, it was found that the components of teacher identity consisted of 7 aspects: professional value perception (PVP), sense of group belonging (SGB), professional competence perception (PCP), perceived social status (PSS), role integration ability (RIA), perceived development opportunities (PDO), and school-enterprise collaboration experience (SECE). This model was presented to 9 experts, and the results confirmed that the model was consistent with the conceptual framework of the study and effectively reflected the teacher identity in the context of vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province.

Discussion

1. The level of professional identity of teachers in vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province was at a high level, which was consistent with the research of Raktawee Thaoto, Mongkol Sarin, and Phra Bunrit Aphipunno (2023) on the enhancement of professional characteristics of teachers according to the identity of students in the Faculty of Education, Mahamakut Buddhist University. The research results found that the professional characteristics of teachers according to the identity of students in the Faculty of Education, Mahamakut Buddhist University were: good consciousness, determination, creativity, and unity. Overall, students in the Faculty of Education, Mahamakut Buddhist University, had professional characteristics of teachers according to the identity of students in the Faculty of Education, Mahamakut Buddhist University at a high level, with a mean value of 4.22, S.D. of 0.64.

2. The components of teacher identity in higher vocational colleges, Shaanxi Province. The results show that teacher identity consists of seven main components: professional value perception, sense of group belonging, professional competence perception, perceived social status, role integration ability, perceived development opportunities, and school-enterprise collaboration experience. Each component has a high level and has a statistically significant positive effect on teacher identity, resulting in teachers having pride in their profession and striving for continuous self-development. This is consistent with the research of Chanpen Tongdee, Kamontip Srihasat and Suwimon Tirakanant (2021) on Factor Analysis Of Good Teachers' Characteristics In The Opinions Of Secondary School Students Under The Jurisdiction

Of The Secondary Educational Service Area Office. The research results found that the components of good teacher characteristics in the view of students consist of seven components, consisting of dedication, academic evaluation, using online lessons, using teaching media, politeness, and gentleness. These seven teaching techniques and application use components can explain 60.226 percent of the variance in good teacher characteristics in students' perspectives.

3. The model of professional identity of teachers in vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province was found to be consistent with the standard criteria, so it can be proposed as a reliable model. From in-depth interviews with 9 informants and analyzing data using grounded theory techniques with NVivo program, it was found that the components of teacher identity consisted of 7 aspects: professional value perception (PVP), sense of group belonging (SGB), professional competence perception (PCP), perceived social status (PSS), role integration ability (RIA), perceived development opportunities (PDO), and school-enterprise collaboration experience (SECE). This model was presented to 9 experts, and the results confirmed that the model was consistent with the conceptual framework of the study and effectively reflected the teacher identity in the context of vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province. This is consistent with the research of Tawica Mekarkakorn, Suwanna Narkwiboonwong, and Wandee Suthinarak on A causal model development of professional teachers. in vocational education the research results found that the causal model of vocational education professional teachers was consistent with the empirical data ($\chi^2 = 98.57$, $df = 86$, $p = 0.17$, $RMSEA = 0.02$, $GFI = 0.98$, $AGFI = 0.91$ and $MR = 0.02$). The variables in this model could explain 93 percent of the variance of vocational education professional teachers. The factors that directly influenced vocational education professional teachers had coefficient values from high to low, including self- and professional development factors, psychological factors, and educational institution and teacher peer factors. The factors that indirectly influenced vocational education professional teachers had coefficient values from high to low, including psychological factors, educational institution and teacher peer factors, and personal factors. And Jianhe Dou and Wipada Prasansaph (2024) on Mental Health Education Management Model of Chinese Universities in Hainan Province. The results of the research revealed that 1. "Organizational culture on the Music Teacher Professional Development of Middle School in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region" The four factors are 1) Chinese music teachers 2) Organizational culture 3)

professional development for Chinese teachers 4) career paths for Chinese teacher. 2. The four factors derived in “Organizational culture on the Music Teacher Professional Development of Middle School in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region” are considered to be appropriate, accurate and accordance.

Knowledge from Research

Teachers’ professional identity found that overall, teachers have high to very high levels of identity, especially in the aspect of professional competence perception (PCP), which reflects their own potential. There are 7 main components of teachers’ professional identity that have a positive effect on teachers’ identity, namely: Professional Value Perception (PVP), Sense of Group Belonging (SGB), Professional Competence Perception (PCP), Perceived Social Status (PSS), Role Integration Ability (RIA), Perceived Development Opportunities (PDO), School-Enterprise Collaboration Experience (SECE). And the teacher’s professional identity model from qualitative data and expert confirmation found that the developed model is truly consistent with the context of teachers in vocational colleges in Shaanxi and can be used as a model for developing teachers’ identity in a broad sense.

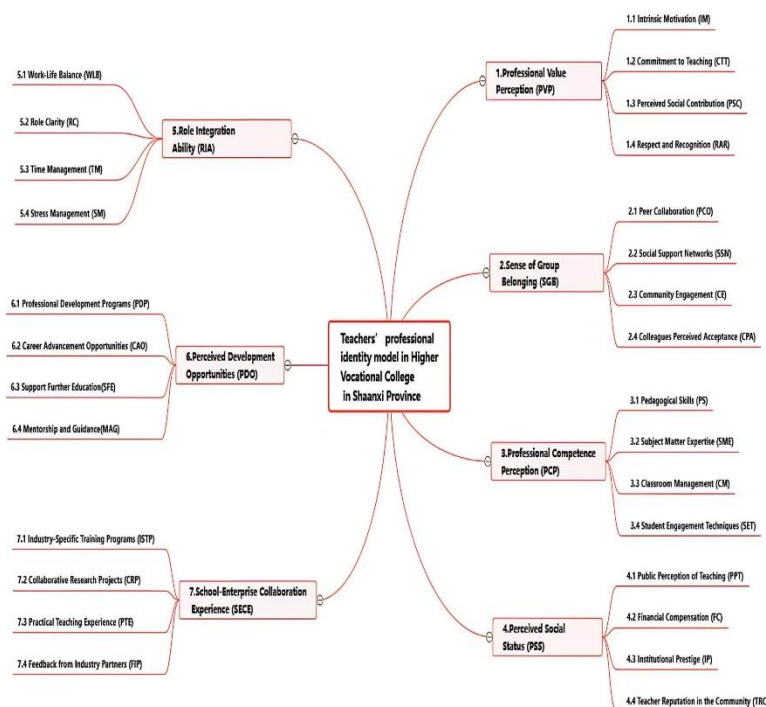


Figure 2 Knowledge from Research

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study found that the overall professional identity of teachers in higher vocational colleges in Shaanxi Province was at a high level across all dimensions. Among the seven components assessed, Professional Competence Perception (PCP) scored the highest, indicating that teachers had a strong sense of their own professional capability. The dimension with the lowest score, though still high, was Perceived Social Status (PSS). All components—including Professional Value Perception (PVP), Sense of Group Belonging (SGB), Role Integration Ability (RIA), Perceived Development Opportunities (PDO), and School-Enterprise Collaboration Experience (SECE)—demonstrated consistently high levels, suggesting a well-rounded and positive perception of professional identity among the respondents.

The confirmatory factor analysis validated a seven-component model of professional identity, which was found to align well with theoretical expectations and fit the empirical data. The qualitative findings, derived from in-depth interviews with nine informants and analyzed using grounded theory and NVivo software, supported the quantitative model. Experts also affirmed the model's validity and contextual relevance. These results highlight that a strong sense of identity among vocational teachers is influenced by both internal factors (such as values and competence) and external conditions (such as collaboration and perceived status), contributing to their professional pride and continuous development. From the research results, researchers have continued:

1. Policy recommendations

1.1 A policy should be set to promote the identity of teachers in vocational education, especially in the dimensions of teacher role integration ability (RIA) and perceived development opportunities (PDO). A policy should be set to continuously organize training or develop teachers to increase their potential and create pride in their profession.

2.1 A mechanism for cooperation with the school-enterprise collaboration experience (SECE) should be developed, such as organizing a teacher training program or creating a “teacher-industry” network to give teachers the opportunity to learn new technologies and apply them to teaching and learning.

3.1 A teacher identity assessment system should be designed according to the 7 components of the model, such as the Office of Teacher and Educational Personnel Development, which may develop standard assessment tools according

to the research-proposed model for use in planning teacher development in the long term.

2. Suggestions for applying research results

2.1 This professional identity model should be used as a framework for planning policies and teacher development activities, such as organizing professional competence perception (PCP), fostering sense of group belonging (SGB) in the organization, and creating a mentoring system or professional group.

2.2 This model should be used to design guidelines for vocational teacher career development throughout the province or country, integrating with the school-enterprise collaboration experience (SECE), and setting policies to support teachers' career advancement.

2.3 The research results should be able to be further developed for designing vocational teacher training curricula or conducting further in-depth research in other contexts, such as other provinces or other countries, to compare and develop a more comprehensive model.

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