



The Study on the Professional Identity of Undergraduate Students Majoring in Elementary Education at Yunnan Normal University

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Abstract

Background and Aims: This study explores the professional identity of undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education at Yunnan Normal University, in response to China's educational reforms and the growing need for qualified rural teachers.

Methodology: A mixed-methods approach was used, collecting 290 valid questionnaires and conducting 12 semi-structured interviews, guided by Beijaard's identity model (cognition, emotion, behavior) and theories from Bandura and Erikson.

Results: Statistical analyses, including ANOVA, correlation, and regression, revealed that students demonstrated a moderately high level of professional identity. Emotional identity scored the highest, followed by cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Female students and those with higher self-rated academic performance scored significantly better in emotional and cognitive dimensions. Senior students showed stronger behavioral identity, likely influenced by practicum experience. Regression results indicated emotional identity as the strongest predictor of overall professional identity. Thematic analysis of interviews supported these findings, highlighting students' emotional commitment, cognitive understanding of the profession, and behavioral challenges during internships. Practicum and mentorship were identified as pivotal to identity development.

Conclusion: While emotional and cognitive engagement with the teaching profession is strong, behavioral readiness needs improvement through structured practicum, early field experience, and emotional development programs. The study provides both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for enhancing teacher education, especially in underserved regions of China.

Keywords: Professional Identity; Undergraduate Students; Elementary Education

Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous advancement of China's basic education reform, the demand for high-quality primary school teachers has significantly increased. To meet the needs of the "Double Reduction" policy and promote rural education revitalization, many normal



universities have established undergraduate programs in elementary education. Yunnan Province, known for its ethnic diversity and complex geography, faces a particular shortage of qualified primary teachers in rural and border regions. In response, the Yunnan Provincial Department of Education has emphasized improving teacher training quality through the “Implementation Plan for the Training and Supply of Teachers in Compulsory Education Schools (2021–2025),” which stresses cultivating well-prepared and committed elementary education undergraduates for underserved areas.

Against this backdrop, teacher professional identity has become a key focus in educational research. A strong professional identity is closely linked to job commitment, teaching effectiveness, and long-term career development (Beijaard et al., 2004; Moore & Hofman, 2004). However, there remains a major challenge: many pre-service teachers lack a stable and well-formed sense of professional identity during their undergraduate training. Professional identity is not innate but develops through personal experiences, social interaction, and formal training. This issue is particularly concerning because unclear or weak identity may hinder future teachers’ motivation, self-efficacy, and role commitment (Yuan & Lee, 2016). However, many pre-service teachers face identity confusion, low confidence, or weak recognition of the teaching profession, which can hinder their development as effective educators.

While research on teacher identity has gained momentum globally, most studies in China have centered on in-service teachers, with limited attention given to undergraduates majoring in elementary education. This creates a research gap that limits our understanding of how professional identity is initially shaped. This gap is particularly relevant in Yunnan, where developing high-quality rural teachers is a pressing need. Therefore, there is a clear need to examine how professional identity forms during the early stages of teacher preparation. This study aims to investigate how undergraduate students at Yunnan Normal University perceive and develop their professional identity and what factors influence this process.

Objectives

1. To assess the teacher professional identity of undergraduate students majoring in elementary education by examining their level of identification with the teaching profession.
2. To analyze the impact of professional preparation on teacher professional identity by exploring how coursework and practicum experiences influence their professional outlook.
3. To identify key factors shaping teacher professional identity and to propose strategies for enhancing it in teacher education programs.





Literature Review

1. The Concept of Professional Identity

Professional identity refers to individuals' self-concept derived from their perception, values, beliefs, and emotional attachment to their profession. For prospective teachers, professional identity includes their understanding of the teaching role, their motivation to teach, and their readiness to assume the responsibilities of a teacher.

Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) propose a tripartite model of professional identity composed of three core dimensions: subject matter expertise (cognition), pedagogical competence (behavior), and professional self-understanding (emotion). This model has been widely accepted in teacher education and will serve as a foundational structure for the present study.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development emphasizes the role of identity formation during adolescence and early adulthood. It underscores how personal development is influenced by social and institutional contexts, particularly relevant to undergraduate students who are still shaping their career goals.

Bandura's social cognitive theory adds a dynamic layer by highlighting self-efficacy and observational learning. Students form their professional identity not only by internal reflection but also by engaging in social learning experiences such as practicum and mentorship.

Therefore, professional identity in this study will be understood as a dynamic and multidimensional construct that includes self-identification with the profession, emotional commitment, and readiness for professional practice.

To develop a comprehensive understanding of pre-service teachers' professional identity, this study integrates multiple theoretical perspectives. While professional identity is often treated as a multidimensional construct, existing literature rarely offers a cohesive explanation that links cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and contextual aspects. This review synthesizes four major theoretical approaches—Erikson's psychosocial theory, Bandura's social cognitive theory, Beijaard's three-dimensional identity model, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory—each contributing a specific lens to understand the formation of identity among undergraduate education majors. The following sections outline how each theory informs different dimensions of the study.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Erikson's Psychosocial Theory

Erikson's stages of identity development emphasize that identity is constructed through the resolution of psychosocial conflicts during adolescence and early adulthood. For university students, the decision to pursue teaching as a career and the internalization of a teacher's role

align with Erikson's concept of identity vs. role confusion. This theory supports the examination of students' self-perception (self-identity) as a foundation for professional identity.

2.2 Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1986) posits that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in career decision-making and professional development. Within this framework, students' confidence in their teaching abilities (professional preparation) and the influence of role models during practicum experiences are key determinants of professional identity formation. This theory underpins the link between professional preparation and identity.

2.3 Beijaard's Three-Dimensional Model

Beijaard et al. (2004) define professional identity in terms of cognition, emotion, and behavior. These dimensions correspond directly to the design of the questionnaire in this study:

Cognition → Professional recognition

Emotion → Emotional attitudes

Behavior → Professional preparation

This model supports the operationalization of professional identity and justifies the structure of the research instrument.

2.4 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

This theory explains how different environmental systems (microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem) influence individual development. In the context of this study, students' background factors such as grade level, gender, and school environment are understood as ecological factors that may affect their professional identity. This theory supports hypotheses related to demographic differences in identity development.

Table 1 Mapping of Theoretical Foundations to Research Variables

Theoretical Framework	Core Concepts	Corresponding Variable(s)
Erikson's Psychosocial Theory	Identity Formation	Self-identity
Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory	Self-efficacy, Observational Learning	Professional Preparation
Beijaard's Identity Model	Cognition, Emotion, Behavior	Identity Dimensions (Recognition, Emotion)
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory	Contextual Influence	Grade Level, Gender, School Context

Conceptual Framework

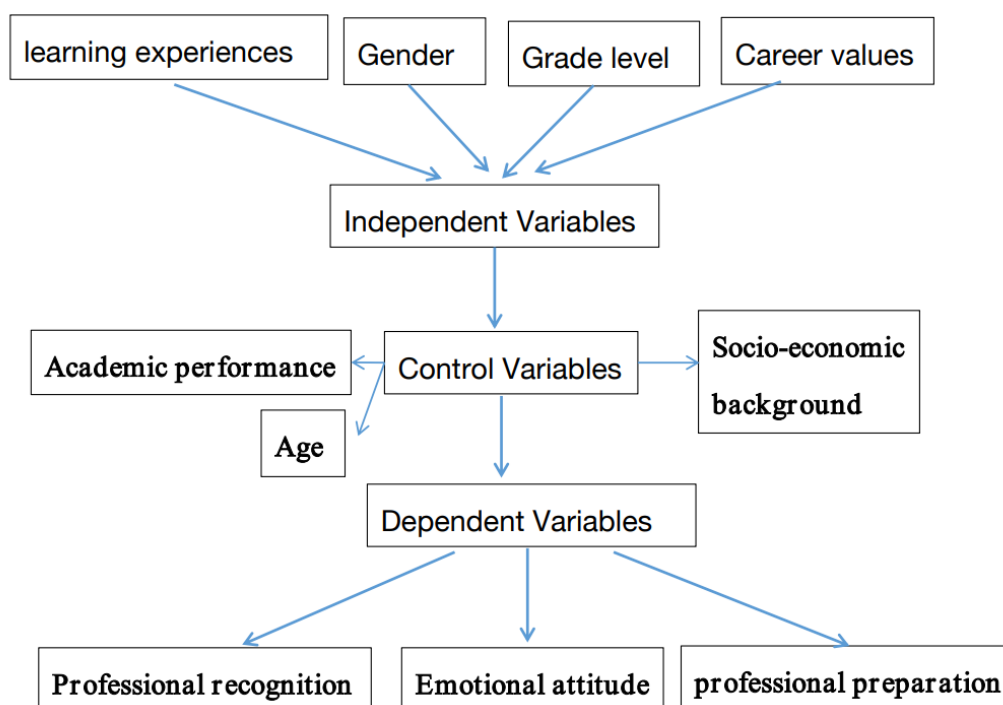


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

1. Population and Sample

The population of this study will consist of all full-time undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education at Yunnan Normal University. The sample will include students from first-year through fourth-year levels.

A total of 290 valid responses were collected. The total population consisted of approximately 1,100 students enrolled in the program. The minimum required sample size was calculated using Yamane's formula (1967) with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, yielding a recommended minimum of 285. Thus, the obtained sample of 290 ensured sufficient statistical power and representativeness.

To ensure comprehensive coverage and representativeness, the researcher will employ a cluster random sampling strategy to distribute the questionnaire to the entire cohort. Variables such as gender, academic year, and regional background will be considered to allow analysis of group differences in professional identity development. The questionnaire will be administered through the online platform "Wenjuanxing," ensuring accessibility and data security.

Participation will be voluntary, and all responses will be collected anonymously. Prior to survey administration, the purpose of the study and data confidentiality measures will be clearly communicated to all participants.

For the qualitative phase, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in gender, academic year, and self-rated academic performance. In addition, students who had provided particularly reflective or articulate responses in the open-ended questionnaire items were prioritized. This strategy helped ensure the interviews captured a range of developmental stages and enriched the understanding of professional identity formation.

1. Instrument

1.1.1 Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections:

Section 1 collected demographic information such as gender, year level, and self-rated academic performance. In addition to basic background variables, this section included a newly added item that asked students to self-assess their academic performance using a 5-point Likert scale. This variable was used in the analysis as an independent factor.

Section 2 contained a professional identity scale, including six dimensions as shown below:

Table 2 Dimensions and Corresponding Items

Dimension	Item Numbers	Description
Self-Identity	1–4	Self-perception and sense of belonging
Professional Identity	5–11	Interest, value judgment, and learning motivation
Professional Recognition	12–16	Recognition of social status and professional duties
Emotional Attitude	17–19	Passion and emotional alignment with teaching values
Professional Preparation	20–23	Skills and readiness for entering the teaching profession
Career Values & Perspectives	24–31	Open-ended views on teaching, motivation, and training

Although the initial questionnaire consisted of 31 items grouped into six specific dimensions—namely Self-Identity (Items 1–4), Professional Identity with the Major (Items 5–11),

Elementary Teacher Identity (Items 12–16), Emotional Attitude Toward the Profession (Items 17–19), Professional Preparation (Items 20–23), and Career Values and Perspectives (Items 24–31)—only the first 23 items adopted a 5-point Likert scale and were suitable for statistical analysis.

For internal consistency testing and structural analysis, the original six dimensions were regrouped into three broader theoretical dimensions: Professional Cognition (10 items), Professional Emotion (9 items), and Professional Behavior (8 items). This reclassification was guided by Beijaard's (2004) three-component model of teacher professional identity, which has been widely applied in identity-related research.

Consequently, Items 1–23 were used in the quantitative analysis, while Items 24–31 (which included multiple-choice and open-ended questions) were excluded from reliability and factor analysis but were reserved for qualitative interpretation.

1.1.2 Open-Ended Questions

Items 24 to 31 will consist of open-ended questions covering:

Understanding of the teaching profession and motivations.

Evaluation of elementary education curriculum.

Experiences from internships and career planning.

These questions will supplement the closed-ended responses by capturing deeper subjective perspectives.

Results

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents and Questionnaire Reliability Analysis

1.1 Basic Information of Respondents

A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed via the Wenjuanxing online platform, of which 290 were returned as valid, yielding a valid response rate of 96.67%. These respondents were full-time undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education at Yunnan Normal University.

In addition to gender and grade level, students were also asked to self-rate their academic performance using a 5-point Likert scale. For analysis purposes, responses were categorized into three groups: Excellent, Good, and Average or Below. The demographic distribution is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 290)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	85	29.3%
	Female	205	70.7%



Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grade Level	Year 1	72	24.8%
	Year 2	74	25.5%
	Year 3	71	24.5%
	Year 4	73	25.2%
Academic Performance	Excellent	88	30.3%
	Good	139	47.9%
	Average or Below	63	21.7%

1.2 Questionnaire Reliability Analysis

To assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire used in this study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for each of the three dimensions of professional identity as well as for the entire scale. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Professional Cognition	10	0.849
Professional Emotion	9	0.837
Professional Behavior	8	0.832
Total Scale	27	0.871

All Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded 0.80, indicating high reliability and internal consistency of the measurement instrument. These results validate the use of the current instrument in assessing the professional identity of undergraduate students in this context.

2. Overall Level of Professional Identity and Item-Level Descriptive Analysis

2.1. General Average Scores

Based on the data collected from 290 valid responses, the overall level of professional identity among undergraduate students was found to be moderately high. The mean score across all 27 items was $M = 3.96$, with a standard deviation of $SD = 0.64$. This indicates that most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements expressing professional identification with teaching.

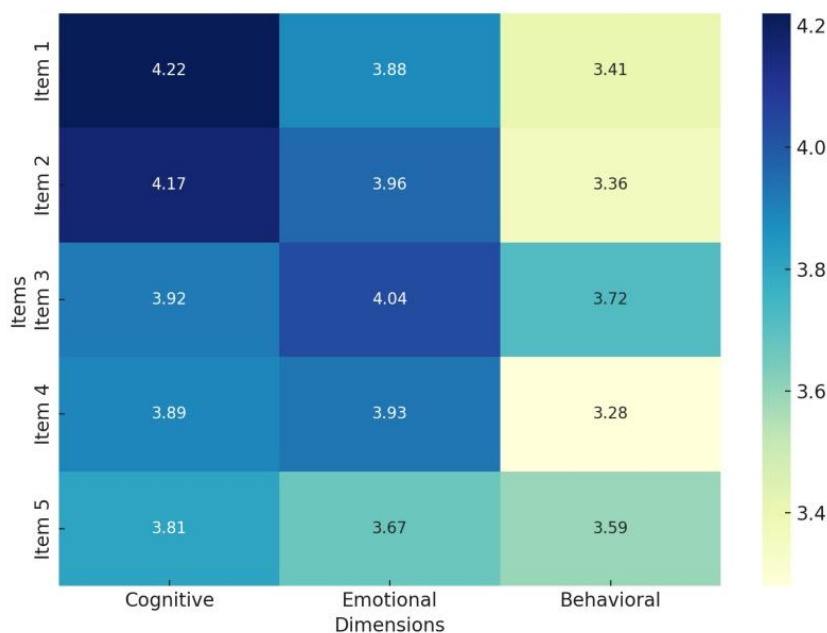
Table 5 displays the overall mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values of the total professional identity score.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics of Total Professional Identity (N = 290)

Statistic	Value
Mean	3.96
Standard Deviation	0.64
Minimum	2.22
Maximum	4.89

2.2 Distribution Trends by Mean Scores

To further visualize the response pattern, Figure 2 presents a heatmap illustrating the mean scores of all items categorized by dimension. The color intensity reflects the relative strength of agreement among participants.


Figure 2 Average Scores of Three Dimensions (Heatmap)

In summary, the descriptive data of overall professional identity and individual item analysis reveal that Yunnan Normal University's elementary education students exhibit a positive orientation toward the teaching profession, especially in terms of values and emotional commitment, though their sense of behavioral preparedness is comparatively lower.

3. Dimension-Level Internal Consistency and Item Comparisons

3.1 Item Comparisons Within Dimensions

To explore response patterns more granularly, comparisons were made among the items within each of the three dimensions. Table 6 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of items grouped by dimension.

Table 6 Dimension-Wise Item Descriptives

Dimension	Item No. Examples	Mean Range	SD Range
Cognition	Items 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 10	3.82–4.10	0.58–0.72
Emotion	Items 8, 11, 12, 14, 15	3.89–4.32	0.55–0.69
Behavior	Items 22, 23, 25, 27	3.52–3.75	0.61–0.78

These differences suggest that students exhibit greater emotional attachment and cognitive understanding of the profession than they do confidence in actual teaching-related behaviors. This discrepancy is likely related to the limited practical teaching opportunities provided at the undergraduate level.

3.2 Inter-Dimensional Correlation Overview

To assess the interrelationships between the three dimensions, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. The results, as shown in Table 7, reveal statistically significant positive correlations among all three dimensions.

Table 7 Pearson Correlation Between Dimensions

Dimensions Compared	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p)
Cognition & Emotion	0.68	$p < 0.01$
Cognition & Behavior	0.61	$p < 0.01$
Emotion & Behavior	0.64	$p < 0.01$

These findings indicate that professional cognition, emotion, and behavior are interrelated components of an integrated identity. A student who strongly believes in the value of teaching (emotion) and understands its societal role (cognition) is also more likely to express confidence in teaching-related behaviors.

Taken together, the internal consistency analysis, item-level comparisons, and inter-dimensional correlation results reinforce the construct validity of the professional identity framework adopted in this study.

4. Analysis of Demographic Differences (Gender, Grade, Academic Performance)

4.1 Gender Differences

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the professional identity scores between male and female respondents. Table 8 summarizes the results.

Table 8 Gender Differences in Professional Identity (N = 290)

Dimension	Gender	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Cognition	Male	3.91	0.65	-1.74	0.083
	Female	4.00	0.62		
Emotion	Male	3.81	0.66	-2.20	0.029*
	Female	4.01	0.61		
Behavior	Male	3.58	0.68	-1.36	0.175
	Female	3.66	0.67		

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

As seen above, female students scored significantly higher than males in the emotional dimension ($p < 0.05$), while differences in cognitive and behavioral dimensions were not statistically significant. This indicates that gender may influence the affective aspects of professional identity.

4.2 Grade-Level Differences

A one-way ANOVA was performed to examine whether professional identity varied among students across different academic years. Results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9 Grade-Level Differences in Professional Identity

Dimension	F-value	p-value
Cognition	2.31	0.076
Emotion	2.85	0.038*
Behavior	3.92	0.009**

*Significant at $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Post hoc analysis (Tukey's HSD) revealed that Year 4 students scored significantly higher in the behavioral dimension compared to Year 1 students ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that with greater exposure to practicum or teaching-related tasks, students' behavioral identity strengthens over time.

4.3 Academic Performance Differences

Another one-way ANOVA was conducted based on students' self-rated academic performance (Excellent, Good, Average/Below). Table 10 presents the results.

**Table 10** Differences in Professional Identity by Academic Performance

Dimension	F-value	p-value
Cognition	4.76	0.010*
Emotion	5.42	0.005**
Behavior	3.18	0.043*

*Significant at $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

4.4 Homogeneity of Variance Tests

Levene's Test for homogeneity of variances was conducted before the ANOVA tests to assess the equality of variances. Results indicated no significant violations ($p > 0.05$), confirming that the assumptions for ANOVA were met.

In conclusion, emotional identity shows gender-related variation, behavioral identity improves with academic progression, and all three dimensions are significantly influenced by academic self-perception. These findings highlight the importance of designing differentiated teacher education support systems tailored to demographic characteristics.

5. Correlation Analysis and Regression Model Construction

5.1 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between the three dimensions of professional identity (cognition, emotion, and behavior) and students' self-rated academic performance. The results are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11 Pearson Correlations Between Identity Dimensions and Academic Performance

Variable Pair	r	p-value
Cognition & Academic Performance	0.37	< 0.01
Emotion & Academic Performance	0.41	< 0.01
Behavior & Academic Performance	0.33	< 0.01
Cognition & Emotion	0.68	< 0.01
Cognition & Behavior	0.61	< 0.01
Emotion & Behavior	0.64	< 0.01

All correlations were statistically significant at the 0.01 level, suggesting moderate to strong relationships. Notably, emotional identity had the strongest correlation with academic performance.

5.2 Regression Model Construction

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine which of the three dimensions best predicted the overall professional identity score. The model included cognition, emotion, and behavior as independent variables. Table 12 presents the regression results.

Table 12 Regression Analysis Predicting Professional Identity

Predictor Dimension	Beta	t-value	p-value
Cognition	0.29	5.32	< 0.001
Emotion	0.36	6.07	< 0.001
Behavior	0.24	4.12	< 0.001
R-squared = 0.58		Adjusted R-squared = 0.57	

All three dimensions were significant predictors of overall professional identity. The model explained 57% of the variance in total professional identity scores. Among them, emotional identity exerted the strongest predictive power (Beta = 0.36).

5.3 Multicollinearity and Residual Analysis

To test for multicollinearity, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was computed for each independent variable. All VIF values were below 2.0, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

A normal probability plot (Q-Q plot) of the residuals was generated to assess the normality assumption. The points closely followed a straight line, confirming that the residuals were approximately normally distributed. FIGURE 9 illustrates the Q-Q plot.

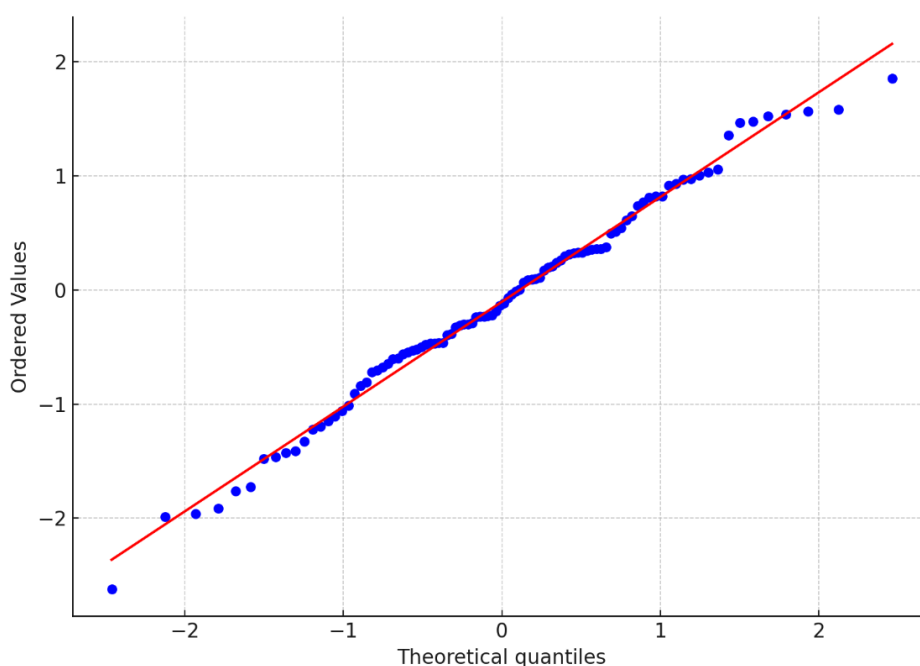


Figure 3 Q-Q Plot of Regression Residuals



The regression model demonstrates both statistical significance and strong explanatory power, underscoring the importance of enhancing emotional and cognitive development in professional identity formation.

6. Interview Analysis and Thematic Synthesis

In addition to the quantitative findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 undergraduate students across different grades and academic performance levels to explore deeper insights into their professional identity formation. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes that complement and enrich the quantitative results.

6.1 Emotional Identity and Professional Aspiration

Many students expressed a strong emotional connection to the teaching profession. Terms such as “fulfilling,” “meaningful,” and “child-centered” appeared frequently. Several Year 1 and Year 2 students described their ideal teacher image as caring and inspiring, while Year 4 students emphasized responsibility and impact. One participant shared:

“When I see how much influence a good teacher can have, I feel that this is the job I want to do. It’s not just about knowledge—it’s about shaping lives.”

This emotional alignment was often cited as the source of motivation for persisting through academic or practical challenges.

6.2 Perceived Obstacles and Cognitive Dissonance

Despite strong emotional commitment, many students also reported cognitive dissonance when confronted with the realities of teaching. Participants mentioned challenges such as heavy workloads, limited social recognition, and the gap between theory and practice.

“What I learned in class was not enough when I entered the actual classroom. I felt overwhelmed and unsure how to manage students effectively.”

Such comments reflect a misalignment between their conceptual understanding of teaching and practical readiness. This aligns with the lower behavioral scores observed in the quantitative analysis.

6.3 Turning Points in Professional Identity Development

Most students identified practicum experiences and feedback from mentors as transformative. Several Year 3 and Year 4 students cited their internships as moments when their professional self-image solidified. Practical exposure allowed them to internalize what it means to be a teacher beyond textbook definitions.

“During my internship, I realized that being a teacher is not just about preparing lessons, but also about guiding and supporting children emotionally.”



These turning points played a crucial role in converting abstract beliefs into concrete identity.

6.4 Thematic Summary Based on the interviews, four core themes emerged:

- 1) Emotional commitment to teaching as a career of purpose.
- 2) Tension between idealism and classroom reality.
- 3) Need for more structured, early practicum opportunities.
- 4) Importance of mentorship and feedback in identity formation.

The qualitative data thus reinforce the quantitative findings, revealing that while cognitive and emotional aspects of professional identity are well-formed, behavioral confidence requires further development through hands-on experience and supportive guidance.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer meaningful insights into the professional identity of pre-service elementary educators and how various demographic and contextual variables affect its development. In particular, the integration of qualitative data enriched the interpretation of quantitative results and revealed deeper contextual challenges faced by students.

Firstly, the high scores in emotional identity suggest that students are emotionally invested in the teaching profession. This aligns with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which emphasizes that emotional commitment can be a strong motivator for career persistence, even when cognitive confidence is still in development. Interview data revealed that many students expressed enthusiasm and idealism about becoming teachers, often referencing a sense of mission and social contribution. However, the relatively lower scores in professional preparation indicate a gap between emotional inclination and perceived professional readiness, pointing to the need for more structured and hands-on practicum opportunities. Interviewees noted a lack of early field exposure, limited chances for classroom observation, and insufficient feedback during practicum, all of which hindered their behavioral confidence.

Secondly, the finding that female students scored higher on emotional identity is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Zhao & Li, 2020), which suggest that female pre-service teachers are more likely to internalize the emotional aspects of teaching. This could be attributed to gendered expectations in education and greater emotional sensitivity among female students. Additionally, interview responses indicated that female participants often described teaching as a nurturing and relational profession, reinforcing gendered perceptions. Such findings suggest that gender-responsive strategies may be needed in teacher education.

Thirdly, the differences across grade levels confirm that professional identity is a developmental process. Senior students, with more exposure to teaching practice and



educational theory, showed significantly higher scores, particularly in the behavioral domain. This supports Erikson's psychosocial theory, which posits that identity formation matures through continued experience and social role immersion. Participants in senior grades frequently referenced practicum experiences as shaping their classroom confidence and affirming their commitment to teaching.

Furthermore, the strong correlation between self-rated academic performance and professional identity dimensions supports the notion that students who excel academically also tend to have clearer self-concepts and stronger identification with their chosen profession. This is consistent with findings by Feng Lina (2021), who noted that academic success reinforces confidence and future career commitment. Interview data confirmed that high-performing students tended to articulate more coherent career goals and exhibited greater initiative in preparing for the teaching profession.

Finally, the three-dimensional model proposed by Beijaard et al. (2004)—cognition, emotion, and behavior—was validated in this study. The study found that these dimensions interact with each other and are influenced by both individual and contextual factors. This was particularly evident in the thematic analysis, where students' narratives revealed that emotional investment alone was not sufficient without supportive learning environments and practical opportunities. The model served as a robust framework for evaluating the professional identity of the respondents, confirming its relevance in the context of teacher education in China.

Recommendation

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations are proposed to strengthen the development of professional identity among pre-service elementary education students at Yunnan Normal University and similar institutions.

First, structured and early field exposure should be incorporated into the curriculum from the first or second year. Microteaching sessions, classroom observations, and reflective journals can provide students with authentic teaching experiences, thereby bridging the gap between emotional commitment and behavioral readiness.

Second, universities should develop emotional support programs such as peer mentoring, teaching identity workshops, and counseling sessions that address the psychological challenges students face during their professional formation.

Third, the curriculum should be adjusted to include modules that foster practical application of educational theory, such as collaborative problem-solving, role-playing, and



scenario-based learning. These methods help students translate cognitive understanding into concrete classroom behaviors.

Fourth, institutions should promote public outreach and partnerships with local schools to improve the social perception of the teaching profession. This may include public lectures, open teaching demonstrations, and media engagement to elevate the societal status of teachers and reinforce students' professional pride.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged.

First, the sample is limited to one university in Yunnan Province, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should involve more diverse institutions across different regions in China to validate these results.

Second, the self-reported nature of the survey and interviews may introduce social desirability bias, with students presenting themselves more positively.

Third, although the mixed-methods design enriched data interpretation, the qualitative sample size was small (n=12). Future research could expand the interview sample and employ longitudinal designs to track the evolution of professional identity over time.

Finally, future studies could explore intervention-based approaches—such as practicum reform, teacher identity curricula, or targeted mentoring programs—to assess their effectiveness in enhancing the professional identity of pre-service teachers.

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