The Influencing Factors of Professional Identity of Normal University Students Majoring in Primary Education Based on Grounded Theory

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Abstract: Elementary education is crucial for cultivating qualified primary school teachers and laying the foundation for lifelong learning for children. The professional identity of primary education students is crucial, not only impacting their career development and job satisfaction but also directly affecting the quality of education and the stability of the teaching workforce. Currently, significant differences in professional identity exist among primary education students based on gender, grade, and family background, resulting in varying levels of professional identity. This study, using semi-structured interviews, collected data on professional identity among primary education students at a university in Northeast China. Drawing on grounded theory, this study conducted an in-depth analysis of professional identity and its influencing factors. The study found that six core factors influence professional identity: motivation for choosing a major, personality traits, career feedback, comprehensive career challenges, career development support mechanisms, and individual biography. Based on these findings, the study proposes strategies to enhance students' intrinsic motivation, improve teacher salaries and benefits, establish a comprehensive support system, and optimize pre-service training. These strategies aim to enhance professional identity among primary education students.

Keywords: Primary Education; Normal School Students; Teacher Professional Identity; Grounded Theory; Influencing Factors

1. Problem

China is currently in a critical period of building a strong nation through education and realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. As the foundation of the education system, improving the quality of primary education depends not only on teachers' ability to implement effective instruction in accordance with the laws of children's cognitive development, cultivate students' comprehensive qualities, and maintain educational equity amidst resource disparities, but also on the core support of a highly qualified teaching staff. Therefore, the professional identity of teacher trainees has been elevated to a policy level. The "Action Plan for the Revitalization of Teacher Education（2018-2022）" issued by the Ministry of Education in 2018 clearly states that " teaching role models, outstanding frontline teachers and principals will be invited into the classroom, and public welfare teaching and volunteer services will be organized to cultivate the professional identity and social responsibility of normal school students. "[1] The " Professional Competency Standards for Normal School Students in Secondary Education (Trial) " also states that normal school students should " have , be willing to teach, and love . They should recognize that the value of teaching lies in spreading knowledge, spreading ideas, spreading truth, shaping souls, shaping lives, and shaping new people."[2] All of these policies list professional identity as a core goal and advocate cultivating a sense of mission and responsibility among normal school students through traditional cultural immersion, dialogue with famous teachers, and teaching practice. However, currently, research on the professional identity of normal school students still has problems that need to be addressed, such as focusing on in-service teachers and ignoring pre-service groups, lacking systematic analysis of influencing factors, and insufficient targeted research on primary education. Therefore, this article focuses on the group of teacher trainees majoring in primary education, attempts to explore and analyze the key factors affecting the professional identity of teacher trainees, and puts forward relevant suggestions to improve the quality of teacher training.

2. Literature Review

Guided by policy, relevant scholars have conducted research on the topic of teacher education students' professional identity. Existing research has focused on the definition of teacher professional identity and the key factors that influence teacher professional identity.

3. Research on the Concept of Teacher Professional Identity

While there is currently no unified definition of teacher professional identity due to varying research perspectives and fields, key characteristics of professional identity can be extracted from existing research. Foreign research on teacher professional identity began relatively early, and theories of teacher professional identity are multidimensional and dynamic. Multidimensionality is reflected in Cooper and Olson (1996) who stated that " teacher professional identity is a ' polyhedron ' shaped by historical, social, psychological and cultural factors "; [3] Coldron and Smith (1999) pointed out that " teacher professional identity has a structural tension between ' agency ' (individual teaching practice) and ' organization ' (social role expectations) " ; [4] Sachs (2001) defined it as "a collection of socially and self-attributed professional characteristics that distinguish the shared values of a group of teachers"; [5] TenDam & Bolm (2006) added that it is "an individual's interpretive framework for their own teacher identity"; [6] Flores (2006) indicated that teacher professional identity is "a continuous process of value internalization influenced by personal, social and cognitive components"; [7] Hermans & Dimaggio (2007) further defined teacher professional identity as "a social identity formed through a dialogue between the self and external reality " . [8] The dynamic nature of professional identity is reflected in Volkmann (1992), who, based on role theory, proposed that professional identity encompasses "multiple complex levels such as role, self, self-image, and professional self." [9] Goodson & Kohler (1994) argued that " professional identity is a dynamic process in which the teacher's individual personality and the specific teaching context intertwine, influence, and reproduce each other. " [10] Chang-Kredl & Kingsley (2014) believe that it is a "generative process of continuous formation, construction, and shaping." [11]

The first scholar in China to propose the concept of teacher professional identity was Wei Shuhua (2005) . She believed that " the development of teacher professional identity is both a process and a state." [12] Domestic scholars generally agree with this scholar's view and further refine the definition of teacher professional identity from three dimensions. First, the emotional orientation dimension. Yu Huihui (2006) believes that " teacher professional identity means that teachers recognize their own teacher identity, accept this profession from the bottom of their hearts, and can make positive perceptions and positive evaluations of all aspects of the profession." [13] Tang Guojie (2010) focused on the teacher professional identity of college teachers and believed that " emotional attachment and psychological investment are the internal driving force for maintaining the willingness to teach. " [14] Second, the cognitive orientation dimension. Yin Xiaojing (2009) believes that " teacher professional identity refers to teachers' self-reflection to align their personal views with social expectations. " [15] Dai Yiyi (2024) pointed out that "teacher professional identity is teachers' recognition of their professional roles and affirmation of their social value in practice. " [16] Finally, regarding the behavioral orientation dimension, Wu Shenshen (2003) pointed out that teacher professional identity requires " teachers to acknowledge their teacher identity and actively perceive it. " [17] Jiang Xiaohong (2012) proposed that " teachers should consciously internalize professional norms into their behavior. " [18] All of the above studies point out that teacher professional identity is characterized by dynamic development and gradually evolves in the process of continuous social development and dynamic change. They also agree with Wei Shuhua's view that "teacher professional identity is both a process and a state."

Based on the clarification of the concept of teacher professional identity, researchers have further explored the definition of teacher professional identity through a review of existing literature. Some scholars define it as "a combination of reasonable cognition, correct attitude, and positive emotional experience toward the teaching profession." [19-20] Many researchers believe that teacher professional identity among teacher trainees mainly

encompasses aspects such as "cognition, emotion, and behavioral tendencies." [21-23] Wu Dan（2022）proposed that the professional identity of normal school students is " a process of continuous change, construction and improvement." [22] Xiong Fuli（2022）pointed out that "the professional identity of normal school students is indirectly constructed, relying on the image of teachers shaped by external media and limited self-observation, rather than actual professional experience." [23] Deng Wenqian（2023）emphasized that it is "a combination of the dynamic process of public-funded normal school students accepting their teacher identity and the static state of recognizing their professional status." [24] Specifically, Bo Yanling（2008）believes that "the professional identity of normal school students is a comprehensive level of professional cognition, emotion and other factors in static terms, and a process of internalizing social expectations and achieving role assimilation in professional learning in dynamic terms." The above research is reflected in the three-dimensional basic structure of "cognition-emotion-behavior" and the dual attributes of "static level-dynamic development"; the differences are due to the different emphasis of scholars on structural dimensions: whether to incorporate values, formation mechanism: direct or indirect experience, group type: public-funded and ordinary normal school students, reflecting the contextual complexity of the concept and the diversity of research perspectives.

Based on the above research and analysis, this article defines the professional identity of normal school students as: an observable static three-dimensional structure including reasonable cognition, positive emotions, and teaching behavior tendencies, and a dynamic development process - a combination of relying on external information to indirectly construct professional expectations and achieve role assimilation.

4. Research on Factors Influencing Teacher Education Students' Professional Identity

The professional identity of normal school students. In the analysis of existing studies, the professional identity of normal school students is mainly influenced by individuals, families, schools, and society.

Among the personal factors, gender, personal characteristics, and motivation for enrollment are particularly significant. From a gender perspective, Zheng Zhihui（2012）and Cai Zhiling（2013）pointed out that "female teacher trainees have a higher level of professional identity than male teachers because traditional Chinese culture places higher expectations on male achievement than females [25] . For males, the lower teacher benefits do not satisfy their motivation for achievement." [26] From a personal characteristics perspective, Sun Ningjian et al. (2024) pointed out that " the higher the degree of personal characteristics match, the higher the professional aspirations of teacher trainees [27] ." In the process of teacher trainees' professional identity formation, their roles are clearly conflicting. Good psychological quality and self-management skills can effectively help them improve their sense of self-efficacy, which in turn can stimulate their passion to be teachers and to be good teachers, and is one of the driving forces. From the perspective of enrollment motivation, students who choose the teaching profession out of love and interest have a higher level of professional identity than those who choose it out of external factors. Ding Daoqun（2011）found through a survey that " students with higher scores in teacher professional identity chose to study for free teacher training mainly because of their inner love for the education profession." [28] Guo Qian（2021）found through a survey that " students who chose to adjust their majors or fill in their applications randomly had lower levels of professional identity." [29]

In addition, family factors include family economy, family environment, and family background. Ding Daoqun（2011）pointed out that "free normal school students with poor family economic conditions have more positive feelings about the teaching profession, but their professional skills need to be strengthened, while students with better family economic conditions have relatively good professional skills preparation, but relatively lack professional emotional experience." [31] Meng Shihui（2019）' s research shows that " family environment is an important factor affecting normal school students' professional identity. The family's recognition and support for the teaching profession and the teaching experience of relatives and friends will enhance the professional identity of normal school students." [30] Li Pan（2023）'s research shows that " many students' choices of majors or careers are

also influenced by their parents and relatives, but there are also cases where parents interfere too much with students' own choices, which reduces their sense of identity with the careers recommended by their parents." [31] Cai Zhiling (2013) pointed out that " the family background of teachers has a negative effect on the professional identity of normal school students: first, the complaints of parents who are teachers affect students' interest; second, the pressure of exams causes teachers to have high work pressure and neglect their families, which affects the professional identity of normal school students." [29]

The school level includes curriculum setting, practical experience, and teacher influence. Qi Peifang (2007) pointed out that "normal college courses tend to focus on professional theories, neglecting educational practice and implicit courses, especially insufficient training in teaching skills. This makes interns perform poorly in classroom control, teaching wit, means and methods, affecting the formation of their professional identity as teachers." [32] Bo Yanling (2008) pointed out that " internship experience also has a great impact on the professional identity of normal college students. Through interviews, it was found that some normal college students were anxious during internships because they did not get the opportunity to practice in their daily lives, and they felt frustrated, which profoundly affected the formation of their professional identity as teachers. " [17] At the same time, some studies have shown that "the level of professional identity of normal college students after participating in internships is lower than that of students who did not participate in internships." [32] Li Pan (2023) believes that " university teachers play a vital role in the influence of normal college students. Their imparting of theoretical knowledge and professional knowledge to students can enhance students' ability to identity ." [34]

The social level, including the economic status, social status and public opinion of teachers, has a great influence on the professional identity of normal school students. Zhang Fenzhi et al. (2007) believed that " compared with other professions, the improvement of teachers' salaries has not substantially improved the economic status of teachers. It has greatly dampened the enthusiasm of teachers for work and also caused the professional identity of

normal school students to be weak. " [33] Meng Shihui (2019) pointed out that " under the policy orientation of ' making teaching an enviable profession ' , the professional identity of some normal school students is still not high. It is precisely because the current social status of teachers is still not high that the dignity of teachers is violated from time to time." [33] Li Min pointed out (2024) that "in recent years, negative public opinion about the teaching profession has frequently occurred, such as moral deviance incidents, which have affected the society's evaluation of the teaching profession and are not conducive to the correct recognition of the value of the teaching profession and the formation of professional identity among public-funded normal school students." [34]

5. Research Status of Professional Identity of Primary Education Students

Research on the professional identity of elementary education students has primarily focused on the current state of identity, influencing factors, and strategies for improvement. Most empirical research indicates that the overall professional identity of elementary education undergraduates is at an average or above-average level, [35-37], but with structural differences. In terms of intrinsic value identification, students generally have a high sense of professional significance, while extrinsic value identification (such as salary and benefits) and professional commitment (such as a desire to continue teaching long-term) are relatively weak, [36] reflecting that while students recognize the value of their profession, they remain skeptical about its economic rewards and sustainability.

Although the professional identity of normal school students is at a medium or above level, there are obvious differences in gender and grade. In terms of gender, female students generally have higher professional identity than male students, [39] especially in the dimensions of professional preparation and will [38] , which is related to the socioeconomic pressure and professional stereotypes faced by men. [41] Grade differences show dynamic changes, but there are divergent conclusions: Zhao Lina (2011) found that the identification of fourth-year students was significantly higher than that of lower-year students, while Lei Weihe (2015) pointed out that professional identity showed a

"U-shaped curve" (higher in the first and fourth years, and lower in the second and third years), while Xu Bo et al. (2022) observed that the peak was reached in the third year (average score of 4.01), which may be related to the deepening of the course and internship experience.

Regarding the research on the factors affecting the professional identity of primary education students, current scholars have based themselves on the three aspects of society, colleges and families, and have conducted in-depth analysis of the mechanism of different influencing factors on the professional identity of public-funded normal school students. First, at the social level, Lei Weihe et al. (2015) mentioned that low teacher salaries and biased perceptions of social status weakened identification, and rural students showed higher identification due to limited employment options. [41] At the college level, Zhao Lina (2011) pointed out that the college curriculum was divorced from practice, internships were superficial, and the lack of a normal cultural atmosphere restricted the deepening of identification; [38] Xu Bo (2022) found through investigation that the autonomy of normal school students' professional choice significantly affected their identification level, and the identification of students who applied for the exam independently was significantly higher than that of those who were transferred or passively selected. At the individual and family level, the degree of parental support affected the student's identification level, [40] while only children had a high professional value identification but a weak professional will, reflecting the relationship between resilience and professional commitment. [41]

Existing research indicates that enhancing the professional identity of primary education students requires a multi-dimensional approach. Liu Shuhong et al. (2015) pointed out that, at the policy level, the focus should be on optimizing teacher remuneration mechanisms, particularly enhancing the policy attractiveness of rural positions, in order to enhance the external value of the profession. Zhao Lina (2011) and Xu Bo (2022) believe that institutional training reforms need to be deepened simultaneously, not only strengthening the effectiveness of educational internships through a curriculum system that integrates theory and practice, but also cultivating the core of professional spirit through an immersive

teacher education cultural environment (such as teacher ethics lectures and skills competitions). Regarding individual students, Lei Weihe (2015) suggests that phased career planning education should be implemented, combined with frustration training to strengthen professional will, and focusing on breaking down the professional stereotypes of male normal school students. Future research urgently needs to focus on the dynamic formation mechanism of professional identity and explore long-term intervention models to provide theoretical support for the high-quality development of the teaching staff.

Has made a relatively systematic explanation of the concept of teacher professional identity, the influencing factors of teacher professional identity, and the research status of the professional identity of normal students majoring in primary education. It was found that the research objects are mainly in-service teachers, while there are few studies on the teacher professional identity of normal students majoring in primary education. Based on this, this study is based on grounded theory. On the basis of existing research, it explores the influencing factors of teacher professional identity of normal students majoring in primary education, and on this basis, explores measures to improve the teacher professional identity of normal students.

6. Research Design

6.1 Research Subjects

In order to ensure the representativeness of the sample and consider the students' understanding of professional identity, this study selected normal students majoring in primary education from a college in Northeast China as interview subjects. First, considering the gender differences in the understanding of teachers' professional identity, this paper selected two male students to participate in the interview; second, compared with lower-grade students, higher-grade students have a more comprehensive and profound understanding of teachers' professional identity after experiencing internships and internships. Therefore, this paper selected undergraduate students majoring in primary education from grades 3 to 4, with an average age of 21. Third, considering the nature of the subject, the sample covers both liberal arts and science groups. Finally, 11 normal students

majoring in primary education were selected and online interviews were conducted using Tencent conference software. The basic information of the subjects is as follows (**see Table 1**):

Table 1. Basic Information of Interviewees

serial number	gender	grade	age	Subject attributes
1	male	Senior year	twenty one	reason
2	female	Senior year	twenty two	arts
3	female	Junior year	20	arts
4	female	Senior year	twenty one	reason
5	female	Junior year	twenty one	arts
6	female	Senior year	twenty two	arts
7	female	Senior year	twenty one	arts
8	male	Senior year	twenty one	arts
9	female	Senior year	twenty one	arts
10	female	Junior year	20	arts
11	female	Senior year	twenty one	reason

6.2 Research Methods and Tools

This study employed a grounded theory methodology, obtaining research data through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Based on text analysis, a theoretical model of factors influencing professional identity among primary education teacher trainees was constructed. This approach was chosen based on the highly subjective and context-dependent nature of teacher professional identity, which requires in-depth exploration of individual experiences and dynamic construction processes. Specifically for this pre-service group of primary education teacher trainees, the qualitative research employed in this study can effectively reveal the interactive mechanisms among their cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. During implementation, the interview outline was designed to cover nine dimensions, including career choice motivation and personal trait fit, and included 13 core questions (**see Table 2**). Its content validity was ensured by the three dimensions of teacher professional identity (emotional, cognitive, and behavioral orientations) and the influencing factor framework (see Table 2) identified in the literature review. Interviews were conducted with the consent of the interviewees and were fully audio-recorded. The average interview duration was 30–60 minutes (**see Figure 1**), and the final transcripts were approximately 100,000 words.

This study used NVivo software to conduct structured coding analysis on the interview texts to accurately identify the key influencing factors in the formation of professional identity among teacher trainees, and based on the in-depth extraction and integration of the interview materials, constructed a theoretical model rooted in empirical data.

Table 2. Interview Outline

| Classification	question
Career choice motivation	Why did you choose to apply for the teacher training program and this major? What was your desire to teach when you applied?
	Did anyone significant influence your career choice? What was your family's attitude towards your decision to become a teacher?
Personal trait matching	Do you think your personality is suitable for the teaching profession? What personality traits are required of a teacher?
Career Cognition Assessment	What do you think about the social status, professional reputation and development prospects of primary school teachers?
	How do you evaluate teachers' salaries, benefits and working environment?
	What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of the primary school teaching profession?
Emotional identification	Do you think the profession of primary school teacher can bring you a sense of happiness or fulfillment?
	How do you currently identify with the teaching profession? What factors mainly influence your opinion?
Changes in willingness	How has your desire to teach changed since you first enrolled? What factors have strengthened/weakened your desire?
Practical experience	Have there been any events in your teaching practice that have strengthened or shaken your beliefs as a teacher?
Cultivation process	What impact has your professional course study had on your professional identity?
Future Decisions	Do you intend to work as a teacher after graduation? Please explain why.
Improvement Suggestions	Based on your own experience, what suggestions do you have for improving teachers' professional identity?
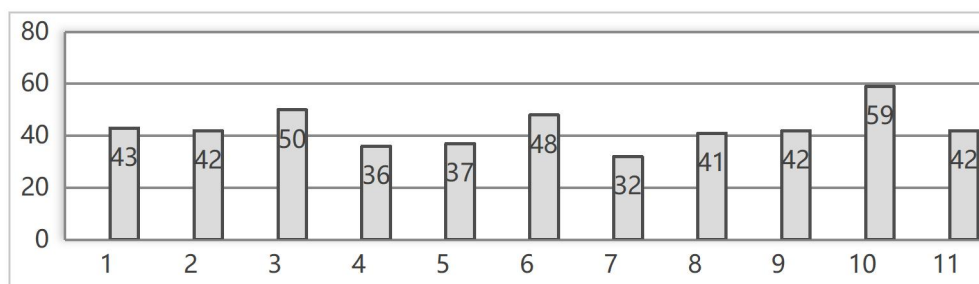
Figure 1. Interview Duration

6.3 Research process

6.3.1 Open coding

This study systematically coded and analyzed the transcripts using NVivo qualitative analysis software. Using the interview transcripts as the primary source, we systematically extracted core data segments reflecting factors influencing teacher trainees' professional identity. We rigorously used the interviewees' original statements as the basis for concept naming to minimize bias from researcher subjectivity. With the software's assistance, 494 original statements were generated in the initial phase. Through semantic comparison and content integration, 124 initial concepts with independent semantics were ultimately condensed (see Table 3 for some examples).

Table 3. Open Coding (Partial Example)

Original sentence example	Initial concept
At that time, the college entrance examination scores were used to maximize the use of scores to achieve a relatively stable career status.	Score-oriented
Quoting Locke's " blank slate theory " , elementary school teachers need to shape the whiteboard, and then middle school and high school teachers only need to color on the basis of our shaping.	Teaching and educating people
The birth rate is declining, the number of children is decreasing, and job recruitment is based on merit. The employment pressure is high and the employment situation is also relatively severe.	Job crunch
As times change, school curriculum and teaching materials are constantly changing, so we must constantly acquire new knowledge, study teaching methods, and update teaching methods.	Improve teaching skills
Society generally believes that primary school teachers are a meaningful profession that is related to children's enlightenment, and parents will respect conscientious and responsible teachers.	social respect
The current national downsizing is a disadvantage for professional identity.	National downsizing
The southeastern coastal and central China regions are better than those in the western and northeastern regions, followed by the central hub cities, where salaries are higher than those in surrounding areas.	Regional differences
The hardware is complete, but the comfort is relatively poor. Except for the area near the workstation, the space for movement is limited.	physical environment
I feel the irreplaceable sense of accomplishment and significance that students give me. At the same time, my professional skills have improved, my confidence has increased, and I have a clearer understanding of my mission as a teacher.	Student Spiritual Feedback
The state should restrict the professional entry requirements for teachers. Teaching without systematic study and professional ethics training is a denial of the professional ethics training of teachers and normal school students.	Strict access control
In high school, the relationship between teachers and friends is very pure, where we exchange academic knowledge in class and life experiences outside of class. Therefore, I care more about this kind of emotional connection and transmission.	Other teacher influences
My family thinks that teaching is a stable profession with fixed holidays and salary, and it is an ordinary job, so they support me to pursue a career in primary school education.	Family support
Being with children, the working environment is relatively pure	interpersonal environment

Teaching internships and practice, I realized the true meaning of teaching and educating people, and gained the emotional experience of being needed and respected.	Practice Emotional Gain

6.3.2 Axis coding

After completing open coding and extracting 124 initial concepts, we conducted axial coding. By analyzing the logical relationships and internal connections between concepts, we categorized them into higher-level theoretical categories. After systematic analysis, we ultimately developed 17 subcategories, encompassing intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and career paths. Through in-depth analysis of the interplay between these categories, we ultimately identified six core main categories: career choice motivation, personality traits, career feedback, comprehensive career challenges, career development support mechanisms, and individual biography (see Table 4). This transition from fragmented concepts to a structured theoretical framework lays the foundation for constructing a model of factors influencing teacher education students' professional identity.

Table 4. Axial Coding of Factors Influencing Teacher Professional Identity among Primary Education Students

Initial concept (reference point)	Subsidiary category (reference point)	Main category (reference point)
Interest (12), Value Driven (2), Personal Experience (1)	Intrinsic motivation (15)	Motivation for choosing a major (51)
Score orientation (4), practical considerations (6), passive adjustment (2), teacher role model influence (2), social status and reputation (1), regional culture (1), physical environment (5), interpersonal environment (6)	Extrinsic motivation (27)	
Basic role (1), teaching method innovation (2), Subject adaptability (6),	Career Paths (9)	
Extrovert (2), Introvert (5), Both (4), Lively and cheerful (4), Planner (3), Good at communication (4), Easy-going (2), Careful (3), Patient (6), Responsible (2), Emotionally stable (2), Hardworking (3)	Personality traits (38)	Personality traits (69)
Connecting the past and the future (3), Teaching and educating (14), Ordinary and unique (2), Stable and dedicated (2), Emotional gain (3), Realization of social value (2), Achieving work-life balance (1), Clear goals (2), Good attitude (2)	Personal Teacher Professional Values (31)	
Low salary level (9), salary structure (3), salary equal to civil servants (3), differences between public and private schools (2), regional differences (2), slow growth rate (1), growth potential (1), allowances (5), living security (13), holidays (4), paid leave (3)	Financial compensation (46)	Career Feedback (70)
Student feedback (2), student spiritual feedback (8), ability improvement (1), emotional support (5)	Emotional feedback (16)	
Multi-talented teachers (1), technology integration (2), cross-border job transfer development (2), great room for advancement (2), bumpy development (1),	Future Development Space (8)	
Numerous non-teaching tasks (4) and inability to truly play the role of educating students (1)	The work is tedious (5)	Career Comprehensive Challenge (45)
Parents' disdain (5), mixed reviews from society (3), parents' misunderstandings and reports (3)	Social Identity Challenge (11)	
Inadequate status and benefits (6), lack of information (3), national downsizing (1), resource imbalance (3), fierce competition (6), job shortage (5), limited promotion (1), physical and mental stress (6)	Job Resource Dilemma (31)	
Pre-service training (5), improving teaching skills (1), frontline teachers' communication and sharing (3), carrying out activities (2), pre-service teachers' participation in class management (1), providing practical opportunities (8), course direction (2), students' all-round development (1)	Pre-employment training mechanism (23)	Career Development Guarantee Mechanism (76)
On-the-job school growth training (5), reducing burden (3), teacher	On-the-job support	

requirements (1), life-work balance (1)	needs (10)	
Policy implementation (1), policy encouragement (1), salary increase (5), additional positions (2), promotion of a positive atmosphere (2), strict access control (1), clear discipline status (1), strengthening supervision (1), and strengthening attention (3)	Policy support demands (17)	
Public opinion (6), social respect (4), social atmosphere (3), reputation recognition (2), basic role in educating people (6), social recognition (3)	Social Trend Guidance (24)	
Mentor's role model (6), friends' encouragement (2), family support (3), other teachers' influence (8)	Influence of significant others (19)	Individual Biographies (63)
Emotional gain from practice (7), changes in beliefs after practice (9), experiential learning (7), knowledge reserve (6), teaching skills (11), teaching philosophy (3), lifelong learning belief (1)	Practice Feedback Effect (44)	

7. Selective Coding and Theoretical Model Construction

Selective coding aims to further analyze, summarize, and integrate the main categories formed during the axial coding phase, thereby extracting core categories that can govern all categories. [37] In this study, two additional normal school students were interviewed and their content was recoded to generate the coding results. Comparison revealed no new concepts or categories. By analyzing the interrelationships between the six main categories, we found that they all had direct or indirect impacts on the professional identity of primary education normal school students. Based on this, we constructed a theoretical model of factors influencing the professional identity of normal school students.The professional identity of elementary education students is influenced by both direct and indirect factors, which are intertwined and vary across individuals. Direct factors include motivation for choosing a major and personality traits. Motivation for choosing a major plays a key role. Choosing a major out of passion and interest accelerates the formation of professional identity, while passive adjustment weakens its development. Personality traits also directly influence how students behave and experience in educational settings. For example, traits such as extroversion, patience, and responsibility lay a solid foundation for their professional identity. Indirect factors operate through the interaction between the external environment and individual experiences. Regarding career feedback, positive changes in students can indirectly enhance professional identity, while negative feedback can interfere with it, such as when financial compensation fails to meet a teacher's basic living needs.

Successful responses to comprehensive career challenges can strengthen professional identity, while failures can weaken confidence. Career development support mechanisms, such as comprehensive pre-service training, generous benefits, national policy support, and a positive social atmosphere, provide indirect support for professional identity. Furthermore, individual biography, including the influence of significant others during one's upbringing and family attitudes, can also subtly influence professional identity.

8. Factors Influencing Teacher Professional Identity among Primary Education Normal School Students

By refining the categories and the relationships between them, this study identified six factors that influence the professional identity of normal school students: motivation for professional choice, personality characteristics, career feedback, comprehensive career challenges, career development guarantee mechanism, and individual biography.

8.1 The Motivation for Choosing a Major is the Primary Factor Affecting the Teacher Professional Identity of Normal School Students

Choosing a major constitutes the primary driving force behind normal school students' professional identity as teachers. Deci & Ryan (1985) emphasized the central role of intrinsic motivation in professional commitment in their self-determination theory. [38] This suggests that the motivation for choosing a major directly triggers normal school students' initial identification with the role of teacher and is the starting point for the formation of professional identity. In terms of intrinsic motivation,

primary education students mentioned "interest" (e.g., love for children, love for the teaching profession), "value drive" (e.g., unifying social and personal values; accompanying students' growth, imparting knowledge), and "personal experience" as deep-seated motivations. In terms of extrinsic motivation, "score orientation" (e.g., maximizing college entrance examination scores) and "realistic considerations" (e.g., career stability, staffing, and holidays) are practical inducements. It is worth noting that students who enter normal school programs through "passive transfer" often have a weak initial professional identity. For example, one interviewee admitted, " Being admitted to this major was something I never expected. " Furthermore, recognition of the "foundational role" of a particular educational stage or a preference for a career path that promotes "innovative teaching methods" can effectively strengthen their willingness to teach and their degree of professional identity as a teacher.

In general, the motivation for choosing a major, especially the intensity and nature of the intrinsic motivation, lays the initial direction and foundation for the professional identity of normal school students, while the extrinsic motivation provides practical support. The two together form the starting point of professional identity.

8.2 Personality Characteristics are Endogenous Factors Affecting Teacher Professional Identity among Normal School Students

Personality, as an internal foundation, profoundly influences normal school students' perceptions of adaptability and value judgments regarding the teaching profession. Holland's career choice theory states that the degree of fit between an individual and their professional environment determines career adaptability. [39] For primary education normal school students, this fit is primarily reflected in personality traits and professional values. In terms of personality traits, primary education normal school students with extroverted personality traits, such as "patience," "good communication skills," "lively and cheerful," and "hardworking," are considered highly compatible with the professional requirements of teachers, who frequently interact with students and handle complex teaching situations. Introverted primary education normal school students, however, with

traits such as "strong planning, carefulness, and emotional stability," also demonstrate advantages in teaching preparation, such as lesson planning. However, they may present different career experience paths during classroom interaction. In terms of professional values, interviews show that primary education normal school students who value "emotional gain" (such as students' emotional dependence) and "social value realization" (such as talent development) are more likely to form a positive and lasting professional identity. For example, one teacher training student mentioned, " During my teaching internship, through interacting with students, I experienced a sense of being needed and respected. This has enhanced my recognition of the teaching profession. "

In summary, personality traits and professional values together constitute the internal influencing factors of professional identity, which influence the development direction of professional identity and make primary education normal school students with different personalities show different characteristics in the process of constructing professional identity.

8.3 Career Feedback is a Process Factor that Affects Teacher Professional Identity among Normal School Students

As a process-moderating variable, the dynamic impact of career feedback on professional identity can be explained based on Homans' social exchange theory. The theory emphasizes that individuals' evaluations of career rewards regulate their level of commitment and explains the psychological motivations and exchange processes behind human behavior through success propositions, incentive propositions, and value propositions. [40] This process is reflected in the dual regulatory effects of economic rewards and emotional feedback on the development of professional identity among primary education normal school students. In terms of economic rewards, "low salary levels," "regional disparities" (e.g., higher salaries in coastal areas than in western and northeastern regions), and "slow growth rates" directly influence primary education normal school students' judgments on the material value of the teaching profession. For example, some normal school students believe that the low salary upon joining the profession is insufficient to meet their living needs. This negative economic feedback significantly weakens their

professional identity. However, "livelihood guarantees" (e.g., five social insurances and one housing fund, transportation subsidies, etc.), "paid leave," and "holidays" can, to a certain extent, enhance their professional identity. Emotional feedback, on the other hand, offers a stronger sense of connection. Positive student feedback, such as "smiley faces during homework, proactive questions and lively discussions in class," creates a sense of accomplishment and being needed, which can effectively mitigate the negative impact of economic pressure and strengthen professional identity. Furthermore, the inhibitory effect of career development expectations, such as "cross-disciplinary job transfers," on professional identity reflects concerns among primary education students about a single career path. This concern about the uncertainty of their future careers can also become part of professional feedback, impacting the stable development of professional identity.

When financial rewards align with personal expectations and individuals experience emotional recognition and a sense of belonging, career feedback fosters deeper engagement with their professional roles, leading to a continuous strengthening of their professional identity. Conversely, if financial rewards are unbalanced or emotional support is lacking, career feedback may weaken the professional identity of primary education students. Overall, career feedback, through the dynamic balance between financial and emotional rewards, continuously catalyzes the strengthening or weakening of professional identity.

8.4 Comprehensive Professional Challenges are Stress Factors that Affect Teacher Professional Identity among Normal School Students

As a stressful constraint, comprehensive career challenges significantly impact the professional identity of primary education students. Bogue systematically proposed the push-pull theory of labor migration. This theory argues that career mobility is influenced by both the push force of the outflow area and the pull force of the inflow area [41] . For primary education students, comprehensive career challenges constitute a "push force" that pushes them away from the teaching profession. These challenges are mainly reflected in three aspects: work content, social recognition, and job resources. In terms of work content, "numerous non-teaching tasks," such as administrative affairs and various teaching competitions, squeeze normal teaching time, making it difficult for students to focus on their core responsibilities of teaching and educating. In terms of social recognition, some parents' misunderstanding of teachers' work, excessive criticism, and even reporting of them, trigger professional dignity anxiety among students and shake their recognition of the value of the profession. In terms of job resources, "job shortages caused by national downsizing and declining fertility rates" have intensified the pressure of employment competition, causing students to panic and feel anxious about their career prospects. Although some normal school students regard challenges such as competition as opportunities to improve their abilities, in most cases, the physical and mental pressure brought about by these challenges, such as the sense of powerlessness caused by the heavy workload of class management after educational internship, will directly prompt normal school students to repeatedly evaluate the sustainability of the teaching profession, which will have an impact on their professional identity.

In short, comprehensive professional challenges do not exist in isolation but rather form a mutually reinforcing cycle. The numerous non-teaching tasks encroach on teaching time, directly impacting teaching effectiveness and leading to parental doubts about the quality of teacher education. Furthermore, the social recognition crisis weakens the profession's resilience to pressure, amplifying the negative impact of shrinking job resources. These multiple pressures profoundly impact the motivations and career paths of primary education students. While a few students mention experiencing self-improvement through challenges, overall, the ongoing pressure is gradually altering their professional identity as teachers, potentially leading to a structural imbalance in the future workforce.

8.5 The Career Development Guarantee Mechanism is a Supporting Factor Affecting the Professional Identity of Normal School Students as Teachers

The career development guarantee mechanism provides external support factors for primary education teacher trainees. Bronfenbrenner proposed the ecological system theory, which argues that individual development is influenced

by the interrelationships and joint actions of microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems (environments that are not directly involved but have indirect influences), and macrosystems (macro factors such as social culture and values). [42] Interview results show that the supportive environment for primary education teacher trainees is reflected in four levels: pre-service training, on-the-job support and policy guarantees, and social atmosphere. During the pre-service training stage, if normal colleges provide rich "practical opportunities" such as internships and internships to expose students to real teaching environments and enhance their understanding of the content of teachers' work, and if "differentiated curriculum design" helps students leverage their strengths, it can effectively enhance the professional confidence and sense of professional identity of primary education teacher trainees. In terms of on-the-job support, schools should provide growth guidance for novice teachers through training models such as "experienced mentoring new teachers," reduce administrative burdens to ensure teaching focus, and thus enhance teachers' sense of professional efficacy. At the policy level, "improving salaries" and "implementing policies" to prevent teachers from violating regulations due to livelihood issues, and "strictly controlling teacher admission requirements" to maintain professionalism, these institutional safeguards can provide primary education normal school students with a sense of job security and enhance their professional identity. At the societal level, Only by fostering a "positive atmosphere of respect and recognition of teachers' social status" and providing greater tolerance for teachers can normal school students feel society's respect and understanding for the teaching profession and develop a positive evaluation of it.

To sum up, the career development guarantee mechanism, as a supportive factor affecting primary education teacher trainees, includes four levels: pre-service training, on-the-job support, policy guarantee and social atmosphere. These four levels interact with each other and together constitute a support system to promote primary education teacher trainees to form and enhance their professional identity.

8.6 Individual Biography is a Background Factor Affecting Normal School Students' Professional Identity as Teachers

The individual biography as a background factor on the professional identity of primary education teacher trainees is based on social learning theory. Social learning theory emphasizes that the development of individual behavior is influenced not only by one's own experience, but also by the behavior of others and environmental factors. In other words, individuals can change their own behavior patterns through a comprehensive observation of the behavior and results of others. [43] For primary education teacher trainees, the significant others and practical experiences in their past life experiences, through internalization of experience and emotional acquisition, have a profound impact on the construction of their professional identity as primary education teachers. Among them, the influence of significant others is particularly significant, such as family recognition and support for the teaching profession, such as valuing career stability and encouraging children to teach, or the role model power of mentors such as tolerance and profound academic accomplishment. Practical experience is another key factor. Real interactions with students during educational internships and apprenticeships, such as feeling the shining points of each student and experiencing the sense of accomplishment of classroom teaching, these concrete emotional experiences can change teacher trainees' perceptions of the teaching profession and promote the positive transformation of professional identity.

The important others and practical experiences in individual biographies subtly and profoundly shape the primary education major's cognition, emotions and degree of identification with the teaching profession, leading their professional identity to develop in a positive direction.

9. Strategies to Improve the Professional Identity of Normal School Students

Through in-depth analysis of interview data, this study systematically illuminates the diverse factors influencing teacher professional identity among normal school students. These factors interact and work synergistically to support the formation of professional identity. The value of this research lies not only in a deep understanding of this phenomenon but also in translating theory into practice. To this end, this study focuses on exploring specific strategies for effectively cultivating teacher professional identity among normal school students, aiming

to provide valuable evidence for the improvement of teacher education.

9.1 Enhance the Intrinsic Motivation of Normal School Students to Choose Primary Education Major and Strengthen their Belief in Teaching

Interview data reveals that some normal school students are not strongly motivated to choose primary education. Many are assigned to this major and have no desire or inclination to pursue a teaching career. Alternatively, their choice of major is not driven by interest or a sense of value, but rather by extrinsic motivations, such as the allure of career stability, social status, and prestige. However, extrinsic motivations are inherently unstable and have limited impact on enhancing normal school students' professional identity. Therefore, it is necessary to shift the focus from "I have to learn" to "I want to learn," ensuring that normal school students deeply understand the value, significance, and joy of primary education and are confident that they can grow and realize their potential in this field. The government can continue to implement and improve policies such as the National Publicly Funded Normal School Program and the Excellent Teacher Program, raising selection criteria (not just by examining scores but also by prioritizing students' overall qualities) and providing more compelling performance guarantees and development commitments. Furthermore, the government should include primary education as a strategic foundational discipline. Strengthening the independent status of primary education in the higher education discipline catalog and supporting universities in developing integrated undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs should also be part of the national normal school certification system, with standards closely tied to the quality of compulsory education, highlighting its uniqueness and irreplaceable nature. By institutionally elevating the status of the discipline, the profession's appeal can be fundamentally enhanced. At the school level, various strategies, including increased publicity, should be used to actively encourage students to apply for primary education majors, thereby enhancing their intrinsic motivation to choose this major. Schools can help students develop a positive perspective on the teaching profession by providing in-depth explanations of its stability, social value, and sense of professional fulfillment. Furthermore, by showcasing exemplary teachers, organizing educational practice activities, and providing detailed explanations of the primary education major's training objectives and development prospects, students can be stimulated to develop a positive outlook on the profession, strengthen their sense of identity and internal motivation for choosing the major, and ultimately attract more students to apply. This will strengthen their commitment to the teaching profession and their ongoing pursuit of the value and significance of education throughout their future careers. At the same time, the motivation for choosing a major ultimately depends on individual decision-making. Students can use methods such as career interest tests and personality analysis to gain a deeper understanding of their suitability for the teaching profession. Students can then set short- and long-term career goals tailored to their individual characteristics, closely linking their professional development with their goal achievement.

By focusing on the state's emphasis on the status of the subject, school publicity and guidance, and the stimulation of personal intrinsic motivation, we can fundamentally enhance the attractiveness of the primary education major and the professional identity of normal school students, prompting them to change from the passive "I have to learn" to the active "I want to learn" and strengthen their belief in long-term teaching.

9.2 Improve Teachers' Salaries and Benefits and Enhance the Attractiveness of the Teaching Profession

Optimizing salary structures and narrowing regional salary disparities, while improving incentive mechanisms in schools, can effectively enhance teacher education students' professional identity as teachers. Interviews revealed that professional feedback has a moderating effect on professional identity, while low salary levels, slow salary growth, and regional disparities can weaken professional identity. To address this, the government can optimize funding allocation, allocating more funds to teacher salaries and benefits, with a focus on ensuring that compulsory education teachers' salaries are at least as high as the average salary of local civil servants. Furthermore, it can gradually increase the salaries of teachers in rural and remote areas, narrowing the gap in teacher salaries between

urban and rural areas and between regions. Furthermore, it can rationally design a teacher salary structure encompassing basic salary, performance-based salary, and allowances and subsidies. Increasing the proportion of basic salary can ensure teachers have stable income security; improving the performance-based salary system, incorporating teaching quality, teaching achievements, and student evaluations into assessment criteria, can incentivize teachers to improve their teaching quality; establishing special allowances to provide appropriate subsidies for teachers who take on additional work or work in challenging positions. Promoting teachers' contributions and social value through various channels can enhance their social prestige. Establish and improve a teacher honor and recognition system, increase publicity for outstanding teachers' achievements, foster a positive atmosphere of respect for teachers and education throughout society, and enhance normal school students' identification with the teaching profession. Furthermore, within the scope permitted by policy and taking into account the specific circumstances of the school, establish a special on-campus reward fund to provide additional rewards for teachers who excel in teaching, scientific research, and educating students. Improve the working environment for teachers, equip them with advanced teaching facilities, create a comfortable working atmosphere for them, and encourage normal school students to feel the appeal of the teaching profession.

9.3 Build a Comprehensive Support System to Enhance the Professional Identity of Teacher Trainees

The establishment of a sense of professional identity is far from sufficient to rely solely on individual efforts; it requires immersion in an ecological network with a supportive environment. [44] In response to the common concerns of primary education students about the teaching profession, which are mainly reflected in challenges in social recognition, job resource difficulties, and work pressure, it is urgent to build a comprehensive support system covering national policy guarantees, social culture creation, and school management optimization to solve the problems in the professional environment. First, at the national level, we must provide solid institutional guarantees, optimize the supply of teacher quotas, establish a dynamic

adjustment mechanism to adapt to the needs of educational development, and alleviate the anxiety of "downsizing" ; second, at the social level, we must establish and improve the coordination mechanism between home, school, and society, clarify the boundaries of responsibility of all parties, guide parents to rationally participate in education, establish standardized communication and complaint channels, effectively prevent and resolve conflicts between home and school, and reduce the professional harm to teachers caused by "parent misunderstandings" and "reporting" ; promote the formation of a more objective and inclusive social public opinion atmosphere, thereby enhancing the professional confidence and professional identity of primary education students. Finally, at the school level, we must effectively reduce the burden on teachers, optimize their work content, reduce irrelevant administrative tasks and formal inspections, and allow teachers to focus on teaching and educating students. Schools also need to establish a fair and transparent teacher promotion mechanism so that all teachers are clear about the promotion standards and procedures, including clear promotion conditions, evaluation criteria and timetable, to ensure that every teacher has the opportunity to be promoted through their own efforts.

Only through national policy guarantees, the creation of a good social atmosphere, and multi-dimensional coordinated support from school management can we effectively alleviate the concerns of normal school students about their future career environment, significantly improve the overall attractiveness and stability of the teaching profession, and thus enhance their confidence, sense of identity, and internal motivation to choose and stick to the cause of education.

9.4 Strengthen Pre-service Training for Teacher Trainees and Establish Correct Professional Values

Improving the curriculum, strengthening the faculty, and increasing practical opportunities can help teacher trainees clarify their career paths, prepare for the profession, and establish sound professional values. Interviews revealed that teacher trainees frequently cited concerns such as, "The curriculum is too broad and specialized, but not specialized. While this promotes overall student development, it

undermines their competitiveness." "Practical opportunities are too limited, making it difficult to understand how to teach a complete lesson." To this end, schools can improve the curriculum structure and organize training by subject, allowing students to independently choose their preferred subjects. This will foster motivation, maintain interest, and clarify their career paths. Furthermore, strengthening the faculty requires recruiting faculty with extensive teaching experience and industry backgrounds to provide more practical instruction for teacher trainees. These faculty can share their own teaching experiences and career development histories, helping students develop a sound perspective on career development while also providing practical teaching techniques and strategies. Finally, schools should increase opportunities for practical teaching, allowing students to participate in real-world teaching environments. Providing more opportunities for educational internships, simulation teaching, and classroom observation will allow students to learn and experience the entire teaching process through practice. In this process, teacher trainees can not only apply theoretical knowledge to practice, but also better understand the complexity and challenges of teaching, thus laying a solid foundation for their future careers.

To sum up, by adjusting the curriculum, strengthening the teaching staff and increasing practical opportunities, schools can help teacher trainees improve their professional qualities, clarify their career development direction, enhance their professional identity, and prepare for their future educational careers.

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