

Study on Professional Identity of College EFL Teachers—A Survey in the City of Shanghai, China

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As an important aspect of the inner world of teachers, the study of professional identity is attracting more and more attention from researchers at home and abroad. Through a questionnaire survey based on CETPII (College English Teachers' Professional Identity Inventory), the paper analyzes the college EFL teacher professional identity. The findings show that college EFL teachers in China have high professional identity, but the four factors constituting professional identity are scored differently. Occupational behavior tendency ranks the highest. Also, there are significant differences among teachers of different ages and teaching years.

Keywords: professional identity, college EFL teachers, questionnaire, item analysis

Introduction

Since the concept of “professional identity” was introduced into China, it has drawn attention in many fields, especially the field of teaching and teacher education. EFL teachers' professional identity refers to the teaching beliefs of foreign language teachers and the certainty of their social and cultural roles (Richards, 2008). It has great influence on the teaching effect, the professional development of foreign language teachers and their attitude towards education reform (Tsui, 2007).

Teachers' inner world, such as their cognition, belief, emotion, and needs, plays a crucial role in foreign language education. As an important aspect of the inner world of teachers, the study of professional identity is attracting more and more attention from researchers at home and abroad. This paper focuses on the college EFL teachers in China. Aiming to get further understanding of their professional development, the paper makes a study on their professional identity based a questionnaire survey. By analyzing the results of the survey, the paper tries to explore two questions: Do college EFL teachers reach high professional identity? How do teachers from different backgrounds differ in their professional identity?

Literature Review on Teacher Professional Identity

Beijaard (1995) defined teacher professional identity from three distinctive categories: the subject on teachers, the relationship with students, and the teacher's role or role conception. Teacher professional identity is a multiple, dynamic, and shifting process of construction and reconstruction rather than a singular, fixed, or predetermined entity (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005).

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In the late 20th century, Casanave and Schecter (1997) initiated the discussion on the nature of foreign language teachers' identity. Since then, the research on foreign language teachers' cognition has been deepened and the "sociocultural turn" for foreign language teacher education has been formed (Johnson, 2006).

Compared with foreign countries, domestic scholars' research on teacher professional identity is still immature. Researchers mainly discuss and make empirical research on teacher professional identity from the following aspects: (1) summary of relevant foreign research on teacher professional identity (Zhang, 2006; Xun & Zheng, 2014); (2) theoretical discussion on teacher professional identity (Xiao & Zhang, 2014); (3) research on teachers' career satisfaction or career burnout related to teacher professional identity (Chen & Sun, 1994; Ye & Sun, 2014).

It is not hard to see that domestic scholars prefer the questionnaire investigation and statistical analysis of empirical research methods. They pay more attention to the state of teacher professional identity rather than the process of constructing it.

Research Methodology

Research Objects and Research Questions

Plenty of scholars have already paid attention on college EFL teachers in last decade. Some focused on emotional problems; some paid attention on teachers' needs, problems, and challenges in professional development; some studied on how college EFL teachers do for their teaching beliefs. Comparatively, the study on Chinese college EFL teachers' professional identity is rather new. The research objects of professional identity of foreign language teachers in China mainly include teachers in primary and secondary schools. In view of this, this study focuses on the group of college EFL teachers, and conducts an empirical study on their professional identity.

The paper tries to explore two questions: Do college EFL teachers reach high professional identity? How do teachers from different backgrounds differ in their professional identity?

Research Methods

The study of the present paper is based on Tang's (2013) College English Teachers' Professional Identity Inventory (CETPII). Through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the CETPII is verified to be reliable and comprehensive in the measurement of teachers' professional identity.

201 respondents completed the questionnaire via WJX.cn, a professional online questionnaire survey and evaluation platform and 189 respondents' questionnaires are valid. All these respondents are the EFL teachers working in three colleges in Shanghai, China. Among the 189 valid respondents, 30 (15.87%) are males and 159 (84.13%) are females. In terms of age, most of them (79.36%) are middle-aged teachers ranging from 30 to 50. 6.35% of them are under 30, and 14.29% are above 50. Most of the respondents (63.49%) have worked as college EFL teachers about 10 to 20 years and 20.63% of the respondents even worked more than 20 years.

Data Analysis

General level of college EFL teacher professional identity. The survey questionnaire comprises 19 items and it identifies four factors of college English teachers' professional identity: (1) occupational behavior tendency (item 1-7), which refers to the behavioral intention, or investment of teachers in teaching practice; (2) identity on education reform (item 8-12), which refers to teachers' perception, understanding, or evaluation of their professional knowledge and skills in the context of college English course reform; (3) identity on

occupational environment (item 13-16), which refers to teachers' perception, understanding, or evaluation of their work environment and social status; (4) identity on academic research devotion (item 17-19), which refers to teachers' understanding and evaluation of scientific research as well as their self-motivation or investment in the development of their own academic ability.

In this study, the mean value (M) and standard deviation (SD) of all valid questionnaires on professional identity and its four factors were statistically analyzed. Among them, the M value reflected the overall level of professional identity of teachers. The full score was 5, and the closer the value was to 5, the higher the professional identity was. The statistical results are shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Professional Identity and the Score of Each Factor

	M	SD	Ranking
Occupational behavior tendency	4.573	0.432	1
Identity on education reform	4.433	0.496	2
Identity on occupational environment	3.289	0.756	4
Identity on academic research devotion	4.212	0.461	3

The table shows that college EFL teachers have high professional identity. Among the four factors, occupational behavior tendency ranks the highest. The factor of occupational behavior tendency examines the behavioral intention of college EFL teachers to the teacher's profession, and the behavioral intention constitutes the preparation of teacher professional identity. Take item 5 as an example, *I can make teaching strategies according to students' actual conditions and teach students in accordance with their aptitude*. The respondents choosing "agree" (4 points) and "strongly agree" (5 points) are up to 85.72%. The result reflects their positive attitude towards their career. They will devote themselves to teaching and actively seeking ways to improve teaching efficiency, thus showing a higher occupational behavior tendency

Factor 3, identity on occupational environment, ranks the lowest. A positive and interactive atmosphere is essential for the professional development of foreign language teachers. For example, item 15 states, *I will not consider leaving my position as a college EFL teacher in the future, even if there are other jobs with better pay*. Only 38.09% respondents choose "agree" and "strongly agree", which indicates their lower identity on occupational environment. Occupational environment includes not only working facilities and conditions, but also soft environment such as management mode and teachers' social status.

The high score of identity on research devotion reflects the significant characteristics that the professional identity of college English teachers is different from that of other foreign language teachers, such as primary and secondary school teachers. As an essential quality of college teachers, academic research ability has been widely recognized

Professional identity of teachers from different backgrounds. There are significant differences among teachers of different ages and teaching years, while there are no significant differences among teachers of different genders and educational backgrounds.

In terms of ages, the scores of those teachers under 30 are much higher than those aging from 40 to 50. For example, to item 16, *I am satisfied with the working environment in the college*, 50% of teachers under 30 feel strongly satisfied, but only 4.76% teachers aging from 40 to 50 feel so. This might be due to the different stages of psychological development and career development the two groups are in. Teachers aged 30 and below are

in the early adulthood and the first stage of their career development. Successfully adapting to the career is the focus of their development. Having fewer family concerns such as raising children or supporting the old, they fully devote themselves to work, thus showing a higher professional identity. 40 to 50-year-old teachers are in the middle adulthood and in a revaluation period. They begin to reevaluate on working values and their professional identity is fluctuated in a trough.

The variable of teaching years shows the similar difference. The fewer the teaching years are, the higher identity the teachers reach. Those teaching less than five years get most satisfaction with their career, while those teaching around 10 to 20 years get the lowest scores. The possible reasons for this situation are the gradual retreat of teachers' passion and the breeding of occupational burnout. Through the accumulation of several years' working experience, they have clearly become experts in teaching. The confusion and panic at the platform can be easily faced and properly handled. The teaching work seems to have no challenge for them. But after a period of adjustment, teachers who choose to remain in the teaching profession begin to seek better development, and thus their professional identity will recover.

Conclusion

More and more scholars begin to explore the problem of teacher professional identity and emphasize the importance of professional identity in teacher professional development.

Through a questionnaire survey based on CETPII, the paper analyzes the college EFL teacher professional identity. The findings show that college EFL teachers have high professional identity, but the four factors constituting professional identity are scored differently. Occupational behavior tendency ranks the highest, while identity on occupational environment ranks the lowest. Also, there are significant differences among teachers of different ages and teaching years.

It is hoped that the study could help Chinese college EFL teachers to rethink of their identities and reposition themselves to reach greater professional development.

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