

CHINA MALE EFL TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN HEBEI PROVINCE HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

There are three objectives of this study. Firstly, to explore the process and types of the development of the professional identity among China male EFL teachers in higher institutions. Secondly, to investigate the factors that affect the development of China male EFL teachers' professional identity. Thirdly, to construct a theoretical model of construction of professional identity among China male EFL teachers in higher institutions. This study employs a qualitative research approach, through a case studies involving three male EFL teachers from Hebei province, aiming to enhance English learning outcomes and education quality in higher education, providing insights for university management policies in the field of foreign language education in China. This study has the following main findings: First, there are common and different features in the process of their professional identity development. The professional identity development of them is categorized into three types: the Multiple Identity Conflict type, the Identity Crisis type and the Identity Reconstruction type. Second, the factors affecting the identity development of EFL teachers in Chinese higher institutions are categorized into two groups which are personal factors and sociocultural factors. Third, by analyzing the actual, desirable and ideal identities of China male EFL teachers, this study constructs a professional identity and development model for Male EFL teachers in China higher institutions. The implications of this study for educational reform in higher institutions in China include two aspects: 1) The institutions should create a reasonable institutional environment for the professional development of Male EFL teachers, and 2) the institutions should give EFL teachers more humanistic care. As to EFL teachers, it is important to pay attention to the national policy at the macro level, and design one's career rationally. It is also important to develop a sense of researcher identity and fully recognize that researcher identity is an important part of the professional identity of male EFL teachers and that the development of other identities play a key role in promoting teachers' professional development.

Keywords: Development of Professional Identity, Male EFL teachers, China Higher Institutions

INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of globalization, countries around the world are constantly cooperating and exchanging ideas in the fields of trade and commerce, education, culture, science and technology. In 2010, the Chinese National Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2030) pointed out that "teachers are the key to education, and good teachers are the key to good education" (Ministry of Education). In 2015, the State Council promulgated the Overall Programme for Promoting the Construction of World-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines (Ministry of Education, 2010). On 20th January 2018, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the State Council issued the Guidance on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of

Teacher Training in the New Era, which stated that “The people's aspiration for fair and quality education has become more urgent. Faced with a new orientation, new journey and a new mission, the construction of the teaching force has not yet been able to fully adapt.” (2018, P1).

On the one hand, the above series of national policies highlighted the key position and strategic significance of the teaching force in education and even in the development of the whole country and nation. On the other hand, these policies emphasised the importance and urgency of training a high-quality teaching force.

Quality education cannot be provided without teachers who meet higher qualifications. To build a high-quality teaching force, there is a need to vigorously promote the professional development (PD) of teachers and strengthen teacher education and teacher training. The ultimate aim of teacher education and training is to help teachers better understand who they are and what they do (Xu, 2014; Liu, M., & Yan, 2020). Therefore, the forming process of teachers' identity, teachers' awareness of identity and professional development system are the core components of teacher education and training (Ye Juyan, 2017).

Teacher' professional identity (PI) has a significant impact in addressing the global crisis of sustainability within the field of education (Raus, 2016; M., & Yan, 2020). Teacher professional identity should also be given higher priority in the drive to produce a highly qualified teaching workforce. Teachers are only willing to take on greater responsibilities and missions, reach their full potential, and genuinely contribute to the establishment of world-class universities and disciplines when they have a stronger sense of identity and have received thorough professional development. Thus, the enormous progress of the entire era is achieved, and more exceptional talents are developed to serve society and make a greater contribution.

For higher institutions, it is a comprehensive process to cultivate student-teachers and in-service teachers with professional knowledge, teaching skills, and ethical qualities. Pre-service teacher education in China typically starts with teacher training programs at normal universities. These institutions offer undergraduate and graduate programs in various fields of education, providing students with theoretical knowledge in education, educational psychology, curriculum development, and teaching methods. Upon completion of their pre-service education, aspiring teachers need to obtain a teaching certification to qualify for teaching positions in schools. The certification process usually involves passing national or provincial-level examinations that assess the candidates' pedagogical knowledge and skills.

ISSUES RELATED TO THE STUDY

Studies have shown that there is a certain level of identity crisis among EFL teachers in China which affects the overall teaching quality.

A study conducted by Xu Wenjing and Wang Honglin have revealed that the overall level of China's higher institutions' EFL teacher's identity is average. The following symptoms of the phenomena are present: a low sense of professional identity, a lack of sense of community belonging, and an overwhelming fear of challenges. Their academic pursuit and research willingness are also not high and they lack confidence in their language proficiency (Xu Wenjing & Wang Honglin, 2021). They could not cope with the demand of the teaching profession which leads to higher anxiety and work burnout. Studies has also indicated that anxiety lead to a series of bad consequences, such as insomnia, depression, lower motivation and devotion to work, becoming nervous, bad-temper, inability to focus and lack of confidence, as found in similar studies (Cheung & Hui, 2011; Yazici & Altun, 2013; Liu & Yan, 2020). All these definitely have effects on EFL teachers' performance at work.

A study conducted by Liu and Yan (2021) has explored teaching anxiety and foreign language anxiety (FLA) in 151 Chinese college EFL teachers in relation to their individual characteristics. The result has revealed that gender, age, educational level and English proficiency significantly have

affected the participants' teaching anxiety and teacher FLA levels. Evidently, anxiety is an important issue faced by university language teachers and needs to be further researched (Liu & Yan, 2020). This is due to the fact that such problems can influence the development of the teacher's identity as well as affecting their teaching performance.

The lack of a professional development system for EFL teachers in China is a crucial situation. EFL teachers working in higher institutions are sufficing the language development in the school, however, there are no specific PD training programmes for EFL teachers as the institutions focus on other subjects, especially the newly established private colleges and academies. For example, arts colleges provide specialized education programs that integrate both artistic training and pedagogical skills, such as music, fine arts, dance, drama, and other performing arts. Thus, they cannot provide a sufficient training programme for EFL teachers which causes the PI crisis and unqualified performance.

Finally, present research on teachers' identity has utilized various theoretical frameworks, including critical discourse analysis, pragmatic identity theory and Zimmerman's (1998) discourse identity theory from a linguistic perspective. These theories are mainly employed to interpret the discursive identities constructed by teachers. These researches are reflective of subjectivity and have become a significant topic in current studies, attracting widespread attention from scholars in the fields of linguistics. However, these researches primarily focused on teachers' classroom discourse and personal reflective journals, without delving into the rich linguistic data of teachers in social interactions. That means the research contexts have been relatively narrow and require further expansion.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study has been following specific research objectives, which are:

1. To explore the process and types of the development of the professional identity among China male EFL teachers in higher institutions.
2. To investigate the factors that affect the development of China male EFL teachers' professional identity.
3. To constructs a theoretical model of construction of professional identity among China male EFL teachers in higher institutions.

METODOLOGI

The qualitative approach is applied in this research. The method of the study is case study. Case studies are designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the context and what the person means. The interest lies in the process rather than the outcome, in the overall context rather than specific variables, and in discovery rather than proof seeking (Merriam, 1998). Overall, case study is an in-depth study of a particular individual, organization or event, designed to provide a detailed description and in-depth understanding

A multiple-case study design has both strengths and weaknesses compared to a single-case study design. The advantage is that the conclusions derived from multiple cases are often considered more convincing, and therefore the study as a whole is often considered to be more robust to scrutiny, while the disadvantage is that multiple case studies can take up so much of the research resources and practice. However, if the conditions and resources are available, a multiple case study design should be chosen over a single case study design (Yin, 2009). Therefore, in order to make the conclusions more convincing, a multiple case study design is appropriate for this study.

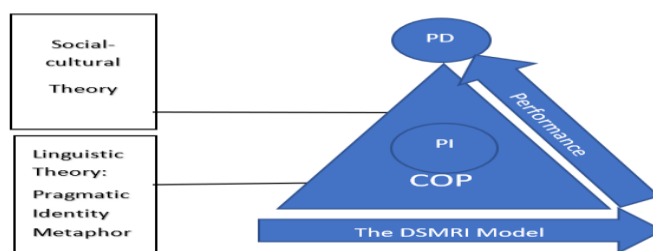
After synthesizing the literature, under the scaffolding of Social Cultural Theory (SCT), Linguistic Theory, several important related concepts namely COP, metaphor and Dynamic System Model of Role Identity (DSMRI) serve as the underpinnings in this study.

Given that social and cultural learning in collaborative practices is a form of situated learning that contributes to social, cognitive, and emotional development, Wenger (1998) suggests that community learning “alters who we are and what we can do,” making it an “identity experience.” Therefore, teacher professional community serves as a site for social learning, where teachers’ professional identities undergo development (Wenger, 2010).

The Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI) elucidates the development of teacher roles within a socio-cultural context. This study will borrow two major aspects of this theory to examine the formation and development of identity in three EFL teachers in China: Constructive Patterns and Overall Socio-Cultural Patterns.

Firstly, Constructive Patterns analyze factors such as context, collaboration, and self-efficacy. Secondly, Socio-Cultural Patterns explore the overall subjective meanings of teacher identity within a specific socio-cultural context (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). DSMRI integrates the strengths of both of these approaches (Kaplan et al., 2015). This study will examine the construction of teacher roles and the relationship between teacher professional development and the aforementioned factors from these perspectives.

By drawing on the two dimensions of DSMRI, this study does not only analyze its application in teacher identity but also applies it to teacher professional development, providing a new conceptual framework for teachers’ professional growth.



(Appendix A: The Theoretical Framework of EFL teachers' PI and PD)

Considering the nature of the required data, this study utilizes semi-structured interviews as the main instrument, and classroom observations, teacher logs, and other document analyses. The researcher observed teachers' performance in classroom activities related to the professional development of English teachers, as well as their reflections on classroom practices. The research objectives require the researcher to have a detailed understanding of participants' perceptions and construction of their professional identity, as well as their work achievements and professional development (including their training experiences and factors such as school policies influencing their profession).

The Participants

Three male EFL teachers from China universities were selected as the cases for this study. The researcher used classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and the collection of documentaries including teaching diaries to follow up the three samples and to analyze the whole process of their work in terms of their classroom teaching and extracurricular activities, so as to reflect their real status from an individual perspective.

All participants in this study have completed the government-mandated teacher training courses and obtained the Advanced Teacher Qualification Certificate. They are all experienced educators with rich teaching experience, expected to serve as insightful sources of information for this study. Therefore, they are qualified teachers capable of providing the richest information for this research.

These three teachers are respectively a lead teacher, a research-oriented teacher and a teaching-oriented teacher. Teacher A (TA), is the lead teacher of the English Department at Hebei Foreign Studies University. Teacher B (TB), is a professor and a member of the Language Association of Hebei Normal University. Teacher C (TC) is a teacher of Basic English Course at Hebei Academy of Fine Arts. The identity of the participants in this study is completely anonymous.

TA, male, 43 years old, is the Associate Professor of English School of Hebei Foreign Studies University. His research interests are phonetics and phonology. He has been engaged in English teaching, research and practice for many years, and has published many English research papers. Due to his outstanding performance in teaching, he has been repeatedly honored as an Excellent Teacher by the school principal. Moreover, he has earned the admiration and recognition of students who regard him as a master in his field.

TB, male, 61 years old, is a professor and doctoral supervisor at Hebei Normal University. He is a leading figure in academic circles at the university and serves as a committee member of the degree committee. His primary research areas include English and American literature, English-Chinese poetry translation and evaluation, and English language teaching. Additionally, he holds positions of responsibility in various academic and cultural organizations. He is a director of the Sino-American Comparative Culture Research Association, vice president of the Foreign Language Teaching Research Association of Hebei Province, executive director and director of the Academic Committee of the Science and Technology English Association of Hebei Province, executive director of the Translation Workers Association of Hebei Province, director of the Teacher Education Association of Hebei Province, vice chairman of the Editorial Committee of Secondary Professional Textbooks in Hebei Province, a standing committee member of the Hebei Youth Federation, and vice president of the Shijiazhuang Translation Workers Association.

TC, Male, 38 years old, is currently a lecturer at Hebei Academy of Fine Arts. He is a master's degree candidate and has been recognized as an outstanding contributor to ideological and political education in schools in Hebei Province. His primary research focus is on intercultural communication studies. He has published a total of 13 research papers and has participated in one provincial-level project and two departmental-level research projects. With ten years of teaching experience, is diligent and responsible in his work. Currently serving as the deputy director of the Foreign Language Research Office in the Department of General Course, he is known for his leadership qualities. Proficient in organizing various activities, he can effectively lead a team and inspire positive and proactive work attitudes.

The Data Analysis

The interview data were transcribed for further analysis. The data were analysed through the following phases:

The first phase was immersion. In this stage, the researcher read the data several times and took notes. The researcher reread the data meticulously and checked if any data went unnoticed based on the main categories. The researcher started by transcribing the interviews and rewriting the field notes. Since all participants are Chinese EFL teachers, the data are recorded in mixed languages, including Chinese and English. The researcher then filtered the data to extract information relevant to the research questions.

The second phase was reflection. This stage dealt with rereading the data, and then putting the data away for a while and then going through them again in case anything has been missed in the first stage.

The third phase was analysis. In this stage, the data were broken down into separated categories, and each category was given a separate name. Also, the similar categories were merged together. The data were coded based on the key terms used by participants which presented each category of role identity. The codification processes were done based on theoretical discussions such as Wright (1987), Wenger (1998), and Farrell (2011). Specifically, for the study, the researcher reviewed the data to identify various themes and issues that emerged from the study. These themes helped the researcher to categorize and label the data into different sections.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study analyzed the professional identity and the professional development of three English teachers in China's higher institutions. The constructs of the interviews included: identity development in their childhood, the stage of English learners, EFL teaching practitioners, and the stage of EFL teacher-researchers during their in-service studies. Through analyzing the qualitative data, this study has the following main findings:

First, there are common and different features in the process of their EFL teachers' professional identity development. Among the common features are: 1) The approaches of professional identity development of EFL teachers in colleges all conform to the natural developmental stages of teacher growth as distinguished by Steffy and Wolfe (1997), which distinguishes the natural developmental stages of teacher growth, new teachers - apprentice teachers - professional teachers - expert teachers, although the extension of the stages are slightly different. 2) All of them underwent an identity shift from teaching-practitioner to teacher-researcher, and teacher-learner (whether academic education, domestic and international study visits, or reflective learning in teaching practice).

Teacher learning (whether academic education, study visits, or reflective learning in practice) has played a key role in facilitating this transition. The different characteristics of these teachers are as follows: TA's professional identity development process: general English teacher to arts English teacher, from traditional teacher to modernized teacher, from a general teacher to a teacher leader; TB's professional identity development process: excellent EFL teacher as an experienced teacher after identity crisis - EFL teacher actively regaining his identity; TC's professional identity development process: college EFL teacher to EFL teacher as well as a researcher.

The professional development of college EFL teachers is categorized into three types of development:

Type 1, the Multiple Identity Conflict type. The main reason for this development pattern is the conflict between multiple identities faced in their professional development, such as teaching practitioners, teacher-researcher, ladder leader, and father, which has a limiting effect on their professional identity development.

Type 2, the Identity Crisis type. It is mainly due to the following reasons: the school reform policy has brought a lot of difficulties to EFL teachers in colleges and universities.

The main reason for this development pattern is the identity crisis brought by the school reform policy to college EFL teachers, such as: the school's job transfer policy has led to the loss of the participant's identity as an EFL teacher.

Type 3, the Identity Reconstruction type. The main reason for this development mode is that when EFL teachers in colleges and universities have bottlenecks in their career development, they are unable to satisfy with their identity as EFL teacher. They can find a new way out for their professional development in time, such as transforming

into an active researcher to get rid of teaching burnout and bottlenecks in scientific research development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the theories of social-cultural perspectives, this study takes teachers' professional identity development as the main theme of the study. The study summarizes the types of professional identity development of China higher institutions EFL teachers, discusses the influencing factors of professional identity development of the teachers, and constructs a theoretical model of professional identity development, which enriches the research field of EFL teachers' identity research and reflects the innovation of the research theme by providing a Male EFL teachers' PI and PD model for China higher institutions.

The implications of this study for educational reform in higher institutions in China include two aspects: 1) The institutions should create a reasonable institutional environment for the professional development of Male EFL teachers, and 2) the institutions should give EFL teachers more humanistic care.

As an EFL teacher, it is important to pay attention to the national policy at the macro level, and design one's career rationally. Secondly, it is also important to develop a sense of researcher identity and fully recognize that researcher identity is an important part of the professional identity of EFL teachers (Long & Huang, 2017), and that the other identity plays a key role in promoting teachers' professional development. Secondly, EFL teachers should actively adjust themselves to be lifelong learners. EFL teachers should dare to go out of their comfort zones and seek professional development opportunities outside their comfort zones, even though they may encounter difficulties and risks in going beyond it. They should also reflect on and renew their teaching practice and participate in teacher education programs home or abroad, or form teacher COP within their faculties or schools, and participate in learning and discussion activities in these communities. Teachers who are not in a position to do so in reality can also participate in online teacher learning communities for online learning. By doing this, they would strengthen the reflection on teaching practice and their own professional development, discover their own shortcomings in time and continuously conduct their professional learning.

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