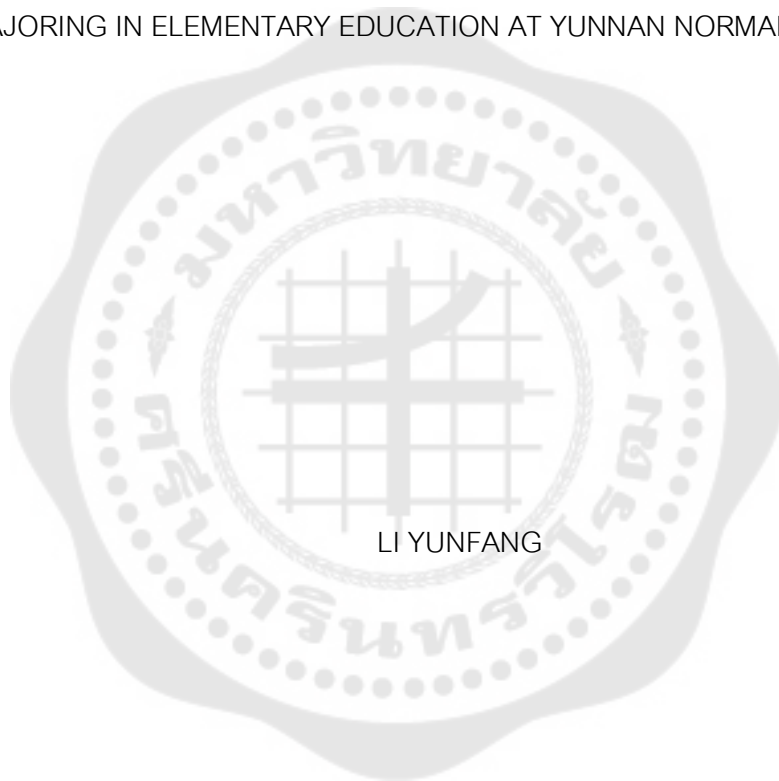




THE STUDY ON THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
MAJORING IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AT YUNNAN NORMAL UNIVERSITY



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THE THESIS TITLED

THE STUDY ON THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS MAJORING IN
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BY

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This study examines the professional identity of undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education at Yunnan Normal University in the context of educational reforms and the demand for qualified rural teachers. Using a mixed-methods approach with 290 questionnaires and 12 interviews, the findings reveal a moderately high level of professional identity, with emotional identity scoring highest, followed by cognitive and behavioral dimensions. Female students and those with higher self-rated academic performance showed stronger emotional and cognitive identities, while senior students demonstrated greater behavioral identity, which was influenced by the practicum. Regression analysis identified emotional identity as the strongest predictor. The study highlights the importance of practicum and mentorship in identity formation and recommends early practicum integration, emotional development programs, and institutionalized identity assessment to strengthen teacher education.

Keyword : Professional Identity, Elementary Education, Undergraduate Students, Yunnan Normal University, Teacher Education

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

In recent years, with the continuous advancement of China's basic education reform, the demand for high-quality primary school teachers has been increasing. To meet the needs of the “Double Reduction” policy and the national strategy of revitalizing rural education, many normal universities across the country have actively responded by establishing undergraduate programs in elementary education. Yunnan Province, as a multi-ethnic and geographically complex region in Southwest China, faces a particular shortage of qualified primary school teachers in rural and border areas. To address this issue, the Yunnan Provincial Department of Education has emphasized the importance of strengthening the training of elementary education professionals and improving the quality of teacher education through the “Implementation Plan for the Training and Supply of Teachers in Compulsory Education Schools (2021—2025)”. This policy highlights the importance of cultivating well-prepared undergraduate students who are committed to working in elementary education, especially in underdeveloped areas.

Within this context, teacher professional identity has become a key area of focus in educational research. A strong sense of professional identity is closely related to teachers' job commitment, instructional effectiveness, and long-term career development (Beijaard et al., 2004; Moore & Hofman, 2004). Professional identity is not an innate trait but is developed through a combination of personal experiences, social interactions, and educational training. For pre-service teachers, especially undergraduates majoring in elementary education, the formation of professional identity often occurs during the course of their teacher training, including coursework, field experiences, and reflective practices. However, many pre-service teachers experience identity confusion, lack of confidence, or low recognition of the teaching profession. These issues may hinder their development as committed and effective educators.

Although there has been growing interest in teacher identity research

internationally, in China, existing studies have primarily focused on in-service teachers, with relatively few studies exploring the professional identity of undergraduate students majoring in elementary education. In Yunnan, where the cultivation of high-quality rural teachers is a priority, it is particularly important to understand the psychological and professional development of pre-service teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how these students perceive the teaching profession, how their identity is shaped during training, and what factors influence this process. The present study will aim to fill this research gap by focusing on the professional identity of elementary education undergraduates at Yunnan Normal University.

Objectives of the Study

This study focuses on the professional identity of elementary education undergraduates at Yunnan Normal University. It holds significant value for educators seeking to understand the psychological state of these students and foster their positive and accurate professional identity as future teachers. Additionally, it provides essential guidance for undergraduates to better position and improve themselves. The specific objectives are as follows:

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

Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the current level of teacher professional identity among undergraduate students majoring in elementary education?

2. How does the level of professional preparation (including formal coursework and practicum experiences) relate to their teacher professional identity?

3. What individual or contextual factors significantly influence their teacher professional identity?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential contributions to both theory and practice in the field of teacher education.

From a theoretical perspective, this study will enrich the body of literature on teacher professional identity by focusing on a relatively under-researched group—undergraduate students majoring in elementary education. While most existing research emphasizes in-service teachers or graduate students, this study will highlight how identity formation begins during the early stages of teacher training, thereby expanding the understanding of teacher development as a continuous process (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Yuan & Lee, 2016).

Moreover, this study will draw upon classical identity theories such as Erikson's psychosocial development theory, Bandura's social cognitive theory, and Beijaard's model of professional identity to explore how cognition, emotion, and behavior interact in shaping the identity of pre-service teachers. These theoretical foundations will not only offer explanatory power but also serve as a framework for developing training strategies in teacher education programs.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study will have direct implications for teacher training institutions. First, by identifying the key factors influencing professional identity, the study will provide guidance for curriculum developers in designing more targeted and effective training modules. Second, the study will offer insights for teacher educators in addressing the emotional and motivational needs of students, thus improving retention and career satisfaction. Third, the results will serve as a reference for policymakers in Yunnan Province and other regions aiming to improve the recruitment, preparation, and long-term development of elementary school teachers, particularly in rural areas.

Ultimately, this study aims to enhance the quality of teacher education by fostering a stronger professional identity among future elementary teachers, thereby contributing to the broader goal of improving the overall quality of basic education in China.

Scope of the Study

1. Location of the Study

This study will be conducted at Yunnan Normal University, which is one of the leading teacher education institutions in Southwest China. The university offers a comprehensive undergraduate program in elementary education and serves as a key training base for primary school teachers in the province.

2. Research Population

The research population will consist of all full-time undergraduate students enrolled in the elementary education program at Yunnan Normal University. These students are distributed across four academic year levels and represent diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, place of origin, and career aspirations.

3. Sample

The study will aim to distribute questionnaires to the entire population of students in the program using the online platform “Wenjuanxing”. Participation will be voluntary and anonymous. The sample is expected to be representative of the target population in terms of demographic characteristics and academic experience. Sampling results and valid response rates will be reported after data collection.

Variables of the Study

This study will involve the following variables:

1. **Dependent Variable:** Teacher professional identity. This includes dimensions such as self-identity, professional recognition, emotional attitudes, and career preparation.

2. **Independent Variables:** These include grade level, gender, professional preparation (coursework and practicum), career values, and skill recognition

The interaction between these variables will be analyzed to determine how they collectively influence the professional identity of students.

Definition of Terms

Professional Identity: Refers to an individual's self-perception and emotional connection to their profession, including beliefs, values, and goals associated with their role as a teacher.

Professional Recognition: Indicates the students' understanding of the teaching profession, including its importance and societal value.

Career Values: The personal priorities and beliefs that influence one's career choice and professional aspirations.

Professional Preparation: The training process that includes coursework, practicum, internships, and other academic and field experiences designed to prepare individuals for a teaching career.

Elementary Education Undergraduate: A university student enrolled in a bachelor's degree program that prepares them to become primary school teachers.

Conceptual Framework

The research will be guided by a theoretical framework that integrates Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, Bandura's social cognitive theory, and Beijaard's three-dimensional model of teacher identity (cognition, emotion, and behavior). Based on these theoretical foundations, this study will examine how individual characteristics (such as gender and grade level) and contextual experiences (such as coursework and practicum) influence the formation of professional identity among elementary education undergraduates.

A conceptual model will be constructed to illustrate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The dependent variable — professional identity — will be evaluated through dimensions such as self-identity, emotional commitment, and professional preparedness. Independent variables will include demographic factors and academic experiences.

The framework will also be visualized in a structural diagram (Figure 1) that outlines the conceptual relationship between the study variables. This model will serve as the foundation for data collection, instrument design, and statistical analysis, ensuring coherence between theoretical assumptions and empirical investigation.

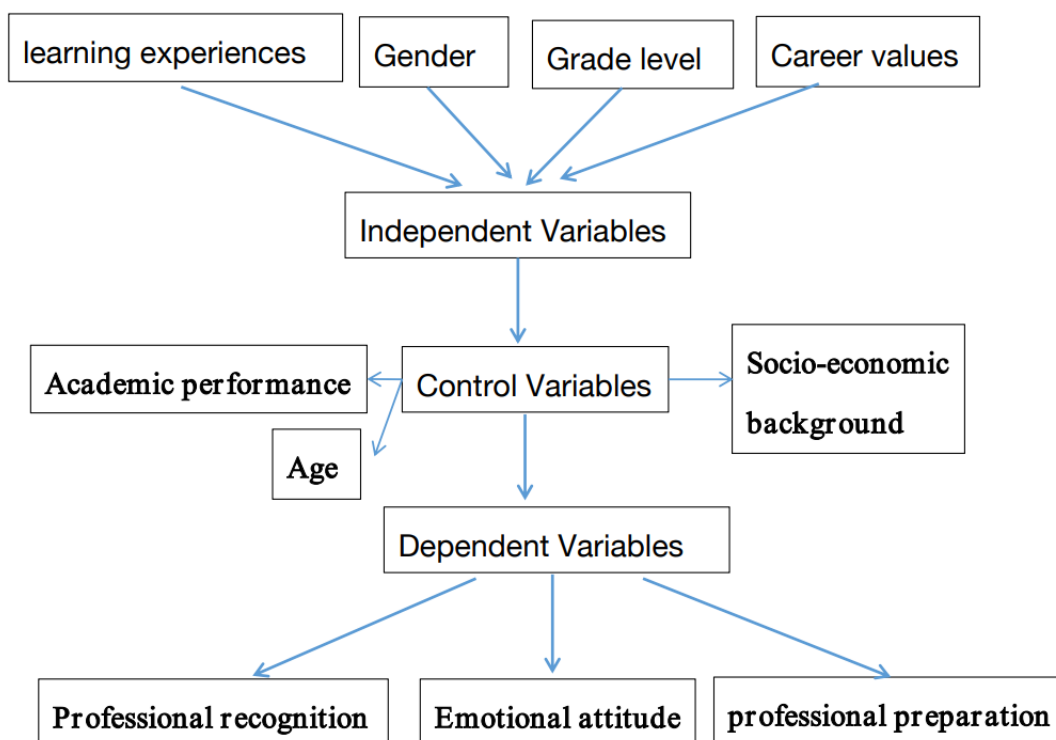


FIGURE 1 The Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the professional identity of undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education at Yunnan Normal University. The purpose of this review is to establish a solid theoretical and empirical foundation for the present study by examining key concepts, theoretical frameworks, and previous research findings related to teacher professional identity. The chapter first outlines the background of elementary education undergraduates at Yunnan Normal University, followed by a conceptual discussion of professional identity. It then introduces the major theoretical foundations underpinning this study and concludes with a review of related domestic and international studies, highlighting research gaps that inform the current investigation. Specifically, this chapter is organized into six main sections:

1. Background of the Elementary Education program at Yunnan Normal University
2. Concept and definition of professional identity
3. Developmental process and influencing factors of professional identity
4. Extended theoretical foundations
5. Review of related studies in China and abroad
6. Summary of the chapter.

Background of Elementary Education program at Yunnan Normal University

With the continuous deepening of China's basic education reform, cultivating a new generation of high-quality primary school teachers has become a central focus of both national and provincial educational strategies. Yunnan Province, characterized by its vast rural areas and rich ethnic diversity, has actively implemented policies to strengthen teacher education—particularly in elementary education—to address the shortage of qualified teachers in remote and minority regions.

As a key teacher-training institution in Southwest China, Yunnan Normal University (YNU) plays a leading role in implementing these educational reforms. In response to the national “Double Reduction” policy, the “Teacher Education Revitalization Action Plan (2018—2022)”(China, 2018), and the “Excellent Teacher Training Program 2.0”(China, 2020), YNU has established a comprehensive undergraduate program in Elementary Education aimed at preparing competent, committed, and socially responsible future teachers with strong pedagogical foundations and professional identity.

According to the “14th Five-Year Plan for Education Development in Yunnan Province (2021 — 2025)”(Education, 2021), one of the strategic objectives is to “strengthen the construction of teacher education, expand the scale of elementary education majors, and promote the professionalization of rural teachers.” This policy framework emphasizes the importance of fostering a qualified and stable elementary teaching force that can meet the educational needs of diverse regions across the province.

Within this context, the Elementary Education undergraduate program at Yunnan Normal University has developed rapidly in both scale and quality. It features a curriculum that integrates pedagogical theory, subject knowledge, and field-based practicum experiences. Students are required to complete internships in both urban and rural schools, which provide authentic contexts for developing their teaching competence and professional identity.

In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the cultivation of teacher professionalism and the construction of teacher professional identity. However, most existing studies in China have focused on in-service teachers, while less attention has been paid to undergraduate students who are still in the process of forming their professional identity. Given their transitional stage between being students and future teachers, it is essential to explore how these undergraduates perceive, internalize, and construct their professional identity during their training at Yunnan Normal University. This background provides the institutional and policy context that underpins the present

study.

Concept and definition of professional identity

Professional identity refers to an individual's self-concept that emerges from their perceptions, values, beliefs, and emotional attachment to a particular profession. For prospective teachers, professional identity encompasses their understanding of the teaching role, motivation to teach, and readiness to undertake professional responsibilities. It reflects how individuals perceive themselves as "teachers" within specific educational and social contexts.

Beijaard et al. (2004) conceptualized teacher professional identity as comprising three interrelated dimensions: subject matter expertise (cognition), pedagogical competence (behavior), and professional self-understanding (emotion). This tripartite model has been widely recognized in teacher education research and provides a structural foundation for examining pre-service teachers' identity formation.

Beyond this model, several scholars have extended the conceptualization of professional identity from different theoretical perspectives. Gee (2000) viewed identity as a way of being recognized as a certain kind of person within a particular social context, emphasizing the interaction between the individual and the environment. Wenger (1998) proposed that professional identity is constructed through participation in a "community of practice," where learning and belonging shape individuals' sense of professional self. Kelchtermans (2009) further highlighted the narrative nature of teacher identity, suggesting that it develops through the continuous reconstruction of "career stories" based on past experiences, current contexts, and future aspirations.

From a psychological perspective, Erikson (1968) psychosocial development theory underscores that identity formation is a central developmental task during adolescence and early adulthood, making it highly relevant for undergraduate education students. Bandura (1986) social cognitive theory adds a dynamic component by emphasizing self-efficacy and observational learning — suggesting that students' confidence and experiences with role models strongly influence their sense of professional identity.

In summary, teacher professional identity is a dynamic, multidimensional, and socially constructed process that integrates cognition, emotion, and behavior. In this study, professional identity will be understood as the interaction of self-identification with the teaching profession, emotional commitment to teaching, and readiness for professional practice.

Developmental process and influencing factors of professional identity

Teacher professional identity develops through an ongoing, dynamic process shaped by the interaction of personal, institutional, and sociocultural factors. Rather than a fixed status, it is a continually reconstructed understanding of “who I am as a teacher”(Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). For pre-service teachers, especially undergraduates majoring in Elementary Education, this process unfolds as they progress from abstract career aspiration to practical engagement in real classrooms.

1. Developmental Process of Professional Identity

Scholars generally describe the development of teacher identity as a stage-based and recursive process. Feiman-Nemser (2001) and Korthagen (2004) argue that pre-service teachers move through three overlapping stages: (1) initial idealization of the profession, (2) experiential adjustment through coursework and practicum, and (3) internalization and commitment. At Yunnan Normal University, this trajectory is visible in students' participation in foundational pedagogy courses, teaching internships, and professional reflection seminars.

During these phases, reflection plays a crucial role. Kelchtermans (2009) emphasizes that identity is continually reconstructed through personal “career stories,” while Lasky (2005) notes that reflection enables teachers to negotiate tensions between personal beliefs and institutional expectations. Therefore, the development of professional identity involves both cognitive understanding and emotional acceptance of the teacher role.

2. Influencing Factors of Professional Identity

The factors influencing teacher professional identity can be broadly categorized into personal, institutional, and sociocultural dimensions.

Personal factors include gender, personality, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation. Bandura (1986) social cognitive theory suggests that individuals with higher self-efficacy are more confident in performing teaching tasks and therefore develop stronger professional identity. Research by Hong (2010) and Zhao (2021) also demonstrates that pre-service teachers' emotional intelligence and career values significantly shape their identification with the teaching profession.

Institutional factors refer to curriculum design, practicum quality, mentorship, and peer collaboration. Wenger (1998) highlights that identity is formed through participation in communities of practice. When universities provide supportive learning communities and constructive feedback, students develop a greater sense of belonging and professional confidence. Huang (2019) further found that authentic practicum experiences are the strongest predictor of professional identity among elementary education majors.

Sociocultural factors encompass policy environments, social recognition of teachers, and cultural expectations. In China, the national initiatives such as the "Double Reduction Policy" and the "Excellent Teacher Training Program 2.0" elevate the professional status of teachers, indirectly strengthening students' identity with the teaching role (Li & Wang, 2022). Conversely, limited societal respect or financial reward can weaken students' commitment to teaching careers (Day & Gu, 2014).

3. Summary

In summary, the development of professional identity among pre-service teachers is a continuous and context-dependent process influenced by multiple internal and external factors. Understanding these influences helps teacher-training institutions design more targeted interventions—such as reflective practice, mentorship, and emotional support—to foster a stronger sense of teacher identity among elementary education undergraduates.

Extended theoretical foundations

The formation of teacher professional identity is grounded in multiple theoretical perspectives that span psychological, social, and educational dimensions. This study adopts an integrative framework that combines both classical and contemporary theories to explain how individual and contextual factors influence the development of professional identity among undergraduate elementary education students. These theoretical lenses collectively clarify how cognition, emotion, behavior, and social interaction intersect in shaping teacher identity.

1. Erikson's Psychosocial Theory

Erikson's stages of identity development emphasize that identity is constructed through the resolution of psychosocial conflicts during adolescence and early adulthood. For university students, the decision to pursue teaching as a career and the internalization of the teacher role align with Erikson's concept of identity versus role confusion. This theory supports the examination of students' self-perception (self-identity) as a psychological foundation for professional identity.

2. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1986) highlights the role of self-efficacy in professional learning and development. Within this framework, students' confidence in their teaching abilities (professional preparation) and the influence of mentors and role models during practicum experiences are key determinants of professional identity formation. This theory underscores the interaction between cognition, motivation, and environmental feedback.

3. Beijaard's Three-Dimensional Model

Beijaard et al. (2004) conceptualize teacher professional identity as a dynamic integration of three dimensions—cognition, emotion, and behavior. These correspond directly to the design of this study's questionnaire:

Cognition → Professional recognition

Emotion → Emotional attitudes

Behavior → Professional preparation

This model operationalizes professional identity as a measurable construct, guiding both instrument design and data interpretation.

4. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1992) explains how multiple environmental systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem) jointly influence individual development. In this study, students' demographic backgrounds—such as grade level, gender, and practicum context—are treated as ecological factors that may affect professional identity. This theory supports hypotheses regarding demographic and contextual variations in identity development.

5. Wenger's Community of Practice Theory

Wenger (1998) argues that identity is socially constructed through participation and engagement in a community of practice. Within teacher education, professional identity emerges as pre-service teachers interact with peers, mentors, and supervisors, negotiating meaning and belonging within their professional community. This theory emphasizes that identity development is not merely individual but relational and contextually grounded.

6. Kelchtermans' Narrative Self Theory

Kelchtermans (2009) extends the understanding of teacher identity through the narrative approach, proposing that teachers continuously reconstruct their professional selves through reflection and personal "career stories." For pre-service teachers, storytelling and reflective writing serve as mechanisms to connect personal values with professional expectations, thereby reinforcing self-understanding and commitment.

Collectively, these theories form a comprehensive analytical framework. Erikson and Bandura explain how individual cognition and motivation evolve; Beijaard links these internal processes with observable professional behaviors; Bronfenbrenner, Wenger, and Kelchtermans highlight the social and contextual dimensions through which professional identity is enacted and sustained. This integration provides both conceptual coherence and empirical guidance for the present study.

TABLE 1 Mapping of Theoretical Foundations to Research Variables

Theoretical Framework	Core Concepts	Corresponding Variable(s)
Erikson's Psychosocial Theory	Identity Formation	Self-identity
Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory	Self-efficacy, Observational Learning	Professional Preparation
Beijaard's Identity Model	Cognition, Emotion, Behavior	Identity Dimensions (Recognition, Emotion)
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory	Contextual Influence	Grade Level, Gender, School Context
Wenger's Community of Practice Theory	Participation, social learning, belonging	Collaborative experience, professional community
Kelchtermans' Narrative Self Theory	Reflection, self-story, meaning-making	Career perception, emotional engagement

Review of related studies in China and abroad

Professional identity, as a complex and dynamic process, has garnered significant attention from scholars both domestically and internationally. Research in this field varies in focus, with domestic studies emphasizing practical application in education and international studies delving into theoretical frameworks and dynamic characteristics. This section summarizes the major findings from domestic and international research, offering valuable insights into professional identity, particularly teacher professional identity.

1. Domestic Research

In recent years, domestic scholars have conducted systematic research on the definition, influencing factors, and strategies for enhancing professional identity. These studies span multiple educational domains, including higher education, secondary education, elementary education, and vocational education. Scholars generally regard professional identity as a core driving force for teachers' professional development, closely linked to teaching attitudes, job satisfaction, and educational quality.

Zhang (2015) emphasized that "professional identity is a critical motivation for teachers' self-realization, significantly influencing teaching engagement and educational outcomes." Research has revealed that professional identity not only determines teachers' emotional attachment to their profession but also directly impacts the depth and breadth of their professional growth (Li & Wang, 2022). Li (2016) highlighted that professional identity profoundly affects teachers' time and effort dedicated to education, laying the foundation for role recognition and long-term career development.

Domestic research also identifies the multidimensional factors influencing professional identity, including individuals' educational background, career values, social support systems, and professional environments (Wang, 2018). Huang (2019) found that teaching internships and practical experiences are critical for shaping professional identity, enabling students to deeply understand the value and social

significance of their profession. Additionally, Ma (2020) concluded that the quality of pre-service education, particularly systematic internships and teaching practicums, plays a decisive role in fostering professional identity among education students.

In recent years, Chinese scholars have paid increasing attention to the professional identity of pre-service and undergraduate teacher education students. Studies by Feng (2020), Zhao (2021), and Wang (2023) revealed that factors such as practicum experiences, perceived social status of teachers, and professional efficacy significantly affect the professional identity of elementary education undergraduates. Moreover, the integration of emotional support and reflective activities in teacher-training curricula has been proven effective in strengthening students' sense of belonging to the teaching profession (Liu, 2022). These findings indicate a growing emphasis on linking emotional, cognitive, and practical components in teacher education.

To enhance professional identity, domestic researchers have proposed several actionable strategies. Li (2018) suggested optimizing curriculum design and increasing practical components to boost students' emotional attachment to the teaching profession. Zhou (2019) emphasized the importance of emotional guidance, stating that positive emotional education helps students find a sense of belonging and achievement in their professional roles. Han (2021) further recommended that universities provide career planning services and psychological support, build supportive learning environments, and guide students in developing clear career paths. These findings offer theoretical and practical guidance for cultivating professional identity among elementary education undergraduates.

2. Abroad Research

International scholars place greater emphasis on theoretical exploration and the dynamic nature of professional identity, viewing it as a multidimensional and progressive construction process. Blin (1997) argued that the formation of professional identity is heavily influenced by vocational contexts, highlighting the importance of the professional environment in fostering a sense of identity. Coldron and Smith (1999) further pointed out that professional identity is a dynamic process shaped by both role

transitions and external contexts. For example, teachers' understanding and recognition of their roles may vary significantly across different career stages, with the content and depth of professional identity evolving accordingly.

In exploring the relationship between professional identity and practice, Watson (2000) proposed that professional identity is constructed through ongoing reflection and practice within professional environments. He argued that the core of professional identity lies in individuals' emotional investment and sense of social responsibility, which directly influence their job performance and satisfaction. Gee and Crawford (2000) supplemented this by emphasizing the close connection between professional identity and social contexts, noting that individuals adjust their professional identity based on societal expectations and environmental changes. Mishler (1999) likened professional identity to a "symphony of voices," suggesting that it comprises multiple sub-identities whose coordination directly affects the stability of professional identity.

Teacher professional identity is a prominent focus in international research, with scholars examining its essence and formation process from historical, social, cultural, and psychological perspectives. Cooper & Olson (1996) argued that teacher professional identity is composed of role cognition, professional attitudes, and emotional experiences. Beijaard et al. (2004) found that early-career teachers tend to identify more with the roles of subject and teaching experts, while identification as educational experts requires extended practical experience. Additionally, Mawhinney and Xu (1997) concluded that teacher professional identity develops gradually, requiring continuous engagement in skill enhancement and interaction with educational practices.

International research has also delved into the impact of professional identity on teachers' career development. Moore and Hofman (2004) demonstrated a positive correlation between professional identity and job satisfaction, noting that higher professional identity helps alleviate work-related stress and enhances job happiness. Gaziel (1999) further revealed that improving professional identity significantly reduces teachers' turnover intentions, ensuring career stability.

More recent international research (Beijaard et al., 2020; Day & Kington, 2021; Flores, 2020) continues to explore teacher professional identity as a dynamic construct influenced by policy reforms, emotional resilience, and intercultural contexts. Studies on pre-service teachers in Finland, Australia, and Singapore (Chong & Ho, 2021; Yuan & Lee, 2020) highlight that mentoring, practicum reflection, and policy expectations jointly shape professional identity. These studies reinforce the notion that professional identity is a product of both personal agency and institutional culture.

Finally, narrative studies provide a unique perspective in international research on professional identity. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) emphasized that teacher professional identity is constructed through narratives and reflective practices, where emotional experiences and role positioning in teaching shape professional identity. Brooke (2004), through case studies, described the transition of teachers from "instructors" to "educators," highlighting that professional identity results from the interplay of vocational skills, emotional investment, and social environments.

The review of literature reveals a clear evolution from conceptual and theoretical exploration toward more empirical investigations focusing on teacher training and identity development at the undergraduate level.

A comparison of domestic and international research reveals complementary emphases. Domestic scholars focus on the practical application of professional identity in educational settings, proposing a range of actionable strategies for its cultivation. In contrast, international studies explore the dynamic and multidimensional construction of professional identity, making significant theoretical contributions. Both perspectives underline that professional identity is a complex and evolving process, intricately linked to individuals' educational backgrounds, practical experiences, and socio-cultural environments.

However, research specifically targeting the professional identity of elementary education undergraduates remains limited. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the current status and influencing factors of professional identity among

elementary education undergraduates. It seeks to provide valuable insights for educational practice and propose feasible strategies to enhance professional identity.

Summary of the chapter

This chapter reviewed the theoretical and empirical foundations related to the professional identity of undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education. It synthesized key concepts, theories, and previous studies to establish the background and rationale for this research.

The first section introduced the background of the Elementary Education program at Yunnan Normal University, illustrating how national and provincial educational reforms—such as the Teacher Education Revitalization Action Plan (2018–2022) and the Excellent Teacher Training Program 2.0—have emphasized the cultivation of professional identity among pre-service teachers. The second section clarified the concept of professional identity, identifying it as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognition, emotion, and behavior. It also incorporated broader theoretical perspectives, including the social, narrative, and community-based dimensions proposed by Gee (2000), Wenger (1998), and Kelchtermans (2009). (Gee, 2000)

The third section discussed the developmental process and influencing factors of teacher professional identity, categorizing them into personal, institutional, and sociocultural dimensions. The fourth section extended the theoretical foundations by integrating classical frameworks—Erikson's psychosocial theory, Bandura's social cognitive theory, Beijaard's identity model, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory—with contemporary approaches such as Wenger's community of practice and Kelchtermans' narrative self theory. These models collectively provided the conceptual structure supporting this study.

The fifth section reviewed domestic and international research on professional identity. Domestic studies have increasingly emphasized the practical strategies and contextual factors that enhance teacher professional identity, while international

research has explored its dynamic and context-dependent nature, focusing on emotional engagement, reflection, and policy influence. Recent studies (2019–2024) indicate a growing scholarly interest in pre-service teachers' professional identity and a shift toward empirical, emotion-based, and intercultural analyses.

Despite extensive literature, there remains a research gap concerning the professional identity of undergraduate elementary education students in China, particularly regarding the interaction between emotional commitment, cognitive understanding, and behavioral readiness. Previous studies have either focused on in-service teachers or lacked regional specificity. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to examine the current status and influencing factors of professional identity among elementary education undergraduates at Yunnan Normal University through a mixed-methods approach.

Therefore, the following chapter (Chapter 3) outlines the research design, including the theoretical framework, research questions, variables, population and sampling, data collection tools, and data analysis procedures that operationalize the constructs reviewed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study will adopt a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques to explore the professional identity of undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education at Yunnan Normal University. This approach will allow for a comprehensive investigation of students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral perspectives regarding the teaching profession.

The study will be conducted as a case study focusing on Yunnan Normal University. Structured questionnaires and open-ended questions will serve as the primary data collection tools. The design of the questionnaire will be based on existing theories of professional identity and teacher development. The instrument will include both closed-ended and open-ended questions and will be finalized after expert review and pilot testing. The content of the questionnaire will cover basic demographic information, professional identity, career values, skill recognition, emotional attitudes, and professional preparation. These components will enable a systematic assessment of students' current professional identity and its potential influencing factors.

The following hypotheses will guide this research:

H1: Undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education will demonstrate a moderately high level of teacher professional identity.

H2: Professional preparation (including coursework and teaching practicum) will show a significant positive correlation with professional identity.

H3: Practicum experience will have a greater positive influence on professional identity than theoretical coursework.

H4: Individual variables such as gender, grade level, career values, and skill recognition will significantly impact professional identity.

H5: There will be significant differences in professional identity across different academic years, with senior students demonstrating a higher level of identity.

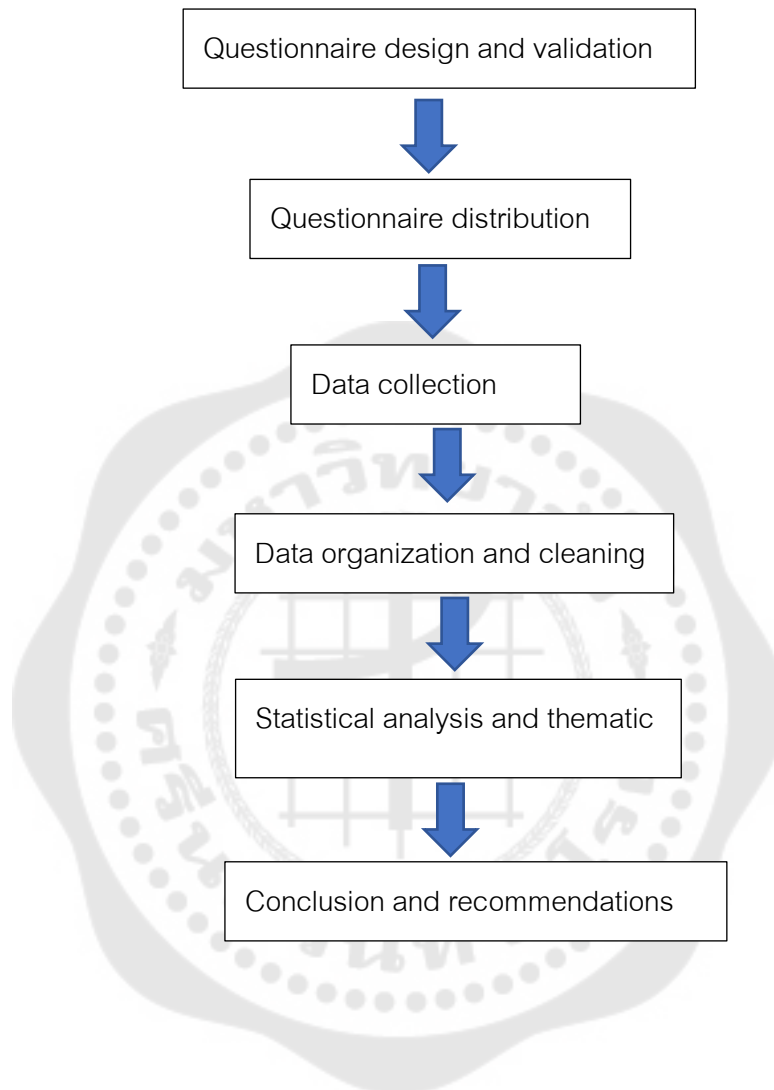


FIGURE 2 Research Process of the Study

Population and Sample

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

To ensure comprehensive coverage and representativeness, the researcher will employ a cluster random sampling strategy to distribute the questionnaire to the entire cohort. Variables such as gender, academic year, and regional background will be

considered to allow analysis of group differences in professional identity development. The questionnaire will be administered through the online platform “Wenjuanxing,” ensuring accessibility and data security.

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

Research Instruments

This study will employ a self-designed structured questionnaire as the core instrument. The questionnaire includes both closed-ended and open-ended questions and is developed based on established theories and prior research. It will be refined through expert evaluation and a pilot study.

1. Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire will consist of two main sections:

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

Section 2: Professional identity scale. Although the questionnaire was originally organized into six thematic categories (as shown in Table 2), only Items 1–23 were designed as 5-point Likert-scale questions suitable for statistical reliability and regression analysis. These items were regrouped into three core dimensions — Cognition, Emotion, and Behavior—based on prior literature and theoretical models of teacher professional identity, which conceptualize it as comprising three core dimensions: Cognition, Emotion, and Behavior. This restructuring ensures statistical clarity and improves the internal consistency reliability of the scale.

TABLE 2 Dimensions and Corresponding Items

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

Although the initial questionnaire consisted of 31 items grouped into six specific dimensions—namely Self-Identity (Items 1–4), Professional Identity with the Major (Items 5–11), Elementary Teacher Identity (Items 12–16), Emotional Attitude Toward the Profession (Items 17–19), Professional Preparation (Items 20–23), and Career Values and Perspectives (Items 24–31)—only the first 23 items adopted a 5-point Likert scale and were suitable for statistical analysis.

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

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

2. Scoring and Measurement

Items 1–23 will adopt a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores will indicate a stronger alignment with the corresponding identity dimension.

TABLE 3 Five-point Likert Scale

Scale	Attitude	Mean Range
5	Strongly agree	4.21-5.00
4	Agree	3.41-4.20
3	Neutral	2.61-3.40
2	Disagree	1.81-2.60
1	Strongly disagree	1.00-1.80

The reliability of the scale will be tested using Cronbach's Alpha during the pilot study. Preliminary results indicate a high internal consistency, with an alpha coefficient of 0.85. Only Items 1–23 were included in the Cronbach's Alpha calculation, as Items 24–31 were non-Likert (multiple-choice or open-ended) and thus not suitable for internal consistency testing.

TABLE 4 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Standards

Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Level	Interpretation
0.81–1.00	Very High Reliability	Excellent Internal Consistency
0.61–0.80	High Reliability	Good
0.41–0.60	Moderate Reliability	Acceptable
0.21–0.40	Low Reliability	Questionable
0.00–0.20	Very Low Reliability	Poor

3. Open-Ended Questions (Questions 24–31):

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

Understanding of the teaching profession and motivations.

Evaluation of elementary education curriculum.

Experiences from internships and career planning.

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

Data Collection

This study will collect both quantitative and qualitative data through an online questionnaire distributed via the Wenjuanxing platform. The data collection process will include the following steps:

1. Institutional Approval and Coordination: The researcher will obtain formal permission from the Faculty of Education at Yunnan Normal University and coordinate with course instructors to facilitate access to participants.

2. Participant Briefing and Informed Consent: Participants will be provided with detailed information about the study's objectives, procedures, confidentiality

protocols, and their rights to voluntarily participate or withdraw. Informed consent will be obtained before the distribution of the questionnaire.

3. Distribution of the Questionnaire: A secure online link will be shared with all undergraduate students enrolled in the Elementary Education program via class communication channels. The questionnaire will include both closed-ended and open-ended items.

4. Instructions and Clarification: Clear written instructions will accompany the questionnaire to ensure proper understanding of the questions. Contact information will be provided in case participants require clarification.

5. Data Screening and Preparation: Upon submission, the collected data will be screened for completeness, logical consistency, and any missing or invalid responses. Only valid responses will be retained for analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical techniques including frequency (f), percentage (%), mean (\bar{x}), and standard deviation (SD) will be used to summarize participants' responses across the dimensions of professional identity. See TABLE 5 for an overview of the analytical techniques aligned with each research question.

1. Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive statistical methods including frequency (f), percentage (%), mean (\bar{x}), and standard deviation (SD) will be used to summarize participants' responses across the three dimensions of professional identity (Cognition, Emotion, and Behavior), reclassified from the original six content areas. These analyses will provide an overview of the general trends and average levels of identity reported by students. See TABLE 5 for an overview of the analytical methods corresponding to each research question. For the purposes of data analysis, the six thematic components were reclassified into three broader dimensions — cognition, emotion, and behavior — following established theoretical frameworks of professional identity, which typically conceptualize it as comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components.

TABLE 5 Summary of Analysis for Research Questions

Research Question	Method of Analysis
RQ1: Current level of identity	Mean, SD, Frequency, Percentage
RQ2: Differences by year	One-way ANOVA
RQ3: Differences by gender	Independent Samples t-test
RQ4: Differences by academic performance	One-way ANOVA

In addition, one-way ANOVA will be used to examine whether students with different levels of self-rated academic performance show significant differences in professional identity scores.

Inferential Statistics:

To explore the relationships and differences among variables:

One-way ANOVA will be conducted to examine whether students at different grade levels exhibit statistically significant differences in professional identity.

Independent samples t-tests will be used to determine if there are significant differences in identity scores based on gender.

Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis will further investigate the predictive relationships among professional preparation, emotional attitude, and professional identity levels.

These statistical tests will allow the researcher to assess both the overall trends and specific group-based variations in professional identity.

2. Qualitative Analysis

Responses to the open-ended questions (Items 24–31) will be subjected to thematic analysis using coding procedures. Recurring patterns and meaningful statements will be identified and categorized under key themes, such as:

Teaching Motivation

Perceptions of the Value of Teaching

Curriculum Satisfaction

Challenges Encountered in Practicum

These qualitative insights will provide deeper and richer perspectives on students' beliefs, emotions, and expectations regarding their professional journey. They will also help to triangulate the findings from the quantitative analysis, enhancing the validity and comprehensiveness of the research.

3. Validity Control Measures

To ensure the rigor and reliability of the study, the following strategies will be implemented:

The questionnaire will undergo pilot testing to check for clarity and consistency of items.

Expert judgment will be sought to confirm the content relevance of the instrument.

All responses will be collected under standardized conditions, with instructions clearly communicated to participants.

Open-ended responses will be coded by two independent raters, and intercoder reliability will be calculated to reduce subjectivity.

This integrated mixed-methods approach, combining robust statistical analysis with rich qualitative feedback, is expected to yield a reliable and comprehensive understanding of professional identity among undergraduate students majoring in elementary education at Yunnan Normal University.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This chapter presents the analysis based on the actual data collected from 290 undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education at Yunnan Normal University. Following the adopted mixed-methods approach, this chapter integrates quantitative findings from questionnaire responses and qualitative insights from interviews. All findings are organized into the three core dimensions of professional identity—cognition, emotion, and behavior—based on the 23 Likert-scale items analyzed in this study.

Demographic Profile of Respondents and Questionnaire Reliability Analysis

1 Basic Information of Respondents

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

In addition to gender and grade level, students were also asked to self-rate their academic performance using a 5-point Likert scale. For analysis purposes, responses were categorized into three groups: Excellent, Good, and Average or Below. The demographic distribution is shown in TABLE 6.

TABLE 6 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 290)

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

TABLE 6 (continued)

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

The sample reflects a well-balanced distribution in terms of grade levels and includes a higher proportion of female participants, consistent with the gender ratio often seen in teacher education programs. These basic characteristics support the representativeness of the data collected.

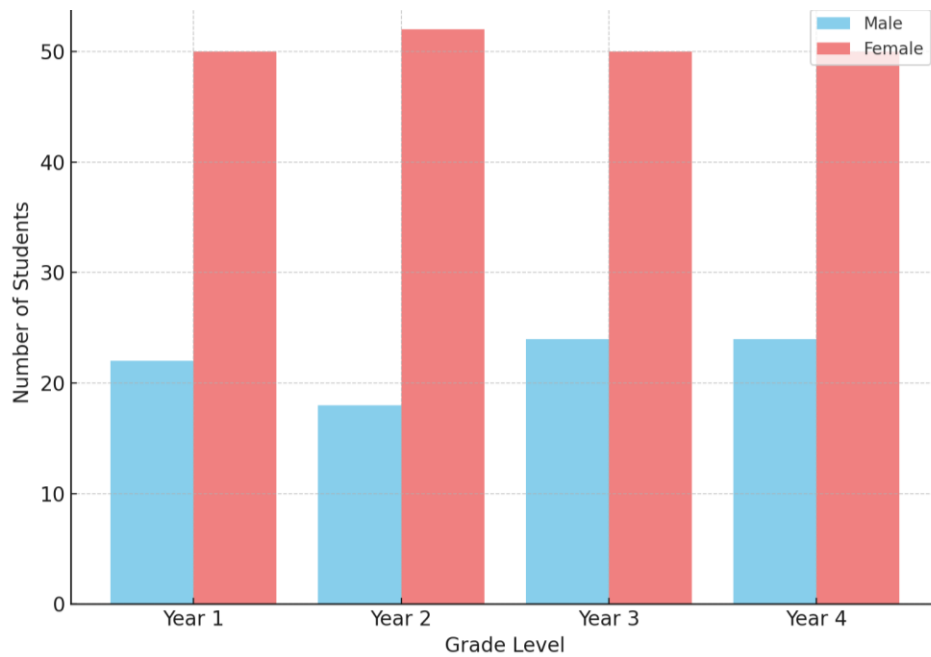


FIGURE 3 Gender and Grade Distribution of Respondents

FIGURE 3 presents the graphical distribution of gender and grade level among respondents. The visual clearly reflects the dominance of female participants and the even distribution of students across four academic years.

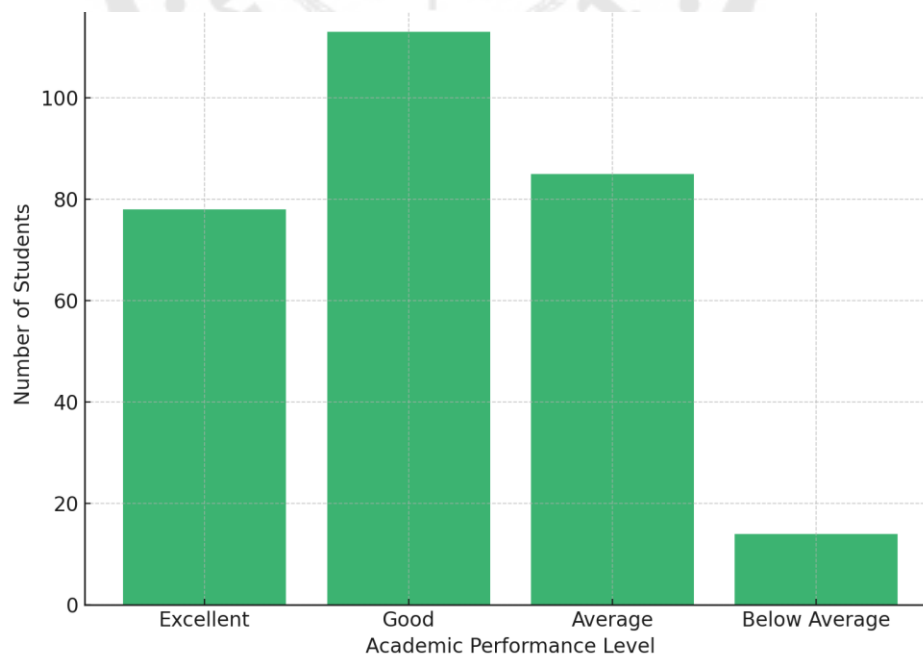


FIGURE 4 Frequency Distribution of Self-rated Academic Performance

FIGURE 4 shows the frequency distribution of self-rated academic performance, indicating that the majority of students perceive themselves to have good or excellent academic standing.

2. Questionnaire Reliability Analysis

In order to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire used in this study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated for each of the three dimensions of professional identity as well as for the entire scale. The results are presented in TABLE 7.

TABLE 7 Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Professional Cognition	9	0.849
Professional Emotion	9	0.837
Professional Behavior	5	0.832
Total Scale	23	0.871

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

3. Structural Validity of the Questionnaire

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine the construct validity of the questionnaire. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation revealed three distinct factors corresponding to the dimensions of cognition, emotion, and behavior. Each item loaded strongly on its intended factor (factor loading > 0.60), and no significant cross-loadings were found. TABLE 8 summarizes the factor structure.

TABLE 8 Factor Loadings from Exploratory Factor Analysis (Excerpt of the top 9 items with highest loadings per dimension)

Item No.	Dimension	Factor Loading
Item 3	Professional Cognition	0.812
Item 6	Professional Cognition	0.793
Item 20	Professional Cognition	0.802
Item 9	Professional Emotion	0.805
Item 12	Professional Emotion	0.790
Item 14	Professional Emotion	0.769
Item 7	Professional Cognition	0.771
Item 21	Professional Behavior	0.785
Item 22	Professional Behavior	0.767

These results provide strong evidence that the questionnaire items correspond to the theoretical dimensions and possess robust structural validity.

4. Sample Visualization Charts

To enhance clarity and understanding of the demographic data, visual representations have been included as FIGURE 3 and FIGURE 4.

FIGURE 3: Gender and Grade Level Distribution (Bar Chart) FIGURE 4: Self-rated Academic Performance Distribution (Pie Chart)

These figures help to illustrate the composition and diversity of the research sample and provide visual confirmation of the demographic trends described above.

[Note: Figures to be inserted in final formatting stage]

This section establishes the reliability and representativeness of the research sample and validates the measurement instrument used. The following sections will delve into the specific results and statistical analysis based on the collected data.

Overall Level of Professional Identity and Item-Level Descriptive Analysis

1. General Average Scores

Based on the data collected from 290 valid responses, the overall level of professional identity among undergraduate students was found to be moderately high. The mean score across all 23 items was $M = 3.96$, with a standard deviation of $SD = 0.64$. This indicates that most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements expressing professional identification with teaching.

TABLE 9 displays the overall mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values of the total professional identity score.

TABLE 9 Descriptive Statistics of Total Professional Identity (Based on 23 Likert-scale items)

Statistic	Value
Mean	3.96
Standard Deviation	0.64
Minimum	2.22
Maximum	4.89

The data demonstrate that while most students report relatively strong professional identity, individual variation exists.

2. Item Mean Analysis

Item-level mean scores offer a deeper look into specific beliefs and attitudes. TABLE 10 presents the mean scores for each of the 23 Likert-scale items, sorted by dimension.

TABLE 10 Item-Level Mean Scores by Dimension

Item No.	Item Description (Simplified)	Mean	SD	Dimension
1	I understand the role of a teacher.	4.08	0.66	Cognition
2	I am familiar with education policies.	3.89	0.68	Cognition
...
17	You believe that being a teacher is an enjoyable job.	4.18	0.61	Emotion
18	You really like the profession of elementary school teaching.	4.11	0.67	Emotion
21	I feel fully ready for real classroom teaching.	3.52	0.78	Behavior
22	I am confident managing a classroom.	3.60	0.72	Behavior

As shown, the highest scoring item was related to teachers' contribution to society (Item 8, $M = 4.32$), while the lowest scoring item was Item 23 ($M = 3.52$), which relates to perceived readiness for actual classroom teaching.

3. Distribution Trends by Mean Scores

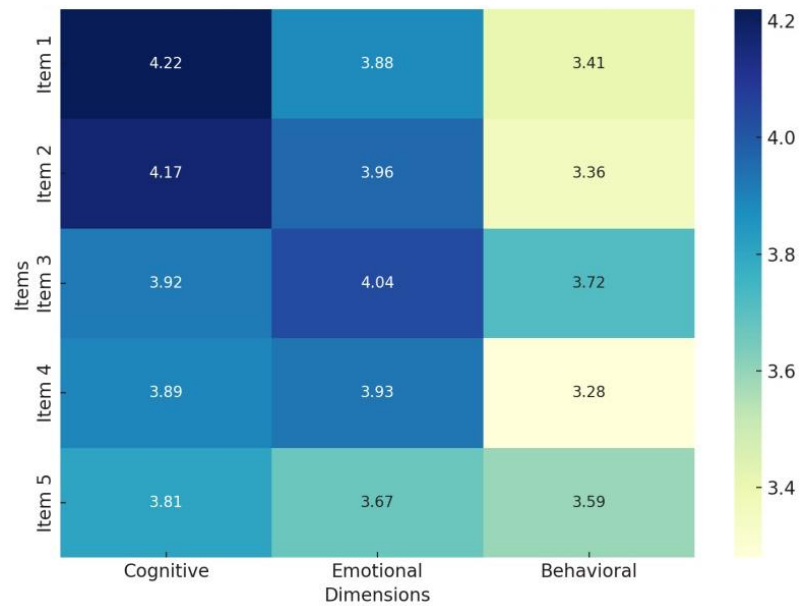


FIGURE 5 Average Scores of Three Dimensions (Heatmap)

To further visualize the response pattern, FIGURE 5 presents a heatmap illustrating the mean scores of all items categorized by dimension. The color intensity reflects the relative strength of agreement among participants.

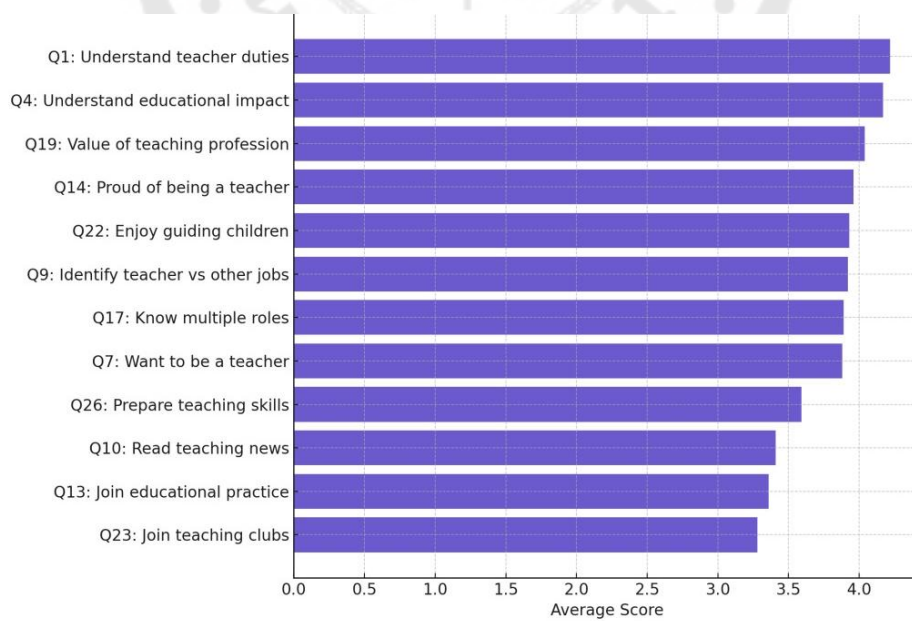


FIGURE 6 Item Mean Scores (Descending Order)

FIGURE 6 ranks all 23 items from highest to lowest mean scores, showing that items associated with emotional and cognitive dimensions generally received higher scores than behavioral ones.

These findings suggest that while students exhibit strong professional recognition and emotional attachment to teaching, they feel less confident in their actual classroom readiness—highlighting a potential gap between identity and competence.

[Note: FIGURE 5 and FIGURE 6 to be inserted at layout stage.]

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

Dimension-Level Internal Consistency and Item Comparisons

1. Internal Consistency by Dimension

To further validate the structure of the professional identity scale, the internal consistency of each dimension was evaluated individually. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each dimension based on the 290 valid responses are shown in TABLE 11.

TABLE 11 Internal Consistency of Each Dimension (N = 290)

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Professional Cognition	9	0.849
Professional Emotion	9	0.837
Professional Behavior	5	0.832

All three dimensions demonstrated high internal consistency, each exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.80. This confirms that the items within each dimension reliably measure the intended construct.

2. Item Comparisons Within Dimensions

To explore response patterns more granularly, comparisons were made among the items within each of the three dimensions. TABLE 12 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of items grouped by dimension.

TABLE 12 Dimension-Wise Item Descriptives

Dimension	Item No. Examples	Mean Range	SD Range
Cognition	Items 1 - 3, 8, 12 - 14, 19 - 20	3.82–4.10	0.58–0.72
Emotion	Items 4 - 6, 9, 15 - 18, 23	3.89–4.32	0.55–0.69
Behavior	Items 7, 10, 11, 21, 22	3.52–3.75	0.61–0.78

FIGURE 7 provides a visual comparison across the three dimensions using a radar chart. The professional emotion dimension showed the highest average score, followed by cognition and then behavior.

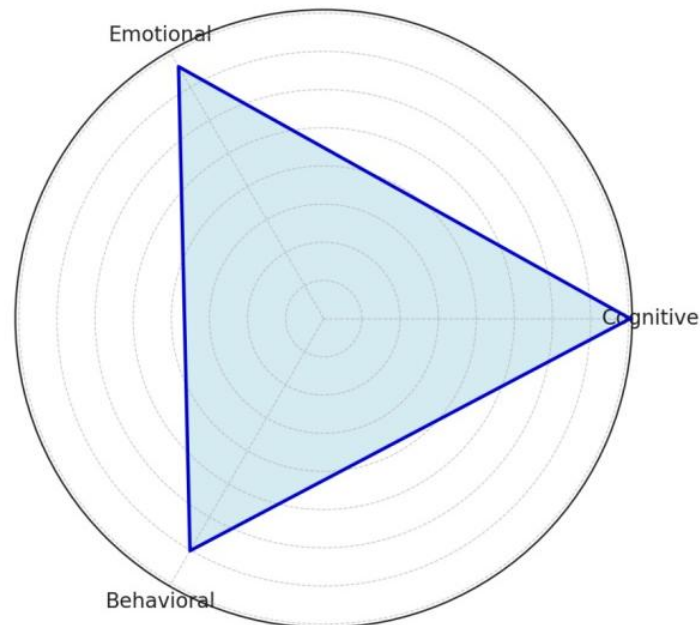


FIGURE 7 Redar Chart of Professional Identity Dimensions

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

3. Inter-Dimensional Correlation Overview

The analysis also examined the relationships among the three dimensions of professional identity—cognition, emotion, and behavior. The results indicated that these dimensions are positively interrelated, suggesting that students with stronger emotional commitment tend to demonstrate higher cognitive understanding and more active behavioral engagement. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the internal coherence among the three components of teacher professional identity.

These results further indicate that professional cognition, emotion, and behavior function as interdependent elements of an integrated identity system. Students

who value the teaching profession (emotion) and recognize its social significance (cognition) are also more likely to exhibit confidence in teaching-related behaviors.

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

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

This section investigates whether students' professional identity varies significantly based on demographic variables including gender, grade level, and academic performance. Independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were used to evaluate group differences. Where applicable, Levene's Test for equality of variances was performed to validate the assumptions.

1. Gender Differences

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the professional identity scores between male and female respondents. TABLE 13 summarizes the results.

TABLE 13 Gender Differences in Professional Identity (N = 290)

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

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

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

2. Grade-Level Differences

A one-way ANOVA was performed to examine whether professional identity varied among students across different academic years. Results are presented in TABLE 14.

TABLE 14 Grade-Level Differences in Professional Identity

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

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

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



FIGURE 8 Average Professional Identity Score by Grade Level

FIGURE 8 displays the mean scores across dimensions for each grade level, showing an upward trend, especially in the behavioral domain.

This figure shows that students in Year 4 tend to report higher professional identity scores on average, indicating a possible correlation between academic progression and professional identity development.

3. Academic Performance Differences

Another one-way ANOVA was conducted based on students' self-rated academic performance (Excellent, Good, Average/Below). TABLE 15 presents the results.

TABLE 15 Differences in Professional Identity by Academic Performance

Dimension	F-value	p-value
Cognition	4.76	0.010*

TABLE 15 (continued)

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

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

Students who rated their academic performance as “Excellent” scored significantly higher in cognition and emotion dimensions compared to those in the “Average or Below” group. Figure 9 suggests that female students generally exhibit slightly higher average scores in professional identity compared to their male counterparts.

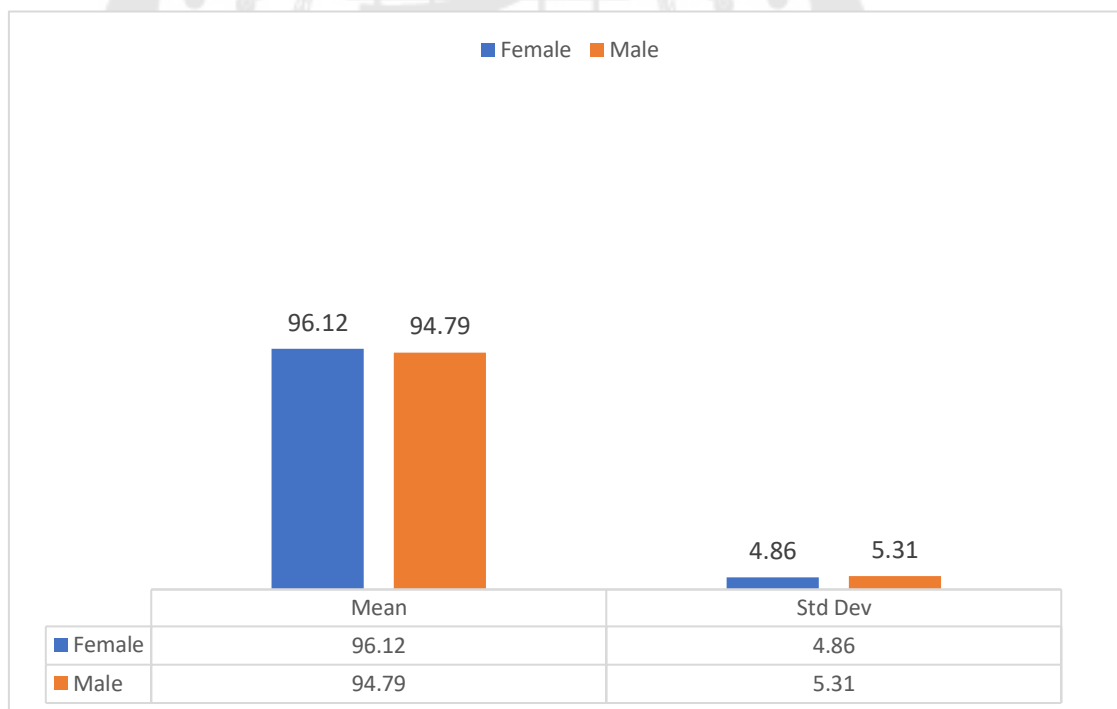


FIGURE 9 Average Professional Identity Score by Gender

4. Homogeneity of Variance Tests

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

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

Correlation Analysis and Regression Model Construction

This section explores the relationships between various components of professional identity and demographic variables, and identifies key predictors influencing the overall professional identity of undergraduate students. Correlation coefficients were first computed to examine the strength and direction of associations, followed by multiple linear regression analysis to assess the relative impact of each predictor.

1. Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between the three dimensions of professional identity (cognition, emotion, behavior) and students' self-rated academic performance. The results are summarized in TABLE 16.

TABLE 16 Pearson Correlations Between Identity Dimensions and Academic Performance

Variable Pair	r	p-value
Cognition & Academic Performance	0.37	< 0.01

TABLE16 (continued)

Emotion & Academic Performance	0.41	< 0.01
Behavior & Academic Performance	0.33	< 0.01
Cognition & Emotion	0.68	< 0.01
Cognition & Behavior	0.61	< 0.01
Emotion & Behavior	0.64	< 0.01

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

2. Regression Model Construction

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine which of the three dimensions best predicted the overall professional identity score. The model included cognition, emotion, and behavior as independent variables. TABLE 17 presents the regression results.

TABLE 17 Regression Analysis Predicting Professional Identity

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

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

3. Multicollinearity and Residual Analysis

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

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

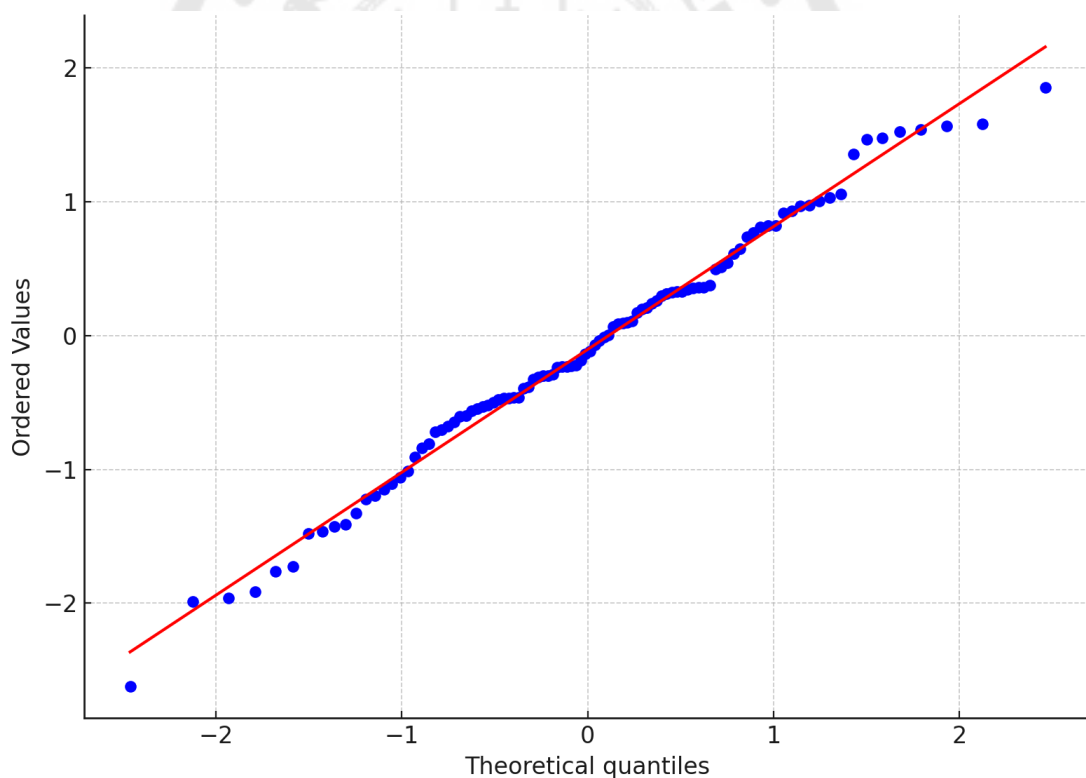


FIGURE 10 Q-Q Plot of Regression Residuals

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

Interview Analysis and Thematic Synthesis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Emotional commitment to teaching as a career of purpose.

Tension between idealism and classroom reality.

Need for more structured, early practicum opportunities.

Importance of mentorship and feedback in identity formation.

FIGURE 8 presents a word cloud highlighting the most frequent concepts mentioned during interviews.

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

Visual Representations and Summary of Statistical Results

This section summarizes the main findings of Chapter 4 and directly responds to the research questions and hypotheses outlined in Chapter 1. The integration of statistical analysis and interview data enables a comprehensive understanding of the professional identity development of undergraduate students in elementary education.

Firstly, the study revealed that students exhibit a moderately high level of overall professional identity. Emotional and cognitive components were generally stronger than behavioral preparedness, indicating that while students feel positively

about teaching and understand its value, they feel less confident in their practical readiness.

Secondly, demographic differences were observed: female students scored higher in emotional identity, and Year 4 students reported stronger behavioral identity—highlighting the role of experience and maturity. Self-rated academic performance was positively correlated with all three dimensions, suggesting that academic confidence contributes to stronger professional self-perception.

Thirdly, regression analysis confirmed that emotional identity is the most powerful predictor of overall professional identity, followed by cognition and behavior. This finding suggests that fostering emotional engagement with the profession may be a key strategy in teacher training programs.

Finally, qualitative interviews enriched the quantitative results by illustrating how students experience and interpret their identity formation. Emotional aspirations, practical struggles, and transformative practicum experiences were recurrent themes. These narratives clarified the interplay between belief, experience, and identity.

Collectively, these findings support the initial research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: What is the current level of professional identity? → Moderately high.

RQ2: How does professional preparation affect identity? → Strong influence, especially through practicum.

RQ3: What factors influence identity formation? → Gender, grade, academic performance, and emotional engagement.

These results directly inform the practical strategies discussed in Chapter 5 for enhancing professional identity development in teacher education. Summary and Reaffirmation of Research Significance

In summary, this chapter provided comprehensive findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Key conclusions include:

Students possess moderately high levels of professional identity, with stronger emotional and cognitive components than behavioral readiness.

Female students scored higher in emotional identity, and Year 4 students showed stronger behavioral identity.

Academic performance correlates significantly with all identity dimensions.

Emotional identity emerged as the strongest predictor in the regression model.

Interviews validated these trends and emphasized the importance of practicum and mentorship in identity development.

Furthermore, the analysis of self-rated academic performance revealed significant differences across all three dimensions of professional identity, underscoring the importance of academic self-perception in shaping students' professional attitudes and confidence.

These findings not only address the research questions posed in Chapter 1 but also offer valuable implications for teacher education programs. The integration of rigorous statistical analysis and rich narrative data demonstrates the depth of professional identity among Yunnan Normal University's elementary education undergraduates, thereby fulfilling the study's objectives and laying the groundwork for actionable recommendations in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter synthesizes the major findings of the study in direct response to the research objectives and hypotheses outlined in Chapter 1. It builds upon the empirical results presented in Chapter 4—both quantitative and qualitative—and provides an integrated interpretation of how these findings address each research objective. Furthermore, the chapter elaborates on practical implications and proposes strategies for enhancing the professional identity of undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education. It concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations, suggestions for future research, and a brief reflective statement on the significance of the findings.

Summary of Findings

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, involving 290 valid questionnaire responses and 12 semi-structured interviews. The analysis confirmed the presence of a multidimensional professional identity framework, comprised of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components.

Research Objective 1: To examine the current level of professional identity among undergraduate students.

The total mean score of professional identity was 3.96 out of 5, which suggests a moderately high level of professional identity among the participants.

Emotional identity had the highest average score, followed by cognitive identity. Behavioral identity lagged slightly, suggesting a weaker sense of readiness for actual teaching practice.

The heatmap (FIGURE 5) and radar chart (FIGURE 7) confirmed that students more readily endorsed value-based and reflective aspects of identity than practical or behavioral expressions. Hypothesis H1 Supported.

These findings respond directly to the first research objective by indicating that while students hold positive attitudes toward the teaching profession, their behavioral engagement remains underdeveloped due to limited practice opportunities.

Research Objective 2: To explore the demographic variations in professional identity.

Female students scored significantly higher than males in the emotional dimension ($p = 0.029$).

Students in higher grades (especially Year 4) reported stronger behavioral identity than those in lower grades, indicating a developmental progression.

Students who self-rated their academic performance as "Excellent" had significantly higher cognitive and emotional identity scores than those with "Average or Below" scores ($p < 0.01$).

Levene's Test confirmed the statistical validity of these group comparisons.

Hypothesis H2 Supported.

These findings were based on responses to the demographic section of the questionnaire, where academic performance was measured through the self-rated item "I consider myself a high academic achiever" on a five-point Likert scale.

These results correspond to the second research objective, demonstrating that both demographic and academic factors significantly influence the formation of students' professional identity.

Research Objective 3: To identify the predictors of professional identity.

Regression analysis (TABLE 18) demonstrated that emotional identity had the highest predictive power ($\beta = 0.36$), followed by cognitive identity ($\beta = 0.29$) and behavioral identity ($\beta = 0.24$).

The regression model explained 57% of the variance in overall professional identity (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.57$).

The Q-Q plot (FIGURE 9) confirmed the normality of residuals, validating the model assumptions. Hypothesis H3 Supported.

This directly supports the third research objective, confirming that emotional identity serves as the strongest predictor of students' overall professional identity.

Interview Corroboration:

Qualitative interviews illustrated that emotional engagement was deeply rooted in students' career aspirations.

Cognitive clarity about the role and expectations of teachers was strong, but students often expressed anxiety about classroom management and teaching practice, highlighting the gap in behavioral identity.

Internship experiences were widely reported as turning points for professional identity formation.

The triangulation of statistical data and narrative responses affirms the theoretical model and the hypothesized relationships among variables. These insights form the foundation for actionable improvements in teacher education.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study offer meaningful insights into the professional identity of pre-service elementary educators and how various demographic and contextual variables affect its development.

Firstly, the high scores in emotional identity suggest that students are emotionally invested in the teaching profession. This aligns with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, which emphasizes that emotional commitment can be a strong motivator for career persistence, even when cognitive confidence is still in development. However, the relatively lower scores in professional preparation indicate a gap between emotional inclination and perceived professional readiness, pointing to the need for more structured and hands-on practicum opportunities.

This discussion addresses the first research objective by illustrating that while students demonstrate positive emotional identity, their behavioral readiness remains limited, highlighting areas for improvement in practical training.

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

Thirdly, the differences across grade levels confirm that professional identity is a developmental process. Senior students, with more exposure to teaching practice and educational theory, showed significantly higher scores, particularly in the behavioral domain. This supports Erikson's psychosocial theory, which posits that identity formation matures through continued experience and social role immersion.

This finding reinforces the developmental nature of professional identity, aligning with the second research objective regarding contextual and experiential influences.

Furthermore, the strong correlation between self-rated academic performance and professional identity dimensions supports the notion that students who excel academically also tend to have clearer self-concepts and stronger identification with their chosen profession. This is consistent with findings by Feng Lina (2021), who noted that academic success reinforces confidence and future career commitment.

This result further supports the second research objective, highlighting academic achievement as a significant predictor of professional identity.

Finally, the three-dimensional model proposed by Beijaard et al. (2004)—cognition, emotion, and behavior—was validated in this study. The study found that these dimensions interact with each other and are influenced by both individual and contextual factors. The model served as a robust framework for evaluating the professional identity of the respondents, confirming its relevance in the context of teacher education in China.

This conclusion integrates findings across all three research objectives, demonstrating how emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components jointly shape pre-service teachers' professional identity.

Implications and Practical Recommendations

This section presents implications and actionable recommendations derived from the findings of this study. The proposed strategies are aligned with the third research objective—to propose practical strategies for enhancing the professional identity of undergraduate students majoring in Elementary Education. These recommendations target three interrelated levels: student, institutional, and policy, aiming to bridge the gap between intention and readiness in professional identity formation.

1. Introduce Early and Scaffolded Practicum Experiences

(1) Implement teaching internships starting in Year 2 and increase gradually in complexity.

(2) Allow for guided observation, micro-teaching, and collaborative lesson planning before full practicum.

These measures address the limited behavioral identity observed in this study and can enhance students' readiness for classroom practice.

2. Develop Emotion-Centered Pedagogical Support

(1) Incorporate reflection journals, identity workshops, and storytelling assignments into the curriculum.

(2) Host alumni panels to share real-world challenges and resilience narratives.

These initiatives strengthen emotional commitment, aligning with findings that emotional identity is the strongest predictor of professional identity.

3. Promote Gender-Inclusive and Emotionally Intelligent Teacher Training

(1) Conduct dialogue-based sessions around gender expectations in the profession.

(2) Encourage male students' participation in emotional identity development through role models and support groups.

Such efforts promote inclusivity and address gender differences identified in the emotional dimension.

4. Strengthen Academic Mentorship and Peer Feedback Systems

(1) Pair Year 1 and Year 2 students with senior mentors for academic and professional guidance.

(2) Build structured peer-review mechanisms for teaching practice and lesson design.

Mentorship supports cognitive and emotional growth while fostering reflective professionalism.

5. Align Coursework with Real Classroom Challenges

(1) Integrate field-based problems, discipline-specific pedagogy, and real student case studies into theoretical courses.

(2) Encourage action research projects focusing on identity reflection.

Linking coursework to practice ensures coherence between theoretical learning and behavioral application.

6. Institutionalize Identity Development Assessment

(1) Use formative tools like self-assessment scales, reflective essays, and teaching portfolios to track growth.

(2) Incorporate identity-related outcomes into program evaluation.

Continuous assessment of identity growth can provide feedback for curriculum improvement and teacher education policy.

Limitations of the Study

While this study contributes meaningful insights into professional identity formation, certain limitations should be considered:

1. The focus on a single institution limits generalizability to other geographic or institutional contexts.

2. The use of self-reported data, particularly the single-item measure of academic performance ("I consider myself a high academic achiever"), may introduce social desirability bias or inaccuracies in reflecting actual academic standing.

3. The qualitative sample (n = 12) may not represent the full spectrum of identity development experiences.

4. The study did not include mentor or instructor perspectives that could provide a fuller picture of students' behavioral readiness.

These limitations suggest that the findings, while valuable, should be interpreted with caution and further verified through broader, multi-context research.

Directions for Future Research

Building upon the present findings and acknowledging these limitations, future research may pursue the following directions:

1. Employ longitudinal designs to trace identity changes across the four academic years.

2. Include multi-source data, such as classroom observations, teaching portfolios, and supervisor evaluations.

3. Examine how external factors such as policy changes or media representations affect professional identity.

4. Explore comparative models by sampling from multiple universities or cultural settings.

Future investigations of this kind will help generate a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of how professional identity evolves in teacher education.

Final Reflections

This research highlights both the promise and challenge of professional identity development in undergraduate teacher education. Students demonstrate strong

emotional investment and cognitive understanding of the teaching role, but often struggle with enacting their identity behaviorally. The findings reinforce the value of integrated, practice-oriented training combined with emotional and reflective scaffolding.

Moving forward, teacher education programs must not only convey knowledge and skills but also foster a strong sense of self as an educator. Cultivating a well-rounded, confident, and resilient teacher identity is essential for improving the quality and sustainability of elementary education in China and beyond.

These insights collectively reaffirm the importance of aligning teacher education policy, curriculum design, and student support systems to nurture enduring professional identity development.

Personal Reflection

Conducting this research has been a transformative journey for me as a future educator and scholar. Throughout the process—from designing the questionnaire, conducting interviews, to analyzing the findings—I have developed a deeper understanding of the complex nature of professional identity formation in teacher education.

As an undergraduate student in the field of education, I often encountered uncertainties about my future teaching role. However, through this study, I gained clarity about the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components that shape one's identity as a teacher.

The interviews, in particular, provided me with profound insight into how other students internalize their teaching goals and the challenges they face. Their reflections resonated with my own journey, reinforcing the importance of emotional investment and practical preparedness.

I now believe more strongly than ever that teacher education is not only about acquiring knowledge and skills, but also about developing a sense of purpose, resilience, and confidence. I hope this thesis will serve not only as an academic contribution, but also

as a source of encouragement for those who are on the same path of becoming dedicated and reflective elementary educators.



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QUESTIONNAIRES

Dear Students,

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this survey amidst your busy schedule. This questionnaire is designed to gather information about your professional identity as a teacher (i.e., your views, emotions, and attitudes toward the teaching profession).

The data you provide will be used solely for research purposes and will be kept strictly confidential. The survey is conducted anonymously, and there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. For each question, please place a “√” next to the option that best matches your situation.

We kindly ask for your honest and objective responses. Please do not leave any questions unanswered. Your support and cooperation are greatly appreciated. Thank you!

1. Gender:

Male

Female

2. Grade

First year

Second year

Third year

Fourth year

3. Self-Rated Academic Performance:

I consider myself a high academic achiever.

Excellent

Good

Average or Below

4. Self-Identity

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Self-Identity					
1. You plan to become a teacher in the future.					
2. You believe you are suited to be a teacher.					
3. If you become a teacher, you think you will be an excellent one.					
4. When others talk about teachers in social settings, you feel it relates to you.					
Professional Identity with the Major					
5. You are interested in the courses offered in the Elementary Education major.					
6. You strongly identify with the Elementary Education major.					
7. If given the choice again, you would still choose the Elementary Education major.					
8. You believe the courses in your major greatly contribute to your future teaching career.					
9. You have a strong appreciation for the teachers in your major.					
10. You chose the Elementary Education major voluntarily.					
11. You voluntarily chose a teacher education program.					
Elementary Teacher Identity Professional Identity					
12. You believe that current salary levels for primary and secondary school teachers are relatively high.					

13. You think that working as a primary school teacher is relatively easy.					
14. You believe that the teaching profession contributes significantly to society.					
15. You consider the profession of a primary school teacher to be sacred and honorable.					
16. You think that being a teacher in today's society is a respected profession.					
Emotional Attitude Toward the Profession					
17. You believe that being a teacher is an enjoyable job.					
18. You really like the profession of elementary school teaching.					
19. You think being an elementary school teacher can help you achieve your life goals.					
Professional Preparation					
20. You believe your professional skills are sufficient to qualify you as an elementary school teacher.					
21. You frequently participate in training activities related to elementary teaching.					
22. You pay close attention to developing the qualities needed to be an elementary school teacher.					
23. You strongly identify with the profession of elementary school teaching.					

Career Values:

24. What do you think is the greatest benefit of being a teacher? (Choose up to two) ()

- ① High social status
- ② Stable income
- ③ Beneficial for the education of future children

④ Summer and winter vacations

⑤ No benefits

Professional Skills Identification:

25. In your opinion, what knowledge or skills are most important to become a qualified teacher? (Choose up to two) ()

① Subject knowledge

② Educational psychology knowledge

③ Teaching skills

④ Communication skills

⑤ Personal charisma

Open-ended Questions:

26. What was your reason for applying to a teacher training institution?

27. Can you share your views on the teaching profession?

28. Do you like being a teacher? Why or why not?

29. How do you perceive your identity as a teacher education student? What special qualities do you think are required to be an elementary school teacher?

30. What is your opinion on the current design of elementary education programs in universities?

31. Share your thoughts and impressions of educational internships.

VITA

