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Study on the relationship between the professional identity and the work engagement of teachers in private universities

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Abstract

This study tries to take professional identity (PI) and job involvement (JI) as the starting points of the research and briefly discusses the characteristics of PI and JI of teachers in Chinese private universities as well as the main factors affecting the level of PI and JI of teachers. This paper analyzes the relationship between the professional identity (PI) and the work engagement (WE) of 530 teachers at a private university in China using questionnaires surveys, interviews and statistics. The result shows that 1) a teacher's professional identity at a private university provides a positive prediction for work engagement. 2) The professional identity (PI) of teachers in different phases of professional development has level and structural differences in its relationship to work engagement (WE). The PI of teachers in private universities is generally in the middle range among which professional motivation is the highest and professional emotional benefit is the lowest. There are significant differences in career identity across different career development periods. Through male physical education teachers' sense of professional emotional benefit, professional motivation and professional self-regulation and female physical education teachers' sense of professional motivation and professional self-regulation, the job investment can be predicted.

Keywords: Education, Job involvement, Professional identity, Self-regulation, Teachers in private university, Work engagement.

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1. Introduction

The significance of management lies in how to allocate human, material and financial resources to successfully achieve organizational objectives. How to improve the professional identity (PI) of organization members, improve employees' work attitudes and work engagement (WE) and give attention to employees' work enthusiasm has always been the core issue of organization management. In the past decade, with the adjustment of social and economic development in China and the increasingly refined degree of industry differentiation, the requirements of the organization and personnel management department for the professionalization of professionals have increased rapidly which has attracted the attention of researchers and teachers. This study tries to take professional identity (PI) and job involvement (JI) as the

starting points of the research and briefly discusses the characteristics of professional identity (PI) and job involvement (JI) of teachers in Chinese private universities as well as the main factors affecting the level of professional identity (PI) and job involvement (JI) of teachers. On this basis, this paper carries out an empirical study on the degree of correlation and action path between professional identity (PI) and job involvement (JI) in order to provide a theoretical basis for improving the management of teachers in private universities and improving their work performance.

2. Literature Review

Professional identity (PI) refers to the positive evaluation of one's career. Identification is the original form of emotional connection between an individual and others. Xanthopoulou, et al. [1] believe that professional identity (PI) is a personal feeling of responsibility and loyalty to the organization. It is an internalized code of conduct that is affected by subjective initiative and the external environment. Allen and Meyer's [2] research shows that professional identity (PI) includes emotional, continuous and normative identities. Irving and Coleman's verified Meyer's conclusion. However, Antonek and Donato [3] proposed that professional identity (PI) reflects an individual's understanding of professional practice, talent development and professional value. Bakker, et al. [4] have defined organizational commitment and compiled the famous organizational commitment volume (OCV). With the in-depth study of professional identity (PI), researchers found that the individual characteristics and professional environment characteristics of subjects are similar. Bartel [5] pointed out that women's PI levels are higher than men. Beijgaard, et al. [6] found that the higher the educational level and position of the subjects, the higher the level of professional identity (PI). Bergami and Bagozzi [7] studied the influence of subjects' nerve types on professional identity (PI). Extroversion and positive emotions are positively related to PI. Bergheim, et al. [8] believe that the level of professional identity (PI) can predict career success.

Work engagement (WE) was first proposed by Berson [9]. He believes that work engagement (WE) is a channel for individual vitality to be involved in material, cognitive and emotional labor. According to Best and Nelson [10], work engagement (WE) includes three dimensions: energy, involvement and effectiveness. Blau [11] and others believe that JI and job burnout are the two characteristics of employees' well-being and the characteristics of JI are high activation and happiness [12].

To sum up, more research results have been achieved through the research of PI and WE. However, there are few research reports on the relationship between the PI and JI of teachers in private universities and colleges. This study based on Meyer's theory of career identity and the Schaufeli JI theory attempts to study China's private colleges teachers' PI and JI levels, the main factors that affect the level of PI and JI and then the degree of relevant PI and JI and action path which has been carried out through empirical research. This is not only feasible in theory but also practical.

3. Object and Methods

3.1. Research Object

In this article, teachers from 24 private colleges and universities in China are the research objects listed in Table 1.

Table 1.
A list of samples of teachers in private universities and colleges in China.

Variables		N	%
Gender	Male	268	67.8
	Female	127	32.2
Age	51-60	24	6.1
	41-50	87	22.0
	31-40	182	46.1
	≤30	102	25.8
Job nature	Liberal arts teachers	272	68.9
	Science and engineering teachers	103	26.1
	Administrative teachers	20	5.1
Technical title	Professor	24	6.1
	Associate professor	97	24.6
	Lecturer	206	52.2
	Teaching assistant	66	16.7
	Others	2	0.5
University category	Undergraduate colleges	276	69.8
	Junior college	119	30.2

3.2. Questionnaire Investigation

3.2.1. Basic Content and Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaires included a PI questionnaire and a JI questionnaire for teachers at private universities and colleges. Among them, the job engagement questionnaire includes three dimensions of focus, vitality and engagement, a total of 17 items, including vitality (7 items), focus (5 items) and dedication (5 items). The questionnaire for the PI of teachers in private colleges was self-made [13]. The questionnaire included 24 items from the three dimensions of occupational

affective benefit, occupational motivation and occupational self-regulation including 8 items of occupational affective benefit and 8 items of each occupational motivation and occupational self-regulation. Various latitude indexes were obtained through exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis [14]. The questionnaire was scored on a 5-point scale.

3.2.2. Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

This study selected samples from 24 domestic undergraduate colleges and higher vocational colleges. We distributed 530 questionnaires obtained 496 questionnaires and in which there are 395 valid questionnaires. The recovery rate was 93.58% and the effective rate was 79.64%. SPSS and Amos software were used in the study [15]. We use statistical software to carry out statistical analysis of data. The main analysis methods are descriptive statistics, independent sample T tests, analysis of variance, correlation analysis, regression analysis and confirmatory factor analysis.

In this study, the WE questionnaire was developed based on the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) developed by Charles and Jennifer [16] and its reliability and validity were tested among teachers in private colleges in China. The results of confirmatory factor analysis showed validity and the correlation results for item and subscale reached a significant level ($P < 0.01$). The internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire were high. The internal consistency coefficients of the 3 sub-scales were 0.767 (vitality), 0.735 (dedication) and 0.753 (concentration) respectively. The results showed that the indicators of the questionnaire met the requirements of psychometrics.

The reliability test of the PI questionnaire adopts the calculation method of the split half correlation coefficient and test-retest reliability [17]. The results of the pre-test small sample analysis show that the half reliability coefficient is 0.7832 and the test-retest reliability coefficient is 0.7936 indicating that the questionnaire has high reliability. To test the validity of the questionnaire based on Meyer's PI theory and combined with the professional characteristics of teachers in private universities and colleges, the initial questionnaire was prepared [18]. The indicators in the three dimensions are evaluated by 12 experts in three rounds.

Then, through exploratory factor analysis, the KMO and the Berlet Ball Test are carried out on the measurement data of the small pre-test samples. The KMO value is 0.876 and the Berlet statistical value is 591.901, all meeting the significance requirements. For the sake of further survey the validity of the questionnaire structure of private college teachers' PI, the PI obtained by exploratory factor analysis was analyzed. The three-dimensional model is verified to investigate the fit of the model. According to the results of factor analysis, a latent variable has been identified. The observation variables corresponding to this latent variable are three factors: the sense of professional emotional benefit, the sense of professional motivation and the sense of professional self-regulation. The covariance matrix of the sample is used as the basis for testing the model [19]. After testing, the fitting indexes of the model are obtained (Table 2). It is observed from Table 2 that the measured data fit the conceptual model of the principle theory well.

Table 2.
Analysis of the fitting factors of teachers' PI in private universities.

Model	χ^2	Df	χ^2/Df	IFI	GFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Value	378.2	158	2.39	0.92	0.92	0.97	0.96	0.076

Note: PI(Professional identity), Df (Degree of freedom), IFI(Incremental fit index), GFI(Goodness-of-fit index), NFI(Normed fit index), CFI (Comparative fit index), RMSEA(Root mean square error of approximation).

4. Research Results and Analysis

4.1. The Basic Characteristics of Teachers' PI in Private Universities

4.1.1. Structural Differences in Teachers' PI in Private Universities

PI refers to the basic evaluation of teachers' careers in private universities and colleges [20]. It includes three aspects: 1) Teachers' emotional attachment, recognition and psychological investment in the profession form the desire of private college teachers to maintain their profession, the sense of professional emotional benefit. 2) Individuals are aware of the costs they have to bear when they leave teaching in private universities and colleges, so they have to continue to engage in this profession. 3) On the principle of reciprocity, private college teachers have formed a sense of professional loyalty, namely professional self-discipline. As can be seen from Table 3, the overall level of PI among teachers in private colleges is not high only at the middle level.

Through the horizontal comparison of existing research results, it is found that the PI of teachers in private colleges is lower than lawyers, doctors and other professionals. This situation may be related to the professional development of teachers in private colleges and the traditional professional social evaluation of teachers [21]. In order to reveal whether there are differences among the three structural elements of PI, the results of a one-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) show that there are differences among the three structural elements of PI among teachers in private universities and colleges ($F = 9.81$, $P < 0.01$).

Through the post-test of TSD (T-Significant Difference), there are significant differences among the feelings of interest, professional motivation and professional self-regulation in PI. The sense of professional motivation is the highest and the sense of professional emotional benefit is the lowest [22].

To some extent, this reflects the compulsion of private college teachers towards their PI. This phenomenon is related to the limitations of private college teachers' professional technology. They feel that the cost of leaving this profession is very high, so they have to continue to engage in it.

Table 3.
Statistical list of teachers' PI and its constituent elements in private universities.

Items	M	SD	F	P
PI (PI)	3.07	0.31	9.81	0.00**
Professional emotional benefit (PEB)	2.99	0.55	8.92	0.00**
Sense of professional motivation (SPM)	3.19	0.54	9.79	0.00**
Sense of professional self-regulation (SPS)	3.04	0.65	9.68	0.00**

Note: ** p < 0.01.

4.1.2. Characteristics of Career Stages of Teachers' PI in Private Universities

To better understand the characteristics of PI of teachers in private universities and colleges in different career stages, this study relies on Fu Shujing's four stage theory of teachers' career development, namely, the exploration period (under 30 years old), the establishment period (40 -31 years old), the maturity period (50 -41 years old) and the peace period (60 -51 years old). The results of the difference test and the least significant difference (LSD) post- test show that: 1) there are striking differences in the PI of private college teachers in different career development stages and the PI of private college teachers in the peaceful period is higher than that in the exploration period. The PI in the mature period is higher than in the establishment period and exploration period [23] because private college teachers in the peaceful and mature stages have longer teaching years than those in the initial and exploratory stages. They have rich experience and are sensitive to their professional roles. 2) There are striking differences in the professional emotional interests of teachers in private colleges at different stages of career development. The career emotional return in the peace period is higher than that in the exploration period, the career emotional return in the maturity period is higher than that in the peace period and the exploration period and the career emotional return in the establishment period is higher than that in the peace period and the exploration period. Teachers at this stage may have reached at the peak of their careers, have a strong sense of achievement and have the highest attachment to and love for their career. 3) There are striking differences in the vocational motivation consciousness of teachers in private colleges at different stages of their career development. The sense of career motivation in peace time is higher than that in mature and entrepreneurial periods. 4) There are significant differences in the professional self-regulation consciousness of teachers in private colleges at different stages of their career development. The consciousness of occupational self-discipline in the exploratory period is higher than that in the peace period and the mature period.

4.2. The Basic Situation of Teachers' WE in Private Colleges and Universities

The basic situation of teachers' work input in private universities and colleges (Table 4) shows that the overall level of teachers' WE is not high, only at a medium level. There are striking differences in the work input of teachers at private universities and colleges at different stages of career development. The work input in the exploration period is higher than that in the completion period and maturity period. The work input in the organizational period is higher than that in the peace time period. The work input in the mature period is higher than that in the calm period [24].

Table 4.
List of basic conditions for teachers' WE in private colleges and universities.

Items	M	SD	F	P	LSD
WE career stage	3.11	0.44	17.86	0.00**	2>1 4>2 3>1 4>3
1 Peaceful period	2.89	0.50	16.98	0.00**	-
2 Mature period	3.25	0.42	15.48	0.00**	-
3 Establishment period	3.23	0.53	17.62	0.00**	-
4 Exploration period	3.82	0.34	18.36	0.00**	-

Note: ** p < 0.01.

4.3. The Relationship between Teachers' PI and WE in Universities

4.3.1. The Relationship between Three-dimensional PI and WE of Teachers in Private Universities

There is a significant correlation between teachers' PI and their three-dimensional sense of professional emotional benefit, professional motivation, professional self-regulation and WE.

Table 5.
List of correlation analysis between teachers' PI and WE in private universities.

Items	PEB	SPM	SPS	PI	WE
PEB	1.00				
SPM	0.05	1.00			
SPS	0.10	0.08	1.00		
PI	0.65**	0.61**	0.37**	1.00	
WE	0.45**	0.28**	0.20**	0.29*	1.00

Note: ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05.

According to the correlation analysis, the stepwise regression analysis is carried out with PEB, SPM and SPS as

independent variables and WE as dependent variables. The results are shown in Table 6. The effectiveness of the regression model was significant by variance test ($F = 52.580$, $P < 0.001$). The 3 independent variables PEB, SPM and SPS were selected for the equation. It shows that private university teachers' PEB, SPM and SPS have a positive predictive effect on WE. The optimal prediction model is: $WE = 0.332*PEB + 0.204*SPM + 0.187*SPS$.

Table 6.
Regression analysis of three-dimensional PI and WE of teachers in private universities.

Model	Nonstandard regression coefficient		Standardized regression coefficient		
	B	Standard error	Beta	T	P
Constant	1.794	0.158	0.296	12.211	0.000
PEB	0.231	0.041	0.332	9.573	0.002
SPM	0.203	0.038	0.204	6.232	0.000
SPS	0.183	0.041	0.187	3.231	0.001

4.3.2. The Relationship between PI and WE at Different Stages of Career Development

The different stages of professional development, teachers' PI and JI differences and the relationship between the PI and JI mechanisms differ based on the basic problem. This study discusses the non-governmental university teachers' PI and JI at various stages of their careers.

(1) Correlation analysis of 3 sub indicators of private university teachers' WE and PI in each career stage

The main objective of this study was to determine which sub-indicators of private college teachers' PI can predict JI in each stage of career development and then reveal the relationship mechanism between private college teachers' PI and JI. In order to avoid possible statistical validity errors due to relatively small samples, correlation analysis is carried out in the next step to determine the indicators of regression analysis [23]. Table 7 shows the correlation analysis of the three sub-indicators of work involvement and PI of teachers in private universities at various stages of career development.

Table 7.
Study the correlation analysis list of 3 sub indicators of private university teachers' WE and PI at each career development stage.

Items	Peaceful period	Mature period	Establishment period	Exploration period
PEB	0.21*	0.28**	0.35**	0.26**
SPM	0.10	0.14	0.25**	0.12
SPS	0.46**	0.11	0.12	0.21*

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

(2) A Prediction model of teachers' PI to WE in private universities in a peaceful period

According to correlation analysis, with PEB and SPS as independent variables and JI as a dependent variable, stepwise regression analysis is conducted on the three dimensions of PI and JI of teachers in private universities and colleges (Table 8). The regression model was significantly effective according to the variance test ($F=5.991$, $P<0.001$). In the regression equation, only the variable SPS was selected into the equation while the sub index of PEB was not statistically significant [24-26]. This result may be related to the fact that during the peaceful period, private university teachers have fully experienced the hardships and fun of private college education and are about to reach retirement age. Therefore, they do their existing work faithfully in order to end their career smoothly (Table 8).

Table 8.
Regression analysis of three-dimensional PI and WE of teachers in private universities in a peaceful period.

Model	Nonstandard regression coefficient		Standardized regression coefficient		
	B	Standard error	Beta	T	P
Constant	4.041	0.476	0.453	8.480	0.000
SPS	0.404	0.165	0.463	2.448	0.023

(3) Prediction model of teachers' PI to WE in private universities in a mature period

The results of the correlation analysis provide the basis for further prediction and analysis. The stepwise regression analysis of PI and WE of private university teachers in a mature period is shown in Table 9. The effectiveness of the regression model was significant by variance test ($F=7.286$, $P<0.001$). Among the 3 independent variables PEB, SPM and SPS, only PEB enters the equation. It shows that the elements of emotional benefit in the PI of private university teachers in the mature period have a positive predictive effect on WE. The optimal prediction model is: $WE=0.281*PEB$. This result may be related to the fact that private university teachers in the mature period are at the peak of their careers and all kinds of career achievements are gathered at this stage, so they have a strong emotional attachment to their careers.

(4) A prediction model of teachers' PI to WE in private universities in an establishment period

According to the results of the correlation analysis, meaningful indicators were taken as independent variables for further regression prediction, PEB and SPM in the establishment period were taken as independent variables and WE were taken as dependent variables for stepwise regression analysis (Table 10). The effectiveness of the regression model was

significant by variance test ($F=16.083$, $P<0.001$). The two variables PEB and SPM are selected. It shows that the factors that have a positive predictive effect on WE in the establishment period of private universities are PEB and SPM. The optimal prediction model is: $WE=0.304*PEB+0.187*SPM$. On the one hand, teachers in private universities have a deeper understanding of people and things in the field of education and teaching and produce professional emotion. On the other hand, due to employment expectations and survival pressure, they have to stay in university to do their own work in order to avoid the cost of a career change.

Table 9.

Regression analysis of three-dimensional PI and WE of teachers in private universities in the mature period.

Model	Nonstandard regression coefficient		Standardized regression coefficient		
	B	Standard error	Beta	T	P
Constant	2.510	0.275	0.280	9.127	0.000
PEB	0.226	0.084	0.281	2.699	0.008

Table 10.

Regression analysis of three-dimensional PI and WE of teachers in private universities in the establishment period.

Model	Nonstandard regression coefficient		Standardized regression coefficient		
	B	Standard error	Beta	T	P
Constant	2.014	0.224	0.302	9.004	0.000
PEB	0.235	0.055	0.304	4.302	0.000
SPM	0.147	0.056	0.187	2.648	0.009

(5) Prediction model of teachers' PI to WE in private universities in an exploration period

Taking the significantly related PEB and SPS as independent variables, the WE of private university teachers in the exploration period were gradually regressed (Table 11). The effectiveness of the regression model was significant by variance test ($F = 7.167$, $P < 0.001$). Two independent variables, PEB and SPS were selected for the equation. It shows that the factors that have a positive predictive effect on WE in the exploration period of private universities are PEB and SPS. The optimal prediction model is: $WE=0.239*PEB+0.289*SPS$. This result is related to the fact that private university teachers in the exploratory period are in a state of adaptation when they first enter the workplace which is a process of changing from the role of students to the role of teachers. They accept a more formal teacher education system, have a sense of professional self-regulation and professional emotional benefit for private college teachers and put themselves into work with a positive attitude.

Table 11.

Regression analysis of three-dimensional PI and WE of teachers in private universities in the exploration period.

Model	Nonstandard regression coefficient		Standardized regression coefficient		
	B	Standard error	Beta	T	P
Constant	1.308	0.413	0.289	3.165	0.002
PEB	0.281	0.092	0.289	3.062	0.003
SPS	0.217	0.086	0.239	2.534	0.013

5. Conclusion

The PI of teachers in private colleges is generally in the middle range among which professional motivation is the highest and professional emotional benefit is the lowest. There are significant differences in career identity across different career development periods.

The WE of teachers in private universities is generally at a medium level with vitality at the highest and focus at the lowest [27-30]. There are significant differences in teachers' WE at private universities at different career stages.

The PI of teachers in private universities has a positive predictive effect on WE and the sense of professional emotional benefit, professional motivation and professional self-regulation in PI can predict WE but there are structural differences in the predictive contribution rate [31-33]. Through male physical education teachers' sense of professional emotional benefit, professional motivation, professional self-regulation and female physical education teachers' sense of professional motivation and professional self-regulation, the job investment can be predicted.

We can predict the level of teachers' work involvement in peace time through the professional self-discipline consciousness of private college teachers. The JI of mature teachers can be predicted by professional emotional benefit. Through the sense of professional emotional benefit and professional motivation, we can predict the WE level of teachers in the establishment period and through the sense of professional emotional benefit and professional self-regulation, we can predict the job investment level of teachers in the exploration period.

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