

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND OCCUPATIONAL BURNOUT OF TEACHERS AT X PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN HENAN PROVINCE, CHINA

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Abstract: This research focused on X public university in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, it analyzed the relationship between various dimensions of professional identity and occupational burnout of teachers. The analysis utilized a survey instrument designed to measure college teachers' professional identity and occupational burnout, systematically surveying 482 teachers from X public university in Henan Province. The research aimed to understand the current status of professional identity and occupational burnout among teachers, analyze differences in various demographic backgrounds, and conduct a detailed research analysis and discussion on the relationship between two variables, teachers' professional identity and occupational burnout, using comprehensive data analysis. Research findings included: (1) During the research period, the professional identity of teachers at X Public University in Henan Province was high, and occupational burnout of teachers at X Public University in Henan Province was lower than moderate. (2) There were significant differences in occupational burnout of teachers in different educational backgrounds, marital status, and ages. (3) There was a significant negative correlation between the teachers' professional identity and occupational burnout. Based on these findings, the research suggested elevating the public's intellectual awareness and providing an objective understanding of the teacher's role, while teachers should clearly define their job responsibilities and uphold ethical standards in teaching. Teachers should also adapt to societal changes and advancements, continuously improve professional capability, keep pace with the times, and maintain a lifelong learning attitude towards their profession and personal development.

Keywords: Professional Identity, Occupational Burnout, College Teacher

Introduction

Teachers, as fundamental elements of education, played various social roles (Jin & Yu, 2021). This group's actions directly impacted the educational quality and the level of student development at

their institutions. In daily management, the psychological qualities of teachers, particularly their mental health, which is closely linked to the overall development of their professional quality, require significant attention (Yi et al., 2014). Teaching was characterized by high burnout and emotional exhaustion (Hakanen et al., 2006; Maslach, 2001). With the continuous development of higher education, deepening educational reforms, and the strengthening of the academic market and university personnel systems, college teachers were burdened with multiple responsibilities in research, teaching, and community service, leading to frequent occurrences of occupational burnout (Yang & Yang, 2002). Studies confirmed that occupational burnout of teachers was a problem in different countries and educational backgrounds (Van Droogenbroeck, 2014). American psychologist Freudenberger (1974) first introduced the term "burnout" to the academic community. He described the stress responses observed in volunteers: gradually depleted physical and emotional states, and a continuous decrease in productivity and commitment (Ahola & Hakanen, 2007). Many college teachers were in a sub-healthy state, exhibiting varying degrees of psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders. They had lost their initial enthusiasm and interest in work, struggling to cope and experiencing burnout (Gu & Deng, 2023).

In the teaching workforce engaged in instructional work, and even in their daily lives after completing teaching tasks, teachers exhibited apparent characteristics of occupational burnout. Some teachers lacked interest in their teaching work, showed little passion for their monotonous and repetitive professional tasks, and were reluctant to proactively change their attitudes in advancing their work, reflecting a mindset of "living day by day without long-term commitment." Teachers experiencing burnout also fail to feel the value and significance of their work, treating it as a burdensome duty to be avoided if possible or approached with negativity if not (Shi, 2020). "Professional identity" refers to the recognition that teachers formed about their profession through long-term educational activities (Wei, 2008). It included emotional identification with achieving self-worth during educational work and gaining recognition from others, representing a positive perception of the teacher's role. The construction of professional identity was mainly seen as a unified structural latent variable and treated empirically (Khapova et al., 2007). Although researchers had different understandings of the concept of professional identity, a common point in these studies was that professional identity was not a fixed indication of a person but a relational phenomenon. The development of professional identity was described as a continuous process, interpreted explicitly as the process of a person being recognized in a given context (Beijaard et al., 2004). The level of a teacher's professional identity affected multiple aspects, such as the teacher's turnover intention, job satisfaction, work commitment, and work motivation (Pan, 2014; Zhang, 2018). This study took X public university in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, as the research subject to explore the impact of the teachers' professional identity on occupational burnout and simultaneously analyzed the relationship between professional identity and

occupational burnout of teachers.

Research Objectives

1) To identify the current status of occupational burnout of teachers in X public university in Henan Province.

2) To identify the current status of professional identity of teachers in X public university in Henan Province.

3) To determine the differences in occupational burnout of teachers in X public university in Henan Province under different demographic backgrounds.

4) To determine the differences in professional identity of teachers in X public university in Henan province under different demographic backgrounds.

5) To analyze the relationship between professional identity and occupational burnout of teachers in X public university in Henan province.

Literature Review

Research on the Teachers' Professional Identity

Research on teachers' professional identity primarily focused on the concept of professional identity itself, with not much emphasis on its structure. It was linked to the existing research's vague conceptual definitions of teachers' professional identity and the predominant use of qualitative research methods. A review of literature and relevant documents revealed that there were few studies on the structure of teachers' professional identity. However, some clear frameworks have been described in the literature, notably in the research of Kremer & Hofman (1985), Brickson (2000), and Wei (2005).

Yu (2006), in her survey and study of professional identity among young middle school teachers in small cities in Hunan Province, identified nine dimensions of professional identity based on literature review and interview results: The professional competencies of teachers: judging whether teachers were competent in their profession, their degree of identification with their teaching knowledge and skills; Professional significance: identifying with the meaning and value of the teaching profession; Understanding of professional characteristics: including the teacher's self-awareness; Acknowledgment of leadership positions; Colleague identity recognition; Equivalent educational level; Recognition of job compensation; Agreement with the background of appointment; judging whether their school environment was about belonging or collectivism.

Beijaard et al. (2000) found that identification as a subject expert, educational expert, and pedagogical expert plays a pivotal role. Their survey revealed that when comparing current professional identity with feelings at the beginning of their careers, 31% of teachers reported having a clearer view of the teaching profession after years of work. Those who said their consciousness had changed

accounted for about 69%, indicating that teachers' identification with their profession had significantly differed from the past. Specifically, many teachers initially identified as experts in their field, but most have transitioned to a more balanced role over time, with few actually becoming educational experts. Wei (2005) found that there was no significant difference in professional identity among teachers of different teaching years. Individual autobiographical factors influence teachers' professional identity, including the impact of past teachers. The positive and negative teaching models of former teachers for pre-service teachers were considered important socialization factors (Knowles, 2013; Nimmo, 1994). In a study by Koster et al. (1995), clear cases were presented where pre-service teachers were influenced by certain teachers in their past. These cases reveal how teachers' self-images were shaped by previous role models. Most pre-service teachers mentioned admired teachers and cases influencing career choices. Good teaching models and understanding of the profession by former teachers were seen as "frames of reference", helping pre-service teachers better understand the significance of the teaching profession (Knowles, 2013; Lortie, 1975). Day & Hadfield (2020) point out that relevant learning experiences, experiences as student teachers, experiences of novice teachers in their field of study before entering the profession, and accumulated teaching experience on the job, were all important sources of identity formation.

Research on the Teacher' Occupational Burnout

Brog & Riding (1991) noted from their survey that among college teachers, one-third experience "immense or extreme" psychological stress in their professional roles. Maslach & Leiter (2008) defined "burnout" as the unbearable state of coping with the current work situation. Similar to the manifestations of occupational burnout, occupational burnout of teachers was characterized by three interrelated psychological syndromes: "emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment" also defined as manifestations of teacher occupational burnout. Brouwers & Tomic (2000) viewed occupational burnout of teachers as embodying three different states: physical and mental fatigue, lack of emotional energy, and work-related stress and fatigue. The negative state of work included apathy towards work, students, parents, colleagues, and a sense of personal achievement.

As professionals who were compensated for their services, teachers bear significant workloads and assume considerable social responsibilities. Moreover, higher education instructors often possess long-standing expectations for their personal performance. Consequently, the occupational pressures experienced by teachers were not effectively mitigated, leading to a degree of impairment in their work commitment. Consequently, the emergence of occupational burnout of teachers becomes an inevitability (Li, 2004). Brasfield (2019) suggested that social interactions could help alleviate occupational burnout of teachers. Additionally, daily life issues that teachers face indirectly contribute to occupational burnout in university teachers. Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) detailed various social influence factors, attributing the development of university occupational burnout of teachers to four

interpersonal relationship factors: interactions with students, cooperation with colleagues, relations with university leaders, and interactions with family members. Mérida-López & Extremera (2017) identified emotional exhaustion as a primary cause of occupational burnout of teachers and discussed its practical implications, recommending greater attention to teachers' working environments. Lauermann (2016) proposed that university teachers' professional competencies, encompassing the ability to impart professional knowledge and practical skills to students, also impact the occurrence of occupational burnout. The MBI-ES (Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey) scale, developed by Maslach (2001), was specifically designed for measuring occupational burnout of teachers and falls within the category of educational scales. It was an integral part of the MBI scale. This form focused more on the external manifestations of existing occupational burnout. It measures whether a person experiences emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The external manifestations were perceived through measurement, with respondents selecting from 7 different levels of emotional states.

Research on the Relationship between Teachers' Professional Identity and Occupational Burnout

Gaziel (1995) conducted a study on 400 primary school teachers in Israel and found that the level of occupational burnout, inclination to leave the job, and tendency to resign have significant effects on teachers' professional identity. Teachers' professional identity serves as a mediating variable affecting occupational burnout, resignation tendencies, and willingness to leave among teachers with fewer sabbatical year projects. The influencing factors of teachers' professional identity could be divided into antecedent and consequent variables (Kremer & Hofman, 1985), with a clear relationship between professional identity and occupational burnout in the consequent variables. According to research by Van den Berg (2002) and Izadinia (2015), teachers' professional identity has become a decisive factor affecting their enthusiasm for work, job satisfaction, and commitment. The improvement of teachers' professional identity was mainly to retain the teachers, and a lack of these factors could lead to teacher stress and burnout. Yang (2014) survey of primary and secondary school teachers showed that emotional labor and professional identity had a significant positive correlation, emotional labor and burnout had a significant negative correlation, and professional identity and occupational burnout had a significant negative correlation. Sun & Ye (2015) argue that positive professional identity could support teachers in reducing work pressure when facing adverse working environments, while the willingness to change jobs was reduced by a strong sense of professional identity. Notably, the most related dimension between professional identity and occupational burnout was depersonalization, indicating that the more positive a teacher's emotions, the more actively they engage in effective teaching activities with student teachers.

Methodology

The subject of this study was a cohort of educators from X Public University in Henan Province, amounting to a total of 1151 individuals. The research used a convenient sampling technique, distributing electronic questionnaires to the target population of teachers in the aforementioned university. As per the sample size determination method proposed by Krejcie & Morgan (1970), the minimum required sample size should be 291. However, the sample size in this investigation surpassed the minimum threshold, amounting to 501. Subsequently, 19 invalid questionnaires were discarded, resulting in the retrieval of 482 valid questionnaires, and the effective return rate reached 96.2%. Teachers' Professional Identity Scale. This study uses the professional identity scale developed by Wei (2008) in China. The scale included four dimensions with eighteen items. The four dimensions were role values, professional behavior tendency, professional values, and professional belonging. Teacher' Occupational Burnout Scale. The study uses the "occupational burnout questionnaire" (Chinese Maslach Burnout Inventory, abbreviated CMBI) compiled by Li (2004), widely applied in professions like teaching, healthcare, police, and business management. The questions in each dimension were emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment

Results

Demographic Analysis of Questionnaire Participants

Through the analysis of the "survey on basic personal information of college teachers", it was evident from the data and charts that, in the survey, there were 250 male and 232 female teachers, with a relatively balanced male-to-female ratio and an evenly distributed overall sample.

In terms of age distribution, there were 97 teachers under 30 years old, accounting for 20.3% of the total sample; 187 teachers aged 30-40 years old, accounting for 38.6%; and 124 teachers aged 40-50 years old, accounting for 25.7%, the current age distribution of university teachers was primarily middle-aged. In terms of marital status distribution, 348 teachers were married, and 134 were unmarried, with most teachers being married, correlating with the older age group of college teachers.

Notably, there were only 7 divorced or widowed teachers, thus included in the unmarried category. From the distribution of educational background in the survey sample, 4.3% of college teachers hold a junior college degree, 9.1% hold a bachelor's degree, and about 90% hold a master's degree or higher, with a significant proportion of postgraduates and doctor's degrees, indicating a predominantly highly educated group among college teachers. In terms of professional title distribution, there were 21 teaching assistants, accounting for 4.4% of the total sample, 80 lecturers, accounting for 21.4%, 278 associate professors, accounting for 58.7%, and 119 professors, accounting for 24.1%. Observing the monthly income distribution of college teachers, it was found that a small proportion, 39 teachers and 8.1% of the sample, earn less than 3,000 yuan. Among the total sample, 96 teachers earning

between 3,000-4,500 yuan account for 20.1%, 208 teachers earning between 4,500-6,000 yuan constitute 43.2%, and 139 teachers with a monthly income above 6,000 yuan account for 28.9%.

Descriptive Statistics on the Levels of Professional Identity and Occupational Burnout

The overall mean score of professional identity among these teachers was 4.03. Among the dimensions, the mean score for professional values was the highest at 4.09, while the mean score for the professional belonging was the lowest at 3.76. It indicated that the overall level of professional identity among teachers at X public university in Henan Province was relatively high, with teachers performing best in terms of professional values but showing a slight deficiency in their professional belonging. The overall mean score of occupational burnouts among teachers was 2.71, which was considered a moderate level. Teachers didn't exhibit strong signs of occupational burnout. The overall status is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistical Analysis of the Teachers' Professional Identity and Occupational Burnout in X Public University

Dimensions	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Role Value	482	4.07	1.02	High
Professional Behavior Tendency	482	4.03	1.09	High
Professional Values	482	4.09	1.02	High
Professional Belonging	482	3.76	0.866	Moderate
Overall Professional Identity	482	4.03	1.05	High
Overall Occupational Burnout	482	2.71	1.37	Moderate

Differences Analysis on the Levels of University Teachers' Professional Identity and Occupational Burnout Compared with Demographic Factors

The study used independent sample *t*-tests and one-way ANOVA to investigate the differences in professional identity and occupational burnout among teachers at X public university in Henan Province under different demographic backgrounds. Further, Pearson correlation analysis was utilized to explore the relationship between professional identity and occupational burnout among teachers, the results as shown in follows:

There were significant differences in professional identity among teachers with different educational backgrounds. Teachers with doctor's degree scored the highest in professional identity, Mean 4.4679. $F=3.03$, with a significance level of less than 0.001, indicating clear differences in the impact of educational background on professional identity. The difference analysis results are shown in Table 2.

This study categorized the educational backgrounds of the survey group, including Junior College to doctor's degree. The highest proportion of teachers had doctor's degrees, numbering 239, while the lowest was Junior College with only 15. The significance of the three factors of occupational burnout - emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and overall burnout - across different educational

backgrounds of college teachers was greater than 0.05, indicating no significant burnout differences based on educational background. The difference analysis results are shown in Table 3.

Table 2: Analysis of Differences in Professional Identity of Teachers in Different Educational Backgrounds

Independent Variable	Educational Background	N	M	SD	F	p
Role Values	Junior College	15	4.6671	0.42814	3.918	$p < 0.001$
	Bachelor's Degree	62	4.6345	0.51645		
	Master's Degree	166	4.5176	0.62096		
	Doctor's degree	239	4.7115	0.35203		
Professional Behavior Tendencies	Junior College	15	4.3615	0.57827	3.21	$p < 0.001$
	Bachelor's Degree	62	4.2976	0.56763		
	Master's Degree	166	4.3171	0.75233		
	Doctor's degree	239	4.5413	0.54916		
Professional Values	Junior College	15	4.3213	0.54279	1.434	0.241
	Bachelor's Degree	62	4.2978	0.69677		
	Master's Degree	166	4.1237	0.75963		
	Doctor's degree	239	4.2848	0.76046		
Professional Belonging	Junior College	15	4.3793	0.50867	1.169	0.309
	Bachelor's Degree	62	4.3473	0.59784		
	Master's Degree	166	4.1873	0.75069		
	Doctor's degree	239	4.3341	0.81375		
Professional Identity	Junior College	15	4.4323	0.37208	3.03	$p < 0.001$
	Bachelor's Degree	62	4.3943	0.53457		
	Master's Degree	166	4.2864	0.62158		
	Doctor's degree	239	4.4679	0.44974		

Table 3: Analysis of Differences in Occupational Burnout of Teachers in Different Educational Backgrounds

Independent Variable	Educational Backgrounds	N	M	SD	F	p
Emotional Exhaustion	Junior College	15	2.1548	1.04673	0.352	0.296
	Bachelor's Degree	62	1.8421	0.46752		
	Master's Degree	166	1.7257	1.37694		
	Doctor's degree	239	1.7042	0.75741		
Depersonalization	Junior College	15	2.5853	1.86381	0.722	0.474
	Bachelor's Degree	62	2.3849	1.08391		
	Master's Degree	166	2.1546	1.49385		
	Doctor's degree	239	2.6487	1.42702		
Reduced Personal Accomplishment	Junior College	15	2.4056	1.87394	0.585	0.022*
	Bachelor's Degree	62	2.0383	1.39507		
	Master's Degree	166	2.2182	1.58289		
	Doctor's degree	239	2.2942	1.46302		
Occupational Burnout	Junior College	15	2.2488	1.28431	0.427	0.264
	Bachelor's Degree	62	2.1729	1.01848		
	Master's Degree	166	2.1842	0.74392		
	Doctor's degree	239	2.02282	0.87941		

Correlation Analysis among Professional Identity and Occupational Burnout

Using Pearson correlation analysis, this study analyzed the relationship between occupational burnout of teachers and professional identity in X Public University in Henan Province. As could be seen from Table 4.16, the correlation coefficient r between professional identity and occupational burnout was -0.637 , indicating a significant correlation. There was an obvious negative relationship between professional identity and occupational burnout of teachers at X Public University in Henan Province. The correlation analysis result is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis between Professional Identity and Occupational Burnout

	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Reduced Personal Accomplishment	Occupational Burnout
Role Values	-0.618**	-0.544**	-0.568**	-0.573**
Professional Behavior Tendencies	-0.607**	-0.594**	-0.586**	-0.616**
Professional Values	-0.613**	-0.606**	-0.579**	-0.625**
Professional Belonging	-0.584**	-0.483**	-0.531**	-0.536**
Professional Identity	-0.623**	-0.611**	-0.613**	-0.637**

** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

Differences in Professional Identity Among College Teachers Under Different Demographic Backgrounds

In terms of gender, male teachers showed higher professional identity than female teachers. Female teachers, compared to their male counterparts, need to invest more energy in their families and face higher societal expectations, which might make it easier for male teachers to score higher in professional identity. In terms of age, the highest scores were observed in the 40-50 years old, indicating this as the stage with the highest level of professional identity among teachers. Teachers in the 30-40 age group scored the lowest, possibly due to not only teaching and research responsibilities but also certain positions within the school, often feeling overwhelmed with the scope of their duties. Additionally, family factors might contribute to the lower scores in this age group. In terms of professional identity, teachers with different educational backgrounds exhibit distinct differences. Compared to teachers with other qualifications, those with a master's degree have the lowest level of professional identity, while those with a doctor's degree tend to have a higher level.

Most teachers with doctor's degrees generally believe that the profession of university teaching was commensurate with their level of education and meets their expectations for the profession. For teachers with high titles, the impact on their occupational identity level was not solely determined by

their salary-related titles. In terms of professional behavior tendency, professors score higher than associate professors, teaching assistant, and lecturers. It indicated that there were significant differences in professional sensitivity among teachers with different titles. Among them, lecturers have the highest degree of occupational identity, and there was the largest disparity between different levels of titles. People often unconsciously compare themselves to their level of involvement at work, and when expectations and efforts diverge, it could lead to a psychological imbalance.

The study indicated that the highest scores in terms of salary-related professional identity were in the 4,500 - 6,000-yuan range, while the lowest were above 6,000 yuan. It might be due to teachers in this salary range feeling that their level of input didn't match their actual monthly income and that their wages didn't meet expectations. Regarding marital status, teachers' professional values were clearly defined. Unmarried teachers tend to focus more on self-improvement and research efforts. Besides personal development, they were also more proactive in managing interpersonal relationships with colleagues and could spend their spare time on hobbies and interests.

Differences in Occupational Burnout Among College Teachers Under Different Demographic Backgrounds

The results showed that in terms of emotional exhaustion, the mean level for female respondents was around 2.5, while for males it was approximately 2.1. Emotional exhaustion among female teachers working in colleges was significantly higher than that of their male counterparts, which aligns with Zhang's (2019) research conclusions. Female teachers might also bear more family responsibilities and caregiving duties, leading to gender differences among college teachers. More consideration was given to balancing work and life, with a focus on family care.

Additionally, female teachers tend to be more emotional in their understanding of specific issues. In the study, with age as the independent variable, those in the 30-40 years old bracket was seen as more valuable than other age groups. They face more significant societal pressure, with evident emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment, often playing a pivotal role in the school. Teachers over 50 years old, often holding higher positions in the school, experience less emotional exhaustion due to reduced research pressure and find it easier to achieve work satisfaction. This age group shows the least apparent burnout in the study. Junior college teachers exhibit a significant advantage in emotional exhaustion compared to teachers with other levels of education. It was largely due to the extensive groundwork and high pressure associated with the tasks they undertake, making the level of emotional exhaustion in junior college teachers the most severe among all education levels. In other words, junior college teachers experience the most pronounced sense of educational deficiency in their work.

Moreover, a clear positive correlation exists between education level and emotional exhaustion, with the meaning emotional exhaustion decreasing as the level of education increases. This situation

was partly related to the research pressure and routine work faced by doctor's degree holders, while Junior College teachers, to a greater extent, experience professional satisfaction and exhibit the strongest sense of personal achievement. According to Chen's (2020) study, different levels of teacher education didn't significantly impact burnout. However, it should be noted that this distinction might vary regionally and depending on the educational institution. Teachers with different monthly income levels showed variations in depersonalization and personal achievement. Teachers earning less than 3,000 yuan had a significantly reduced sense of personal achievement compared to higher-monthly income teachers, with salary making a noticeable difference in university teachers' sense of accomplishment. Teachers earning below 3,000 yuan also clearly experience emotional exhaustion. This didn't directly prove a relationship between monthly income and burnout, despite the lower salaries of these teachers. This group typically represents lower teaching and research capabilities and lower professional positions, leading to their relatively lower monthly income and achievement despite their comparatively low salary levels. It was likely the root cause of the situation. Personal achievement noticeably improves in university teachers earning above 6,000 yuan, who were less prone to emotional fatigue. Marital status has a more significant impact on emotional exhaustion in university teachers. The differences between married and unmarried teachers were not prominent. Still, married teachers, who often dedicate more to family by tutoring children, doing household chores, and dealing with marital issues, severely deplete their emotional value. If married teachers invest a large part of their energy in transitioning their role to the family after work, this could also significantly drain their emotional resources. The research and teaching tasks of married teachers didn't change substantially, but visits to and care for parents on both sides increased markedly after marriage.

Conclusions

1) There were significant differences in teachers' leadership of different demographic backgrounds, such as "age", "teaching age", and whether there was an administrative position

According to the results of the questionnaire survey, the factors that significantly differ in teachers' leadership of different demographic backgrounds were demographic backgrounds such as "age", "teaching age", and whether there was an administrative position. Firstly, older teachers had lower leadership skills than younger teachers. Secondly, the teachers' leadership with longer teaching ages was lower than that of teachers with shorter teaching ages. Finally, the teachers' leadership without administrative positions was lower than that of teachers with administrative positions.

2) There was a relationship between teachers' perception of campus culture and teacher leadership

According to the results of the questionnaire survey, there was a relationship between teachers' perception of campus culture and teacher leadership. The correlation coefficients between the

perception of campus culture and teacher leadership, as well as four dimensions, had reached a significant level, with "school support" having the highest correlation with teacher leadership.

3) There was a relationship between teachers' personal temperament and teachers' leadership

According to the results of the questionnaire survey, there was a relationship between teachers' personal temperament and teachers leadership. The correlation coefficients between teachers' attributes and two dimensions and teachers' leadership and four dimensions all reached a significant level, among which the correlation between "teachers' characteristics" and teachers' leadership was the highest.

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