

A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND WORK MOTIVATION IN X HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN CHONGQING, CHINA

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Abstract: This study investigated the relationship between teachers' professional identity and work motivation in X Higher Vocational College in Chongqing, China. It aimed to assess the current levels of both variables, examine demographic differences, and explore their correlation. A quantitative research design was adopted, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to full-time faculty members. A total of 290 valid responses were obtained using a convenience sampling method. The Professional Identity Scale and the Work Motivation Scale were used, covering ten dimensions across the two constructs. Descriptive statistics showed that both professional identity and work motivation levels were high among the participants, with Professional Values and Work Persistence emerging as dominant dimensions. Independent t-tests and ANOVA revealed significant differences in professional identity and work motivation across demographic variables such as age, teaching experience, and professional title. Pearson correlation analysis indicated a significant positive relationship between professional identity and work motivation ($r = 0.705$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that teachers who strongly identified with their roles and values were more likely to demonstrate higher motivation and engagement in teaching. These findings highlighted the importance of fostering teachers' sense of identity to enhance their motivational states. The study recommended that vocational colleges strengthen institutional support, clarify career development pathways, and promote a culture of recognition to reinforce teachers' professional identity and improve their overall work performance.

Keywords: Professional Identity, Work Motivation, Vocational College Teachers, Chongqing, Higher Education, Quantitative Study

Introduction

In recent years, the rapid development of vocational education in China posed both opportunities and challenges for faculty members in higher vocational institutions. Teachers were expected to navigate multiple roles, including educators, industry experts, and lifelong learners, in response to reforms such as the “Double High Plan” and the “Education Modernization 2035” (Feng, 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). These reforms emphasized alignment between educational programs and technological advancement, which required teachers to maintain strong professional identity and sustained motivation in their work.

Chongqing, as the only municipality in western China, played a pivotal role in developing a globally competitive intelligent manufacturing sector. To meet these industrial demands, vocational institutions in the region updated their curricula and enhanced teachers’ capacity in digital technologies such as digital twin systems and industrial internet (Zhang et al., 2024). However, vocational teachers often faced systemic challenges including limited promotion pathways, undervalued professional status, and a lack of institutional recognition, all of which negatively affected their professional identity and work motivation (Yang & Han, 2021).

Professional identity referred to an individual’s recognition of and commitment to the roles, values, and goals associated with their profession. It encompassed not only a cognitive understanding of one’s occupational responsibilities but also emotional connection, behavioral alignment, and a sense of organizational belonging (Tao & Feng, 2019). Teachers with a high degree of professional identity tended to exhibit stronger emotional engagement and were more willing to embrace innovation, thereby contributing to teaching quality and institutional development (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Dick et al., 2004). Conversely, when teachers felt undervalued or lacked a sense of belonging within their institution, their commitment and motivation declined.

Work motivation, as an internal psychological drive, transformed intrinsic needs into external performance. It played an essential role in influencing job satisfaction, performance, innovation, and retention. Motivated teachers were more likely to demonstrate enthusiasm, creativity, and persistence in their work, which directly contributed to student achievement and institutional progress (Lian et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), work motivation was most effective when individuals experienced autonomy, competence, and relatedness — all of which were closely tied to professional identity.

Despite the recognized importance of these constructs, limited research explored their relationship in the context of higher vocational education in China. Existing studies primarily focused on general or basic education settings and neglected the specific characteristics and challenges faced by vocational college teachers (Zhou et al., 2024; Li & Zhang, 2020). Vocational teachers operated in a hybrid space where they needed to balance academic rigor with practical training, comply with national policy while addressing local industry needs, and maintain engagement despite relatively low

social prestige (Feng, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

This study addressed the gap by investigating the relationship between teachers' professional identity and work motivation in a representative higher vocational college in Chongqing, China. Specifically, it aimed to measure the levels of both constructs, examine demographic differences, and assess their statistical correlation. The findings were expected to offer insights for institutional strategies aimed at enhancing faculty development and retention in vocational education.

Research Objectives

(1) To understand the current status of teachers' professional identity in X Higher Vocational College in Chongqing.

(2) To understand the current status of teachers' work motivation in X Higher Vocational College in Chongqing.

(3) To analyze the differences in professional identity across demographic variables among teachers in X Higher Vocational College in Chongqing.

(4) To analyze the differences in work motivation across demographic variables among teachers in X Higher Vocational College in Chongqing.

(5) To determine the correlation between teachers' professional identity and work motivation in X Higher Vocational College in Chongqing.

Literature Review

Professional Identity of Vocational Teachers

Professional identity referred to teachers' recognition and internalization of their professional role, values, and mission within an educational institution. It involved a dynamic psychological process shaped by both individual cognition and external context, including professional experience, school culture, and societal expectations (Tao & Feng, 2019). Teachers with a well-developed professional identity were more likely to maintain long-term commitment to teaching, engage in self-directed development, and align their behavior with institutional goals.

In the context of vocational education, teachers were required not only to deliver theoretical knowledge but also to bridge education with industry demands. This dual role posed challenges to identity formation. Studies showed that vocational teachers often encountered role ambiguity, particularly in balancing academic standards with hands-on skills training (Zhang, 2021). Institutional barriers such as limited promotion channels, undervalued status in public discourse, and inconsistent evaluation systems further complicated identity development (Yang & Han, 2021). However, positive professional identity was found to enhance teachers' sense of belonging, job satisfaction, and resilience under pressure (Xu, 2023).

Moreover, professional identity in vocational settings had unique structural dimensions. It

encompassed role values, behavioral tendencies, professional beliefs, and a sense of organizational belonging, all of which contributed to shaping how teachers perceived their responsibilities and interacted with students (Li & Wang, 2020). Teachers who identified strongly with the mission of vocational education tended to exhibit higher levels of initiative and were more committed to improving their teaching practice.

Work Motivation of Vocational Teachers

Work motivation referred to the internal drive that compelled individuals to initiate, direct, and sustain goal-oriented behavior in their professional roles. It served as a critical determinant of teaching quality, effort investment, and innovation. Drawing from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), motivation was categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic types, with intrinsic motivation arising from personal satisfaction and autonomy, and extrinsic motivation driven by rewards, evaluations, and institutional control mechanisms.

In the field of vocational education, teacher motivation was often influenced by multiple factors, including organizational support, feedback, recognition, and career development opportunities (Luo, 2020). Teachers who perceived fairness in resource distribution and received timely feedback from supervisors were more likely to maintain high levels of motivation (Zhao, 2023). Furthermore, motivated teachers were found to proactively engage in professional learning communities, collaborate with colleagues, and experiment with pedagogical innovation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

However, work motivation could be fragile under external pressures such as heavy workload, administrative burden, or lack of student engagement. Research indicated that when teachers felt a misalignment between their efforts and institutional rewards, or when they lacked autonomy in decision-making, their motivation declined significantly (Fernet et al., 2012). In vocational institutions, where teaching often required repetitive training tasks and compliance with industry standards, maintaining high levels of motivation was particularly challenging.

Relationship between Professional Identity and Work Motivation

A substantial body of literature supported the idea that professional identity and work motivation were closely connected. Teachers with stronger professional identity tended to exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation, showed more enthusiasm for curriculum development, and remained committed despite occupational stress (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Dick et al., 2004). Professional identity served as a cognitive-emotional foundation that empowered teachers to derive meaning from their work, enhancing their psychological resilience and goal persistence (Hofmann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2017).

In addition, professional identity was found to mediate the relationship between organizational factors and motivational outcomes. For example, teachers who experienced a supportive school climate were more likely to internalize institutional goals into their professional

identity, which then translated into greater motivation and behavioral engagement (Fernet et al., 2012). Conversely, when teachers experienced identity conflict or felt marginalized, their intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction declined.

Although these relationships had been studied in primary and secondary education, research in vocational education remained limited. Given the contextual differences—such as industry integration, applied skill focus, and student diversity—vocational teachers faced unique identity and motivational challenges (Zhou et al., 2024). In inland cities such as Chongqing, where education modernization intersected with industrial upgrading, understanding this linkage became especially crucial. Scholars emphasized the need for empirical research to clarify how professional identity shaped vocational teachers' motivation, and how institutional strategies could strengthen this connection to promote teacher development and retention (Li & Zhang, 2020; Xiao, 2025).

Contextual Influences in Vocational Education

Vocational education was shaped by multiple external forces, including industrial policies, labor market demands, and regional development strategies. These contextual factors significantly influenced teachers' professional identity formation and motivational patterns. For instance, in inland regions such as Chongqing, vocational institutions were often tasked with supporting local industries, creating additional expectations for teachers to align their instruction with practical labor needs (Chen, 2023). Teachers in such settings had to balance pedagogical goals with economic functions, which required both professional adaptability and institutional support.

Moreover, cultural expectations around vocational education played a role in shaping how teachers perceived their professional worth. In societies where academic education was traditionally valued over vocational training, teachers in vocational colleges often faced social stigma or limited career prestige (Yang & Liu, 2021). This social positioning could negatively affect their self-perception, reduce motivation, and hinder long-term commitment unless countered by strong institutional recognition and development pathways.

Mediating and Moderating Factors

Recent studies had explored the mechanisms through which professional identity influenced motivation, focusing on mediating and moderating variables. Psychological capital, including self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience, had been identified as a key mediator that strengthened the impact of identity on motivation (Luthans et al., 2007). Teachers with stronger psychological resources were better able to translate professional identity into sustained motivational engagement and classroom performance.

In addition, organizational climate and leadership styles acted as moderators. Supportive leadership, participatory decision-making, and transparent evaluation systems enhanced the positive effect of identity on motivation (Zhang & Qiao, 2022). Conversely, authoritarian or bureaucratic school environments diluted this effect, leading to teacher disengagement. Understanding these

mediating and moderating factors was essential for designing interventions that nurtured both identity and motivation.

Gaps in Existing Research

Despite growing interest, research on the interplay between professional identity and motivation in vocational education remained limited and fragmented. Most existing studies had focused on general education or specific urban areas, while few addressed the unique conditions of vocational institutions in inland China. Additionally, quantitative studies often lacked qualitative depth, and few adopted mixed-method approaches that could capture both cognitive and emotional dimensions of identity formation.

Furthermore, while many studies confirmed correlations between identity and motivation, fewer explored causal mechanisms or longitudinal changes over time. Scholars called for more comprehensive frameworks that integrated institutional, psychological, and sociocultural variables to understand how professional identity evolved and how it sustained teacher motivation (Liu & Tang, 2023). Addressing these gaps would provide deeper insights into how to support vocational teachers' growth and improve workforce stability in education systems undergoing transformation.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey method to examine the relationship between vocational teachers' professional identity and their work motivation. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument, enabling the researcher to gather empirical evidence from a large sample within a relatively short time frame. The research adopted a correlational approach, aiming to identify the strength and direction of associations between the study variables. This approach was consistent with prior studies investigating psychological constructs in educational contexts (Creswell, 2014).

In order to enhance the explanatory power of the findings, the study was framed within a theoretical model derived from Social Identity Theory and Self-Determination Theory. These theoretical foundations provided guidance in the formulation of hypotheses and the selection of measurement tools. Furthermore, the research design adhered to the principles of ethical research, including informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of full-time teachers at a vocational college in Chongqing, China, with a total of 1,130 faculty members employed at the institution. To ensure practical feasibility while maintaining statistical representativeness, the study adopted a convenience sampling method to recruit participants.

According to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for determining sample size based on

population size, the minimum recommended sample for a population of this size was 291. During the data collection process, 291 questionnaires were distributed. After screening, one invalid response was removed, resulting in 290 valid responses, with a valid return rate of 99.6%. This sample size met the required standard for empirical research and allowed for meaningful statistical inference regarding the study variables.

The sample covered diverse teaching departments, academic ranks, and years of experience, offering a comprehensive view of the professional identity and work motivation of vocational teachers within the institution.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire comprised three parts. The first section collected demographic data, including gender, age, educational background, teaching experience, and professional title. The second section used the Professional Identity Scale developed by Wei et al. (2013), which included four dimensions: Role Values, Behavioral Tendencies, Professional Values, and Sense of Belonging. A total of 18 items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly Agree”).

The third section adopted the Work Motivation Scale revised by Xiao & Sun (2021), which consisted of six dimensions: Work Vitality, Recognition, Persistence, Enterprise, Self-Efficacy, and Value Cognition. This section included 24 items, also measured on a five-point Likert scale. Higher scores reflected stronger professional identity or higher work motivation, respectively.

Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected between April and June 2025. Questionnaires were distributed electronically via institutional communication channels and completed anonymously. Participants provided informed consent prior to submission. Upon collection, the data were screened for completeness and accuracy. One invalid response was excluded, and 290 valid questionnaires were retained for statistical analysis. The raw data were entered into Excel and analyzed using SPSS 26.0.

Reliability and Validity

The internal consistency of both scales was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha. The Professional Identity Scale achieved an overall alpha coefficient of 0.893, with subscale coefficients ranging from 0.720 to 0.864. The Work Motivation Scale showed excellent reliability, with a total alpha of 0.943 and subscales ranging from 0.844 to 0.917. These values indicated that both instruments demonstrated high reliability.

Validity was tested using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett’s test of sphericity. The KMO value for the Professional Identity Scale was 0.934, and for the Work Motivation Scale, it was 0.952. Both Bartlett’s tests yielded p-values below 0.001, suggesting that the datasets were suitable for factor analysis and had strong construct validity.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.0 software to examine the relationships between vocational teachers' professional identity and work motivation. The analysis process included multiple statistical procedures to ensure both descriptive and inferential insights.

First, descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and the distribution of responses on key variables. Measures such as means (M), standard deviations (SD), frequencies, and percentages were computed for gender, age, teaching experience, academic rank, and other background factors.

Second, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were employed to explore significant differences in professional identity and work motivation across demographic subgroups. These tests allowed the identification of potential group-based variations, such as differences by gender or years of service. Post hoc analyses, including LSD and Tukey's HSD, were conducted when ANOVA yielded significant results.

Third, Pearson correlation analysis was performed to assess the strength and direction of the linear relationships between the dimensions of professional identity and those of work motivation. Correlation coefficients (r) were interpreted based on Cohen's (1988) criteria for effect size.

To test the study hypotheses, multiple linear regression analysis was carried out. The four dimensions of professional identity (role values, behavioral tendencies, professional beliefs, and sense of belonging) were entered as independent variables, and the overall score of work motivation was used as the dependent variable. The analysis focused on identifying which aspects of identity significantly predicted levels of motivation, while controlling for basic demographic factors.

Multicollinearity diagnostics were conducted to verify the robustness of the regression results. Tolerance values greater than 0.10 and Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) less than 10 confirmed that multicollinearity was not a concern in the model. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ for all statistical tests.

In addition, the study explored potential moderating effects of demographic variables such as gender and teaching experience. Although not part of the original hypotheses, supplementary analysis using interaction terms in regression models was conducted to generate exploratory insights for future research.

Overall, the data analysis strategy was comprehensive and aligned with prior educational research practices (Pallant, 2020), ensuring that both variable-level relationships and group-level patterns were adequately examined.

Results

Demographic Analysis of Questionnaire Participants

In this questionnaire survey, the teachers at X Higher Vocational College in Chongqing were selected as the research participants. A total of 290 valid responses were obtained. The demographic

variables included gender, age, teaching experience, educational background, and professional title.

Among the participants, 179 were male, accounting for 61.72%, while 111 were female, representing 38.28%. Regarding age, 57 teachers were under 25 years old (19.66%), 52 were aged 26–35 (17.93%), 108 were aged 36–45 (37.24%), 53 were aged 46–55 (18.28%), and 20 were over 56 years old (6.90%). In terms of teaching experience, 116 teachers had 5 years or less (40.00%), 114 had 6–10 years (39.31%), 36 had 11–20 years (12.41%), and 24 had over 20 years (8.28%). Regarding educational background, 221 held bachelor's degrees (76.21%), 52 held master's degrees (17.93%), and 17 held doctoral degrees (5.86%). As for professional titles, 238 were at the junior level (82.07%), 41 were at the intermediate level (14.14%), and 11 were at the senior level (3.79%).

Descriptive Statistical Analysis on Professional Identity and Work Motivation

Descriptive statistics were used to explore the current status of professional identity and work motivation among teachers at X Higher Vocational College in Chongqing. As shown in Table 1 and Table 2, the overall mean score for professional identity was 3.70 (SD = 0.865), indicating a high level. Among its four dimensions, Professional Values showed the highest average (M = 3.75), followed by Behavioral Tendencies (M = 3.71). Meanwhile, Sense of Belonging (M = 3.41) and Role Values (M = 3.39) were at a moderate level.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Professional Identity (N = 290)

Dimension	M	SD	Interpretation
Role Values	3.39	0.983	Moderate
Professional Values	3.75	0.935	High
Behavioral Tendencies	3.71	0.939	High
Sense of Belonging	3.41	0.989	Moderate
Overall Identity	3.7	0.865	High

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Work Motivation (N = 290)

Dimension	M	SD	Interpretation
Work Vitality	3.58	0.947	High
Recognition	3.82	0.914	High
Persistence	3.83	0.9	High
Enterprise	3.75	0.921	High
Self-Efficacy	3.44	0.982	Moderate
Value Cognition	3.41	0.969	Moderate
Overall Motivation	3.68	0.871	High

For work motivation, the total mean score was 3.68 (SD = 0.871), also reflecting a high level. The highest dimension means were found in Persistence (M = 3.83), Recognition (M = 3.82), and Enterprise (M = 3.75), while Self-Efficacy (M = 3.44) and Value Cognition (M = 3.41) were at a slightly lower but still moderate level.

These results suggested that teachers held a strong professional identity and demonstrated high work motivation, particularly in values-based commitment and sustained behavioral engagement. However, there was still room for growth in terms of belongingness and self-efficacy.

Inferential Statistical Analysis

Inferential statistical tests were conducted to identify significant differences in professional identity and work motivation across demographic variables such as gender, age, teaching experience, educational background, and professional title.

Independent Sample t-tests revealed no statistically significant gender differences in either professional identity or work motivation ($p > 0.05$), indicating that both male and female teachers exhibited similar attitudes and motivation levels.

Table 3 One-Way ANOVA Results for Professional Identity

Variable	F	p-value	Significant Difference
Gender	1.21	0.272	No
Age Group	4.35	0.006**	Yes
Teaching Experience	3.98	0.009**	Yes
Education Level	0.98	0.377	No
Professional Title	1.48	0.229	No

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 4 One-Way ANOVA Results for Work Motivation

Variable	F	p-value	Significant Difference
Gender	1.54	0.216	No
Age Group	3.89	0.011**	Yes
Teaching Experience	4.67	0.004**	Yes
Education Level	1.06	0.348	No
Professional Title	3.42	0.018**	Yes

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

One-Way ANOVA indicated significant differences in professional identity across age groups and teaching experience ($p < 0.05$). Teachers aged 36–45 and those with more than 10 years of experience reported higher identity scores. No significant differences were found by educational

background or professional title.

Regarding work motivation, significant differences were found in age, teaching experience, and professional title ($p < 0.05$). More experienced teachers and those with senior professional titles exhibited higher levels of persistence and recognition.

These findings suggested that age and accumulated experience played a key role in shaping both professional identity and motivation, possibly due to greater institutional integration and personal development over time.

Correlation Analysis Between Professional Identity and Work Motivation

To examine the relationship between professional identity and work motivation, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The results demonstrated a significant positive correlation between the two variables ($r = 0.673$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that teachers with stronger professional identity were more likely to exhibit higher levels of work motivation.

At the dimensional level, all four dimensions of professional identity were significantly correlated with the six dimensions of work motivation. Notably, Professional Values showed the strongest correlation with Recognition ($r = 0.654$, $p < 0.01$) and Persistence ($r = 0.622$, $p < 0.01$). Sense of Belonging and Role Values also demonstrated moderate to strong associations with Enterprise and Work Vitality.

These findings indicated that teachers' internal understanding of professional meaning, their emotional investment, and their organizational affiliation were closely tied to motivational factors such as persistence, enthusiasm, and goal pursuit.

Table 5 Pearson Correlation Between Professional Identity and Work Motivation (N = 290)

	Work Vitality	Recognition	Persistence	Enterprise	Self- Efficacy	Value Cognition	Total Motivation
Role Values	0.433**	0.487**	0.468**	0.452**	0.398**	0.376**	0.462**
Professional Values	0.538**	0.654**	0.622**	0.577**	0.461**	0.445**	0.634**
Behavioral Tendencies	0.517**	0.612**	0.591**	0.589**	0.436**	0.429**	0.615**
Sense of Belonging	0.446**	0.498**	0.503**	0.481**	0.412**	0.395**	0.504**
Total Identity	0.581	0.643	0.621	0.606	0.489	0.471	0.673

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

Professional Identity Was Generally High but Uneven Across Dimensions

The findings showed that teachers at X Higher Vocational College in Chongqing generally reported a high level of professional identity, particularly in the dimensions of Professional Values and Behavioral Tendencies. This suggested that most teachers recognized the social significance of their profession and were willing to act accordingly in their teaching and professional activities. However, Role Values and Sense of Belonging were at moderate levels, indicating room for improvement in areas related to organizational alignment and emotional identification with the teaching role. This echoed previous studies which found that emotional engagement and institutional trust were essential but often underdeveloped in vocational settings (Tao & Feng, 2019).

Work Motivation Was Strong but Varied by Personal Characteristics

The results of descriptive and inferential analysis indicated that teachers' work motivation was high overall, especially in terms of Persistence, Recognition, and Enterprise. These findings aligned with the principles of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which emphasized the importance of autonomy, competence, and social connection in sustaining motivation. However, lower scores in Self-Efficacy and Value Cognition revealed that not all teachers felt confident in their abilities or perceived consistent alignment between personal values and institutional expectations. These variations were more evident among younger or less experienced teachers, suggesting a need for differentiated support mechanisms.

Demographic Factors Influenced Identity and Motivation

Inferential statistical results revealed significant differences in both professional identity and work motivation across age groups, teaching experience, and professional titles. Senior teachers and those with more than ten years of experience exhibited higher scores across nearly all dimensions. These patterns implied that accumulated experience might reinforce teachers' confidence, recognition, and sense of belonging, which in turn elevated their identity and motivation levels. This finding was consistent with prior literature highlighting the stabilizing role of tenure and institutional socialization in teachers' professional development (Zhou et al., 2024; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Strong Correlation Between Professional Identity and Work Motivation

The Pearson correlation analysis confirmed a strong positive relationship between professional identity and work motivation ($r = 0.673$, $p < 0.01$). This suggested that teachers who held a stronger sense of professional purpose and role commitment were more likely to demonstrate enthusiasm, persistence, and innovation in their work. Among the dimensions, Professional Values and Recognition showed the highest correlation, indicating that value recognition from both internal beliefs and external sources (e.g., leadership support, peer respect) played a crucial role in motivational enhancement. These results provided empirical support for the idea that improving professional identity could be a key pathway to fostering teacher motivation in the vocational education sector.

Practical Implications for Faculty Development

This study offered several practical implications for policymakers and administrators in vocational

education. First, institutions should design targeted professional development programs that not only enhance technical competencies but also reinforce teachers' identity and value recognition. Second, strategies to strengthen teachers' sense of belonging—such as participatory decision-making, mentorship, and inclusive governance—could further improve emotional engagement. Third, the relatively low self-efficacy scores among younger faculty indicated a need for early-career support, including training, feedback, and recognition systems. By investing in both psychological and structural aspects of faculty development, vocational institutions could achieve sustainable teacher engagement and instructional quality.

Conclusions

This study investigated the relationship between professional identity and work motivation among teachers at X Higher Vocational College in Chongqing, China. Based on quantitative analysis of questionnaire responses from 290 participants, the research yielded several key findings.

First, the overall level of professional identity among vocational college teachers was found to be high, with particular strength in the dimensions of Professional Values and Behavioral Tendencies. However, moderate scores in Sense of Belonging and Role Values highlighted the need for greater support in emotional affiliation and role clarity.

Second, the level of work motivation was also high across the sample, especially in dimensions such as Recognition, Persistence, and Enterprise. Nonetheless, relatively lower scores in Self-Efficacy and Value Cognition suggested that not all teachers felt confident in their teaching abilities or fully aligned with institutional goals.

Third, demographic variables including age, years of teaching, and professional title significantly influenced both professional identity and work motivation. More experienced and senior teachers demonstrated stronger scores across most dimensions.

Most importantly, the correlation analysis revealed a strong and positive relationship between professional identity and work motivation. Teachers with higher levels of identity were more likely to report stronger motivation, indicating that the development of professional identity could serve as a strategic lever to enhance faculty performance, engagement, and institutional loyalty.

Overall, this study contributed to the growing body of research on vocational education by providing empirical evidence on the psychological dynamics of teaching staff in inland China. The findings offered meaningful insights for institutional leaders aiming to improve teacher development, workplace satisfaction, and retention in vocational contexts.

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