

# A Survey and Research on the Professional Identity of Male Free-Normal Students in Preschool Education Majors in Vocational Colleges: A Case Study of a Preschool Education Program at a University in Guangxi

Qiuli Liang

School of Education of Guilin Normal University, Guilin, Guangxi, 541199, China

## ABSTRACT

This case study explores the professional identity of male, government-funded early childhood education trainees at a Guangxi vocational college. Key findings reveal a generally high professional identity level, yet insufficient learning confidence. Significant differences were found based on voluntary major selection and urban-rural background, while identity levels tended to rise with each year of study. Recommendations include strengthening learning support and confidence-building, providing personalized guidance, implementing continuous follow-up across grades, and improving the social status and employment environment for male preschool teachers. This study aims to inform both the cultivation of professional identity and the pre-service training of male preschool teachers.

## KEYWORDS

Higher vocational preschool education major; Free male normal students; Professional identity

## 1 Introduction

Rural basic education is a weak link in national basic education. The "Modernization of Education in China 2035" proposes to focus on rural areas to enhance the popularization level of preschool education and establish a more comprehensive management system for preschool education. Improving the teaching level of rural preschool teachers is an important aspect of enhancing the quality of rural preschool education. As the main force to supplement the teaching staff of rural preschool teachers, local targeted preschool education majors with government funded normal students play an important role in improving the teaching level of rural kindergarten teachers. The transition towards a single gender for teachers can have a negative impact on the emotional, cognitive, and educational diversity of young children. Research has shown that male teachers play a special role and influence in the enlightenment education of preschool children, especially in sports, logical subjects, and gender identity. There is still a shortage of male preschool teachers in urban preschool education institutions, and male preschool teachers who are willing to participate in rural preschool education are even more scarce. To reverse this situation, the government has introduced a policy of publicly funded male normal students, attracting outstanding men to participate in preschool education. As an important platform for cultivating grassroots preschool education teachers, vocational preschool education majors have welcomed a large number of publicly funded male normal students. Encouraging and supporting the training of male preschool education teachers at public expense is of great significance for the development of rural preschool education, and is also an important measure to promote the upgrading of the teacher structure and quality optimization of rural preschool education. Previous studies have found that male preschool teachers face certain professional challenges, such as being marginalized in the work environment due to their small proportion; Low recognition of the teaching profession; The lack of a management mechanism for male preschool teachers hinders their ability to fully utilize their strengths. Compared with ordinary college students, public funded teacher trainees plan to find employment after graduation, which means that their career choices are relatively fixed. Since 2013, Guangxi has had a policy of recruiting male teacher trainees for vocational pre-school education at public expense, but the overall proportion of male kindergarten teachers in kindergartens is still relatively low. Due to the particularity of preschool education, the identity labels interwoven on male teacher trainees in the preschool education major, such as government-sponsored teacher trainees, preschool education majors, and male prospective kindergarten teachers, are more diverse and complex. However, the degree of professional identity of these students is directly related to their learning enthusiasm, career stability, and future contributions in the field of preschool education, and will also affect the effective implementation of the policy of publicly funded male teacher trainees in preschool education. This study aims to start with a survey on the professional identity of publicly funded male teacher trainees majoring in preschool education in Guangxi vocational colleges, understand and analyze the current situation of professional identity among this group, explore influencing factors, and provide reference for promoting the construction of preschool education teaching staff.

## 2 Research Object and Research Method

### 2.1 Research Object

This study selected male teacher trainees majoring in preschool education in a three-year vocational college in

Guangxi as the survey subjects. Electronic questionnaires were distributed anonymously, and a total of 221 survey samples were collected, with an effective response rate of 100%. The first grade had a sample size of 76 (34.39%), the second grade had a sample size of 96 (43.44%), and the third grade had a sample size of 49 (22.17%).

## 2.2 Research Tools

Professional identity was measured using a 25-item questionnaire adapted from Qin Panbo, which employed a 5-point Likert scale across four dimensions: cognition, emotion, appropriateness, and behavior. Statistical analysis confirmed the scale's excellent reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.981$ ) and structural validity (KMO = 0.938, Bartlett's test of sphericity  $*p < .001$ ), yielding a robust measure for the study.

## 3 Research Results and Analysis

### 3.1 The Overall Level of Professional Identity Among Male Teacher Trainees in Vocational Pre-school Education Funded by Public Funds is Relatively High, But They Lack Confidence in Their Own Professional Learning

Through descriptive analysis, the average scores of various dimensions of professional identity and the overall situation of professional identity of publicly funded male teacher trainees were understood. The highest percentile was 5 points, the lowest score was 1 point, and the theoretical average score was 3 points. As shown in the table below.

Table 1 Overall situation of professional identity of male teacher trainees in the preschool education major who are sponsored by the government

	N	Minimum	Maximum	(M)	(SD)
Professional cognition	221	1.00	5.00	4.0701	.67456
Professional emotion	221	1.00	5.00	4.0362	.69951
Professional conduct	221	1.00	5.00	3.9827	.71568
Professional appropriateness	221	1.00	5.00	3.9493	.75243
Professional Identity	221	1.00	5.00	4.0096	.65699
Number of effective cases (in columns)	221				

The data reveals a relatively high level of professional identity ( $M=4.009$ ) among the trainees, indicating strong acceptance of their preschool education major. Among the four dimensions, professional cognition scored the highest ( $M=4.070$ ), demonstrating a clear understanding of the field. In contrast, professional appropriateness scored the lowest ( $M=3.949$ ), which suggests insufficient confidence among the male trainees in their capacity to excel in their studies.

### 3.2 Students with Autonomous Choice Intention have Significantly Higher Levels of Professional Identity than Normal Students with Non Autonomous Choice Intention

This study compares the professional identity of government-sponsored normal university students who choose different majors, and conducts correlation analysis between the two through independent sample t-test. As shown in the table below:

Table 2 Differences in Professional Identification of Publicly funded Teacher Education Students with Different Volunteer Choices

	Professional choice intention	Number of cases	Average	Standard deviation	t	
Professional cognition	Independent choice	153	4.1275	.65303	1.847	0.058
	Parents or others' wishes	68	3.9412	.70873		
Professional emotion	Independent choice	153	4.1495	.63626	3.454	0.000***
	Parents or others' wishes	68	3.7813	.77006		
Professional conduct	Independent choice	153	4.0599	.67392	2.434	0.016*
	Parents or others' wishes	68	3.8088	.77922		
Professional Appropriateness	Independent choice	153	4.0340	.74261	2.540	0.012*
	Parents or others' wishes	68	3.7588	.74478		
Professional Identity	Independent choice	153	4.0927	.61778	2.868	0.005**
	Parents or others' wishes	68	3.8225	.70723		

(\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . The same below)

Analysis revealed that choice intention significantly influenced professional identity. Students who self-selected their major demonstrated stronger professional emotion ( $p < 0.01$ ), behavior, and appropriateness ( $p < 0.05$ ) compared to those whose major was chosen by parents or others. While the voluntary group showed a marginally higher overall professional identity score, this difference was not statistically significant.

### 3.3 The Professional Identity of Preschool Education Funded Teacher Trainees from Urban Areas is Generally Higher than that of Teacher Trainees from Rural Areas

This study investigated the professional identity of publicly funded male teacher trainees from two different source

areas, urban and rural, and conducted independent sample t-tests to understand the differences in their professional identity, and conducted correlation analysis between the two. As shown in the table below:

Table 3 Differences in Professional Identity of Preschool Professional Teacher Education Students by Source Region

	Student's place of origin	Number of cases	Average	Standard deviation	t	
Professional cognition	Town	74	4.2207	.75756	2.225	0.028*
	Countryside	147	3.9943	.61761		
Professional emotion	Town	74	4.1892	.70018	2.330	0.021*
	Countryside	147	3.9592	.68873		
Professional conduct	Town	74	4.1554	.77505	2.578	0.011*
	Countryside	147	3.8957	.66986		
Professional Appropriateness	Town	74	4.1514	.80056	2.879	0.004**
	Countryside	147	3.8476	.70820		
Professional Identity	Town	74	4.1792	.71296	2.628	0.010*
	Countryside	147	3.9242	.61183		

Through the above table, it can be found that there are significant differences ( $P < 0.05$ ) in the four dimensions of professional identity among preschool professional male normal students from different origins, with significant differences ( $p < 0.01$ ) in the appropriate professional identity. There are also significant differences ( $P < 0.05$ ) in the overall evaluation of professional identity. In terms of the four dimensions of professional identity, namely professional cognition, professional emotion, professional behavior, professional appropriateness, and overall evaluation score, students from urban areas generally have significantly higher levels of professional identity than those from rural areas.

### 3.4 There is no Significant Difference in Professional Identity Among Male Teacher Trainees of Different Grades, But There is an Increasing Trend in Average Scores

This study investigated the professional identity of male teacher trainees in different grades, namely freshmen to juniors, who were sponsored by the government. By understanding the differences in their professional identity, the results of one-way ANOVA are shown in the following table:

Table 4 Analysis of Variance of Professional Identity Dimensions among Male Teacher Education Students in Different Grades on Public Funds

Variable		Freshman year N=76	Sophomore year N=96	Junior year N=49	F	P
Professional cognition	4.046±0.697	4.055±0.575	4.136±0.814	0.303	0.739	
Professional emotion	4.069±0.668	4.000±0.645	4.056±0.846	0.114	0.794	
Professional conduct	3.868±0.763	4.019±0.599	4.088±0.830	0.834	0.197	
Professional appropriateness	3.818±0.755	3.991±0.673	4.069±0.871	1.090	0.146	
Professional identification (overall evaluation)	3.950±0.663	4.016±0.568	4.087±0.799	0.284	0.520	

Although no statistically significant differences were found in professional identity across grade levels ( $p > 0.05$ ), an analysis of mean scores reveals a nuanced trend. Cognitive, behavioral, and appropriateness scores show steady improvement, while emotional scores fluctuate, dropping sharply in the sophomore year. This pattern indicates that vocational colleges lack consistent and effective curricular support for fostering professional identity, especially in nurturing professional emotions.

### 3.5 The Better the Professional Performance, the Higher the Professional Identity Score, which is Also an Important Factor Affecting Professional Identity

This study investigated the professional identity of male teacher trainees with different academic achievements who were sponsored by the government. By understanding the differences in their professional identity, the results of one-way ANOVA are shown in the following table:

Table 5 Analysis of Variance of Professional Identity Dimensions of Male Teacher Education Students with Public Funding in Preschool Education in terms of Professional Learning Achievement

Variable	1.Poor grades N=26	2.Average grades N=142	3.Good grades N=53	F		Comparison after-wards
professional cognition	3.756±0.660	4.034±0.634	4.320±0.711	7.039	0.001**	1<2<3
professional emotion	3.740±0.637	4.006±0.707	4.261±0.649	5.422	0.005*	1<2<3
professional conduct	3.557±0.742	3.962±0.673	4.245±0.715	8.790	0.000***	1<2<3
professional appropriateness	3.584±0.688	3.880±0.729	4.313±0.714	10.720	0.000***	1<2<3
professional Identity	3.659±0.632	3.970±0.625	4.285±0.657	9.244	0.000***	1<2<3

As shown in the table above, the correlation analysis between professional performance and professional identity shows that male teacher trainees with excellent grades score higher in the four dimensions of professional cognition, professional emotion, professional behavior, and professional appropriateness, indicating a positive relationship between academic achievement and professional identity. In addition, there is a significant positive correlation between academic performance and overall evaluation score, indicating that professional performance is an important factor affecting male teacher trainees' professional identity.

### 3.6 Regression Analysis of Professional Identity and Demographic Variables Among Male Teacher Trainees on Public Funds

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with demographic statistics of publicly funded normal students as the independent variable and the overall situation of professional identity as the dependent variable. The results are shown in the table:

Table 6 Multiple regression analysis on professional identity and demographic variables

Demographic variables	B	Beta	t		R side	AdjustedR side	F	
1. Grade	.092	.104	1.623	.106				
2. Professional performance	.261	.233	3.567	.000***				
3. Do you hold a position in the class or club	.051	.039	.588	.557	.139	.119	6.926	0.001**
4. student's place of origin	-.260	-.187	-2.876	.004**				
5. Is the choice of major voluntary	-.251	-.176	-2.660	.008**				

The regression model was significant ( $F=6.926$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) and explained 13.9% of the variance in professional identity ( $R^2=0.139$ ). Three factors significantly predicted higher professional identity: better professional performance ( $B=0.261$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), place of origin ( $p=0.004$ ), and voluntary choice of major ( $p=0.008$ ). Notably, whether the major was chosen voluntarily was the strongest predictor. Grade and holding a class/club position showed no significant impact.

## 4 Conclusion and Countermeasures

### 4.1 Strengthening the Professional Identity Education of Male Teacher Trainees on Public Funds Based on the OBE Concept, Especially Strengthening the Guidance of Learning Behavior and the Establishment of Learning Confidence

Applying the OBE (Outcome-Based Education) framework, we focus on enhancing the professional identity of publicly-funded male preschool teacher trainees by ensuring a tangible sense of achievement in their learning. A significant challenge is the low social acceptance of male kindergarten teachers, which can dampen motivation. Furthermore, many male students lack confidence in mastering artistic skills like music and dance, which are core to the curriculum, often due to no prior experience. To address this, vocational colleges should offer specialized introductory courses for these trainees. These courses would affirm the importance of their future roles, provide clear behavioral guidelines for learning, and consistently encourage and acknowledge their progress. This approach helps build learning confidence, reinforces a sense of achievement, and ultimately fosters a firm belief in their future careers.

### 4.2 Carry out Personalized Professional Identity Education for Male Teacher Trainees with Different Sources of Students and Willingness to Choose from Government Funded Programs

Research indicates that publicly-funded male teacher trainees from urban areas exhibit higher professional identity than their rural counterparts. This disparity is likely due to more closed information environments and lower social acceptance of male preschool teachers in rural areas, compounded by differing levels of parental education and understanding. Interviews further revealed that urban trainees tend to have a more confident and comprehensive grasp of their major and career prospects. To address this, a tiered approach is recommended to stimulate learning motivation:

**Self-Exploration & Planning:** Guide students to clarify their interests and career goals, breaking down long-term aspirations into achievable short-term objectives to enhance focus and reduce planning anxiety.

**Building Self-Efficacy:** Offer opportunities for success through professional skills competitions and practical activities to help students build confidence.

**Peer Exchange & Mentorship:** Facilitate communication among male trainees and invite 1-2 outstanding male preschool teachers as role models to provide guidance, practical advice, and solutions to learning difficulties.

### 4.3 Continuously Follow up on the Curriculum Teaching and Professional Guidance of Male Teacher Trainees in Different Grades Who are Sponsored by the Government

Research indicates no significant difference in professional identity among male teacher trainees across different grades. However, other studies suggest that their professional identity develops over time, influenced by varying factors: policy, family, and personal circumstances pre-enrollment; teacher role models in early university; and experiences with

children during internships in later years. To support this growth, a structured curriculum is essential:

Year 1: Integrate admission education with policy and career prospects to establish professional expectations.

Year 2: As academic pressure mounts, deepen professional guidance. Use discovery-based learning, AI tools, and innovative methods like practical and project-based learning to maintain engagement and foster reflection in theoretical courses.

Year 3: Adopt an employment-oriented approach. Combine theory with practice through real-life teaching, emphasizing the "integration of teaching, learning, and research." Assess students' proactive participation in professional practice.

#### **4.4 Transforming the Identity and Status Cognition of Male Preschool Teachers at the Social Level, and Improving the Employment Environment**

The professional identity of publicly funded male teacher trainees in preschool education is related to the professional status of kindergarten teachers, and it is necessary to effectively improve the professional status and salary of preschool teachers. Education bureaus in various regions should contact each other, hold exchange meetings or offer relevant courses before targeted students start working, and release relevant professional introduction videos or articles during the enrollment period to enhance potential students' understanding and confidence in preschool majors. Various positive publicity methods can be used, such as social news media, schools, kindergartens, surrounding communities, and parent groups. Especially, news media should carry out positive publicity to promote the achievements and importance of male preschool teachers' work in kindergartens to all sectors of society. The unique value and charm of male preschool teachers in early childhood education, such as their resolute, brave, and confident personality traits, have a positive impact on the physical and mental development of young children, as well as their advantages in logical thinking and conflict resolution. Through positive and proactive promotion, we aim to deepen society's understanding and recognition of male preschool teachers, in order to eliminate gender discrimination and stereotypes towards male students majoring in early childhood education.

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#### **About the Author**

Qiuli Liang, Guangxi, is a lecturer at the School of Education, Guilin Normal University. Her main research interests include basic theoretical research on preschool education and research on kindergarten teacher education.

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