

An investigation on significant factors for professional identity development of preschool teachers

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Abstract: This paper presents an investigation on potential factors for professional identity development of preschool teachers. Based on 270 questionnaires randomly sampled at Shenyang in China, the paring test based on the F-statistics is used to determine influential factors for the professional autonomy, the motivation and the professional benefit development. Results have shown that the number of teaching years, the marriage status, and the month salary are three many factors for the professional identity development. Therefore, some suggestions are provided for healthy development of the professional identity are listed. This would be useful to determine how to evaluate and motive young preschool teachers.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the number of kindergartens has undergone a fast growth rate along with an emphasize the significance of the preschool education for individual lifelong learning activities [1-3]. In this regard, the professional identity of preschool teachers becomes an important issue. Datnow discussed the relation between professional identity and their career development [4]. The strengthened professional identity is useful to promote professional development of kindergarten teachers. Followed by a survey by Ugaste [5], a main issue for human mobility in private kindergartens are the factors related to the professional identity development. Therefore, following the definitions in the literature [6-8], the professional identity of preschool teachers mainly consists of three dimensions: (1) the professional autonomy, i.e. the competent for the assessment of the ability of the work, (2) the professional motivation, i.e. a recognition of the occupation value and an expectation to professional succeed, and (3) professional benefit, i.e. a willingness to engage in professional activities.

This paper provides a data-based statistical analysis of professional identity for preschool teachers with samples taken from the city of Shenyang in China. The F-test is implemented for various potential factors that are related to the development of the professional identity. Specially, to have a systematic information on the professional identity, the method of the case study, the method of the interview, questionnaires, the story narrative method, etc. were usually used in the literature. This paper, however, specially focuses on data collection and the statistical analysis. This because the sample data collected from many samples are possibly interpreted by the F test, and provide real information about the current development of the professional identity.

To this end, a questionnaire is first designed to collect data for understanding the professional identity development. The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part provides a background survey, including the gender, the region, the marital status and the education background. The main section of the questionnaire consists of 45 objective questions related to three dimensions about the development of the professional identity. In the third section, three subjective questions are provided. A sample of the questions can be the motivation to be a kindergarten teacher, and the ways for professional development.

In this survey, ttotally 270 valid samples were collected, which is taken about 83.6% of all questionnaires. The background data of samples have shown that the percentage of male teachers is quite low (<5%), and about 59.3% of teachers are with undergraduate or above degrees, whereas 56.2% of teachers are within 21-25 years old. This implies most of teachers are new undergraduate student and it is important to determine key factors for their professional identity development.

2. Data analysis

Table 1 summarizes the mean, the range and the standard deviation of collected data for three aspects of the profession identity, i.e. the occupational autonomy, the professional motivation, and the occupational benefit. It is observed that the occupational autonomy has shown the highest mean value ($M=3.952$), which is followed by the occupational benefit ($M=3.827$). Results have shown preschool teachers at Shenyang are generally engaged in educational activities with positive emotional state towards their work.

Table 1. A general statistical analysis of raw data

Item	Number of samples	Minimum value	Maximum	Mean-value	Std. D
Occupational autonomy	270	2.556	5.000	3.952	0.579
Professional motivation	270	1.250	5.000	3.601	0.787
Occupational benefit	270	1.000	5.000	3.827	0.750

The states of the professional identity of preschool teachers are further investigated based on the one-way analysis of variance for various potential factors. Table 2 is listed results for the number of teaching years for the professional identity development. In the statistical analysis, the number of teaching years has been generally classified into five levels. Only 26 samples have more than 15 years of the teaching experiences. Results have shown that the number of teaching year has shown a significant effect on the Occupational autonomy and the Professional motivation (P -value <0.01).

Table 2. The effect of the number of teaching years on the professional identity development

Item	0-1 ($n=84$)	2-4($n=88$)	5-14($n=72$)	15-25($n=18$)	>25 ($n=8$)	F -value	P -value
Occupational autonomy	3.632 \pm 0.624	4.005 \pm 0.519	4.213 \pm 0.494	4.222 \pm 0.331	3.889 \pm 0.509	6.573	0.000**
Professional motivation	3.277 \pm 0.692	3.643 \pm 0.756	3.939 \pm 0.723	3.583 \pm 1.134	3.917 \pm 0.583	3.865	0.005**
Occupational benefit	3.821 \pm 0.753	3.902 \pm 0.591	3.856 \pm 0.770	3.410 \pm 1.047	3.357 \pm 1.493	1.659	0.179

Specially, the occupational autonomy has gradually increased with an increase of the teaching experience. In this regard, the teacher who has 15-25-year experience has shown the highest developing level of the occupational autonomy among all investigated samples, which is followed by the levels of 5-14-year and 2-4-year, respectively. It is interesting to observe that the level of the occupational autonomy of teachers having more than 25-year working experience is similar to that of new teachers. However, they have shown a high level of professional motivation than that of new kindergarten teachers. Specially, there was no significant differences in occupational benefit among teachers for various years of the teaching experience.

Table 3. The effect of the salary on the professional identity development of preschool teachers

Item	1000-2000 ($n=110$)	2001-3000 ($n=120$)	3001-4000 ($n=20$)	>4000 ($n=20$)	F -value	P -value
Occupational autonomy	3.650 \pm 0.596	4.119 \pm 0.466	4.144 \pm 0.432	4.424 \pm 0.501	11.462	0.000**
Professional motivation	3.320 \pm 0.711	3.785 \pm 0.722	3.631 \pm 1.09	4.031 \pm 0.832	4.788	0.003**
Occupational benefit	3.753 \pm 0.758	3.941 \pm 0.623	3.133 \pm 1.033	4.303 \pm 0.690	5.397	0.001**

Table 3 summarizes results for the effect of the salary on the professional identity development of preschool teachers. The salary level indeed has shown a significant effect on every aspect of the professional identity with a P -value <0.01 . To begin with, the salary level is linearly related to occupational autonomy, and teachers with a month income above 4000 have shown the highest level of the occupational autonomy ($M = 4.424$), and a salary within the 1000-2000 level results in the lowest result ($M=3.650$). Similar observations can be obtained for the professional motivation and the occupational benefit. The income level is positively related to the professional identity development of preschool teachers in general.

Table 4. The effect of marital status on the professional identity development

Item	married (<i>n</i> =78)	unmarried (<i>n</i> =192)	<i>F</i> -value	<i>P</i> -value
Occupational autonomy	4.102±0.425	3.849±0.626	4.785	0.031*
Professional motivation	3.802±0.820	3.502±0.782	3.583	0.061
Occupational benefit	3.562±0.795	3.893±0.729	4.880	0.029*

In Table 4, results for the effect of the marital status on the professional identity development of preschool teachers are listed. The statistical test has shown that the marital status has shown significant influence on the occupational autonomy and the occupational benefit (*P*-value <0.05). The mean value for the occupational autonomy for married samples is determined as 4.102, which is statistically higher than that of unmarried samples. For a comparison, unmarried samples with a higher level of the occupational benefit (3.893 v.s.3.562), and there is no significant difference between married and unmarried samples for the professional motivation.

Table 5. The effect of the class size on the professional identity development

Item	<15(<i>n</i> =40)	15-25 (<i>n</i> =160)	25-35(<i>n</i> =36)	>35 (<i>n</i> =34)	<i>F</i> -value	<i>P</i> -value
Occupational autonomy	3.882±0.725	3.943±0.575	3.993±0.501	4.061±0.543	0.352	0.788
Professional motivation	3.645±0.691	3.610±0.804	3.620±0.743	3.549±0.925	0.051	0.985
Occupational benefit	4.351±0.698	3.759±0.724	3.706±0.576	3.767±0.912	3.632	0.015*

Results in Table 5 have summarized the statistical test values for the effect of the class size on the professional identity development. It is observed that the class size has no significant influence on the occupational autonomy and the professional motivation, whereas the small class size (<15) results in a high level of the occupational benefit (*P*-value<0.05).

3. Results and discussions

Results of statistical analysis for influential factors on the professional identity development of preschool teachers were briefly summarized in the forgoing section. It is shown that the number of teaching years, the salary level, and the marriage status are three controlling factors for high levels of the occupational autonomy, whereas the month income is a significant factor for professional motivation development of preschool teachers. Specially, that the average value of the occupational autonomy is about 3.632 for preschool teachers having less than one-year teaching experience, which is much lower than that of the overall average 3.952. The small mean-value indicates new teachers normally have a low awareness of professional competences. However, a linear relation between the teaching experience and the occupational autonomy has been observed. This is, an increase of the teaching year implies an increase of the professional autonomy. In this regard, the teach with 5-14 and 15-25 years of working experience has shown a highest level of the professional autonomy.

More importantly, the survey has shown that 40.7% of preschool teachers with a month salary less than 2000 yuan (about \$ 500), 44.4% of 2001-3000 yuan/month, and only 7.4% of preschool teachers have a month salary more than 4000 yuan. Statistical analysis results have shown that a month income level higher than 4,000 yuan would be valuable for a high level of professional motivation (*M*=4.031), which is much larger than that of other monthly income levels, e.g. 1,000-2000 yuan (*M*=3.320), 2001-3000 yuan (*M*=3.785), and 3001-4000 yuan (*M*=3.631). This implies most preschool teachers were not satisfied with their month salary, which has a great impact on the professional motivation of preschool teachers.

Regarding the question about reasons for a preschool teacher, 31.3% of samples answer the question due to the stability of this job, 24.6% for professional life, and 9.3% were influenced by peers. Specially, 29.6% of samples are determined as a preschool teacher to realize their personal lifelong value, and 5.2% of them has to be a preschool teacher without other options. To summarize, about one-third of preschool teachers are actively selected this job to achieve their own professional values. Therefore, samples who selected the answer “need for self-value realization” has shown the

highest level of professional recognition, indicating that such kindergarten teachers can clearly assess their own professional competence during the career development. In this regard, possible answers “I am very fond of the preschool teacher profession, I have inspired my strong enthusiasm and self-employment in my work, I love young children” implies they are willing to invest more time and energy for this work. For a comparison, the lack of professional initiative and enthusiasm might be influenced by peers or other factor have shown a low sense of professional identity.

For open questions such as “Do you have your own career plan?”, “What is the motivation to choose to be a child teacher?”, many samples responded this as “to become a good teacher” or “Seeking stable work, earning a living”, etc. This implies those samples with a negative attitude towards the career development. Some teacher does not have a clear connection between career planning and professional evaluation. 65% of teachers have no plan about the future career development at all. However, along with an increase of the working experience, results have shown an increased level of professional cognition and the ability for professional development. An increase of educational skills enabled them to more confident about their own competences. Among teachers who has more than five-year working experiences, the level of professional motivation reaches the highest level and the value is significantly higher than that of new kindergarten teachers. However, after 25 years of employment, there was a sense of job burnout, this is justified by low professional autonomy and motivation level in this survey.

According to the survey, there are significant differences in the professional autonomy and occupational benefit of preschool teachers with different marital status. The average occupational identity of married teachers is generally higher than that of the average of unmarried teachers. A stable marriage status provides a sense of stability, and the teacher would like to invest more time and energy for professional development. Specially combined with children, this will help teachers understand more about the preschool educational activities, and investigate children from a unique parental perspective. In addition, results have shown that married teachers have a sense of responsibility and will actively overcome difficulties occurred during the teaching process. Compared with unmarried preschool teachers, married preschool teachers are more accurate in their own professional cognition positioning, and have higher Self-awareness and career orientation.

4. Conclusions

This paper presents an investigation results for the development of professional identity of preschool teachers. To begin with, 270 samples within sixteen kindergartens in Shenyang were randomly selected for questioning. The F-test was used for a pair comparison of raw data based on various designed factors. In this investigation, protentional factors include the month salary, the marriage status, the year of working experience, etc. Results have shown that the month salary level plays a significant factor for professional autonomy, motivation and benefit. In general, the wage level of preschool teachers is averagely less than \$1,000 per month. Even though the average wage of teachers shall not be lower than that of national civil servants, the wage level is far lower than this level. In order to promote healthy growth of young children, the month salary needs to be further improved to attract more talents engaged in the preschool education. Secondly, the social occupation embodies social characteristics. Only after good evaluation and social recognition from others before a wide public acceptance. Therefore, along with a rapid increase of the kindergarten, the educational management departments need solid steps towards an improvement for professional identity of kindergarten teachers. In this regard, to encourage teachers closely linking their career planning and development with their teaching background would be helpful to maintain a good condition for the professional identity development. To promote the professional development of kindergarten teachers, we can provide diversified approaches to motive them for professional training and self-development. The “people-oriented, garden-based” garden-based training model came into being. Finally, to improve the procedural evaluation as the summative assessment method would be helpful to promote reflection of preschool teachers at various career stages, and formulate vocational training system for professional identity development. To summarize, with the influential factors in terms of the month salary, the marriage status and the year of working experience, the

professional identity of preschool teachers needs more attentions for robust development of children and kindergartens.

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