

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND LEARNING ENGAGEMENT AMONG PRESCHOOL EDUCATION UNDERGRADUATES

Dai Yu¹, Li Haofei²

¹School of Education, Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing, Guangdong, China;

²School of Education, Qufu Normal University, Qufu, Shandong, 273165, China.

<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2024.0860>

ABSTRACT

Professional identity and learning engagement are key factors influencing the professional development of undergraduate students in preschool education. To investigate the current status and relationship between professional identity and learning engagement, a survey was conducted with 328 students from grades 1 to 4 using the Professional Identity Scale and the Learning Engagement Scale. The results indicate that the professional identity and learning engagement of preschool education undergraduates are above average and that professional identity positively predicts learning engagement. It is recommended to enhance professional identity and learning engagement through measures such as expanding professional practice opportunities, improving the student cadre system, refining the training mechanism, and deepening professional cognition.

Keywords: Preschool Education, Undergraduates, Professional Identity, Learning Engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued *China Education Modernization 2035*, which emphasized the construction of a high-quality, professional, and innovative teaching workforce. It called for strengthening pre-service teacher training, consolidating teacher professional development systems, and promoting lifelong learning and professional autonomy for teachers, reflecting the priority placed on enhancing the professional capabilities and quality of the teaching workforce. Undergraduate students majoring in preschool education serve as a reserve force for early childhood educators, a critical source of preschool teacher talent, and a cornerstone of preschool education development. Their professional identity and learning engagement play a pivotal role in shaping and nurturing their professional skills and competencies, which, in turn, influence the overall quality of the teaching workforce and preschool education as a whole. Examining the levels and relationships between professional identity and learning engagement among these undergraduates can promote students' identification with their major, enhance their learning engagement, and provide valuable insights for universities in developing talent cultivation programs.

Professional identity serves as the psychological foundation for individuals' autonomous growth and development. Qin Panbo (2009) provided a comprehensive definition, viewing professional identity as the emotional connection that learners form with their field of study based on a certain level of understanding. This psychological state positively influences individuals' learning behaviors, encompassing four aspects: cognition, emotion, appropriateness, and behavior. Cognition refers to individuals' accurate understanding and deep comprehension of their field, serving as the basis for professional identity. Emotion indicates an acceptance and recognition of their field. Appropriateness refers to an intrinsic sense of alignment with the field, and behavior

reflects outward expressions of professional identity through proactive actions. Research has shown that professional identity, as a form of positive emotion, can shape students' attitudes and behaviors toward learning activities, thereby influencing the quality of these activities (Chen, Xu, & Zheng, 2019).

Learning engagement was first proposed by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002), who defined it as the sustained involvement in learning activities with enthusiasm, vitality, and psychological resilience. Learning engagement is characterized by three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Vigor refers to maintaining a positive mental state in learning, dedication involves demonstrating passion for learning activities, and absorption represents being fully immersed and mentally focused during learning. Previous studies have shown that learning engagement positively influences academic outcomes (Guo & Ji, 2019) and contributes to better quality of life (Huang & Zhuang, 2016). Furthermore, research suggests that professional identity affects the degree of learning engagement. The cognitive, behavioral, and appropriateness dimensions of professional identity have predictive effects on learning engagement levels, implying that enhancing professional identity can improve students' learning behaviors (Guo & Liu, 2023).

Although studies have explored the relationship between professional identity and learning engagement, research focusing on preschool education undergraduates remains limited. Existing literature often omits a complete sample of students from first-year to fourth-year (mainly due to the absence of fourth-year students who are typically on internships), making it difficult to examine differences and trends across all four academic years. To address these gaps, this study selected undergraduate students majoring in preschool education from a university in Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province, including all four academic years. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current status of professional identity and learning engagement among these students and to reveal their relationship, offering targeted interventions to enhance learning engagement among preschool education undergraduates.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

This study adopted a questionnaire survey method, targeting undergraduate students majoring in preschool education at a university in Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province. Questionnaires were distributed by academic year. A total of 332 questionnaires were distributed, with 328 valid responses obtained after screening, resulting in an efficiency rate of 98.9%. Among the participants, 71 were first-year students, 27 were second-year students, 118 were third-year students, and 112 were fourth-year students. Additionally, 219 participants had internship experience, while 109 had no such experience. The sample also included 108 student leaders and 220 non-leaders (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Information of Valid Participants

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	26	7.9
	Female	302	92.1
Academic Year	First Year	71	21.6
	Second Year	27	8.2
	Third Year	118	36.0
	Fourth Year	112	34.1
Background	Rural	202	61.6
	Urban	126	38.4
Enrollment Choice	Fully Self-Chosen	139	42.4
	Guided by Parents/Others	116	35.4
	Assigned Major	73	22.3
Internship Status	Observed/Practiced	24	7.3
	Participated in Internship	102	31.1
	Engaged in Two or More Practices	93	28.4
	No Practical Experience	109	33.2
Student Leadership	Student Leaders	108	32.9
	Non-Leaders	220	67.0
Family in Early Childhood Education	Yes	66	20.1
	No	262	79.9

2.2 Research Instruments

2.2.1 Professional Identity Scale

The study employed the *Professional Identity Scale for Preschool Education Majors*, developed by Liang Jinlong, Cui Xinling, and Sun Yuhua (2017), which includes four dimensions: professional cognition, professional emotion, professional behavior, and professional cultivation, with a total of 18 items (Liang, Cui, & Sun, 2017). The professional cognition dimension includes four items that reflect students' understanding of the history, current status, and future prospects of preschool education. The professional emotion dimension comprises five items that assess students' emotional attitudes toward the field. The professional behavior dimension contains five items that measure students' professional actions. The professional cultivation dimension includes four items that evaluate the alignment between the university's preschool education training conditions and students' expectations. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree". Higher scores indicate a higher level of professional identity, and the scale's overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.956.

2.2.2 Learning Engagement Scale

The *Learning Engagement Scale* developed by Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) and translated and revised by Fang Laitan et al. (2008) was used. This scale consists of 17 items covering three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002; Fang, Shi, & Zhang, 2008). The vigor dimension includes six

items reflecting students' active engagement in learning. The dedication dimension comprises five items measuring students' commitment to learning activities. The absorption dimension includes six items assessing students' concentration during learning. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 represented "strongly agree". Higher scores indicate higher levels of learning engagement. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale was 0.936.

2.2.3 Data Analysis

SPSS software was used for data processing, including descriptive statistics, variance analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Current Status of Professional Identity Among Preschool Education Undergraduates

To examine the current status of professional identity among preschool education undergraduates, descriptive statistics were applied to analyze the overall professional identity scores and scores across four dimensions. Additionally, one-way ANOVA and independent-sample t-tests were conducted to further explore differences in professional identity and its dimensions based on grade level, participation in practical activities, and other demographic variables.

Descriptive statistics revealed that the overall professional identity score of preschool education undergraduates was 3.77, slightly below 4 (where 4 represents "agree"), indicating a level above the average standard. Among the dimensions, professional cognition scored the highest ($M=4.06$), suggesting that students have a clearer and deeper understanding of their field. In contrast, professional behavior scored the lowest ($M=3.52$), reflecting insufficient involvement in professional practice (see Table 2).

Variance analysis results indicated significant differences in professional identity based on grade level, participation in practical activities, and student leadership roles. First, professional identity scores increased with academic year, as higher-grade students exhibited stronger professional identity, aligning with previous studies that suggest academic progression enhances professional understanding and emotional attachment to the field (see Table 3). Second, students who participated in more frequent or diverse practical activities scored higher in professional identity, highlighting the positive impact of hands-on experiences in bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world application and deepening students' engagement with their field (see Table 4). Finally, student leaders demonstrated higher levels of professional identity compared to non-leaders, likely due to increased opportunities to organize and participate in professional activities and greater interaction with instructors, which fosters deeper professional connections and growth (see Table 5).

Table 2. Overall Levels of Professional Identity Among Preschool Education Undergraduates

	Mean	SD
Professional Cognition	4.06	0.51
Professional Emotion	3.59	0.75
Professional Behavior	3.52	0.72
Professional Cultivation	3.90	0.59
Professional Identity	3.77	0.53

Table 3. Differences in Professional Identity by Academic Year (M ± SD)

Variable	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year	F
Professional Cognition	3.88±0.61	4.00±0.61	4.10±0.47	4.15±0.43	4.51**
Professional Emotion	3.50±0.79	3.93±0.64	3.60±0.64	3.56±0.84	2.29
Professional Behavior	3.39±0.74	3.79±0.57	3.56±0.63	3.49±0.80	2.24
Professional Cultivation	3.79±0.62	4.06±0.46	3.99±0.53	3.84±0.65	2.77*
Professional Identity	3.64±0.59	3.94±0.46	3.81±0.46	3.76±0.56	2.73*

*Note: $P < 0.05$, $P < 0.01$, $*P < 0.001$.

Table 4. Differences in Professional Identity by Internship Status (M ± SD)

Variable	Observed/Practiced	Internship	Two or More Practices	No Practice	F
Professional Cognition	4.11±0.45	4.05±0.48	4.23±0.43	3.91±0.57	7.27**
Professional Emotion	3.46±0.74	3.49±0.76	3.71±0.72	3.61±0.77	1.60
Professional Behavior	3.49±0.74	3.44±0.76	3.65±0.65	3.49±0.73	1.52
Professional Cultivation	3.80±0.34	3.83±0.66	4.03±0.59	3.88±0.56	2.25
Professional Identity	3.72±0.46	3.70±0.55	3.90±0.48	3.72±0.55	2.94*

Table 5. Differences in Professional Identity by Student Leadership Roles (M ± SD)

Variable	Student Leaders	Non-Leaders	t
Professional Cognition	4.14±0.52	4.02±0.50	3.55
Professional Emotion	3.67±0.74	3.55±0.76	1.92
Professional Behavior	3.63±0.67	3.46±0.73	3.83
Professional Cultivation	3.97±0.54	3.87±0.61	2.44
Professional Identity	3.85±0.51	3.73±0.53	4.20*

3.2 Current Status of Learning Engagement Among Preschool Education Undergraduates

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the overall learning engagement scores and their dimensions, followed by one-way ANOVA and independent-sample t-tests to further examine differences in learning engagement across grade levels, participation in practical activities, and other demographic variables.

The descriptive analysis showed that the total learning engagement score among preschool education undergraduates was 3.62, below 4 (where 4 represents "agree"). Among the

dimensions, dedication had the highest score (M=3.78), indicating a high level of commitment to professional learning. Conversely, vigor had the lowest score (M=3.49), reflecting insufficient energy and enthusiasm in learning activities (see Table 6).

Variance analysis revealed significant differences in learning engagement based on participation in practical activities and student leadership roles, with the differences in leadership roles being highly significant (P=0.002 < 0.01).

By participation in practical activities, students with more frequent or varied practical experiences demonstrated higher levels of learning engagement (see Table 7).

By student leadership roles, student leaders exhibited significantly higher levels of learning engagement compared to non-leaders (see Table 8).

Table 6. Overall Levels of Learning Engagement Among Preschool Education Undergraduates

	Mean	SD
Vigor	3.49	0.66
Dedication	3.78	0.62
Absorption	3.58	0.67
Learning Engagement	3.62	0.60

Table 7. Differences in Learning Engagement by Internship Status (M ± SD)

Variable	Observed/Practiced	Internship	Two or More Practices	No Practice	F
Vigor	3.49±0.71	3.44±0.67	3.62±0.52	3.43±0.73	1.71
Dedication	3.76±0.61	3.74±0.60	3.93±0.59	3.70±0.66	2.70*
Absorption	3.58±0.71	3.53±0.66	3.74±0.63	3.49±0.70	2.63
Learning Engagement	3.61±0.61	3.57±0.57	3.77±0.53	3.54±0.66	2.72*

Table 8. Differences in Learning Engagement by Student Leadership Roles (M ± SD)

Variable	Student Leaders	Non-Leaders	t
Vigor	3.63±0.59	3.42±0.68	2.77**
Dedication	3.93±0.53	3.71±0.65	3.23**
Absorption	3.71±0.58	3.52±0.71	2.48*
Learning Engagement	3.76±0.53	3.55±0.62	3.16**

3.3 Relationship Between Professional Identity and Learning Engagement Among Preschool Education Undergraduates

3.3.1 Correlation Analysis Between Professional Identity and Learning Engagement

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the overall scores and dimensions of the Professional Identity Scale and the Learning Engagement Scale (see Table 9). The results revealed a significant positive correlation between the total scores of professional identity and learning engagement (r=0.618, p<0.01). Furthermore, significant positive correlations were found between each dimension of professional identity and each dimension of learning engagement.

These findings indicate that the higher the professional identity of preschool education

undergraduates, the greater their engagement in professional learning. Amongst the four dimensions of professional identity, professional behavior demonstrated the strongest correlation with the total score of learning engagement ($r=0.577$), while professional cognition exhibited the weakest correlation ($r=0.451$).

Table 9. Correlation Analysis Between Professional Identity and Learning Engagement

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Professional Cognition	1								
2. Professional Emotion	0.399*	1							
3. Professional Behavior	0.468*	0.758*	1						
4. Professional Cultivation	0.534*	0.526*	0.639*	1					
5. Professional Identity	0.690*	0.854*	0.898*	0.811*	1				
6. Vigor	0.391*	0.414*	0.532*	0.455*	0.548*	1			
7. Dedication	0.453*	0.455*	0.539*	0.529*	0.601*	0.792*	1		
8. Absorption	0.407*	0.421*	0.525*	0.490*	0.562*	0.737*	0.802*	1	
9. Learning Engagement	0.451*	0.465*	0.577*	0.532*	0.618*	0.914*	0.934*	0.920*	1

3.3.2 Regression Analysis Between Professional Identity and Learning Engagement

Based on the results of the correlation analysis, a linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive effects of the four dimensions of professional identity on learning engagement (see Table 10). When the total learning engagement score was used as the dependent variable and the four dimensions of professional identity as independent variables, professional cognition ($p<0.01$), professional behavior ($p<0.01$), and professional cultivation ($p<0.01$) were found to have significant positive effects on the total learning engagement score.

The R^2 value was 0.398, indicating that professional cognition, professional emotion, professional behavior, and professional cultivation collectively explained 39.8% of the variance in learning engagement. This demonstrates that these dimensions can positively predict learning engagement levels. The regression equation is as follows:

$$\text{Learning Engagement Total Score} = 0.899 + 0.198 \times \text{Professional Cognition} + 0.023 \times \text{Professional Emotion} + 0.288 \times \text{Professional Behavior} + 0.210 \times \text{Professional Cultivation}.$$

Table 10. Regression Analysis Between Professional Identity and Learning Engagement

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	p	VIF
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	0.899	0.221	-	4.065**	0.000
Professional Cognition	0.198	0.061	0.169	3.234**	0.001
Professional Emotion	0.023	0.053	0.029	0.438	0.662
Professional Behavior	0.288	0.062	0.343	4.645**	0.000
Professional Cultivation	0.21	0.061	0.207	3.451**	0.001
R ²	0.398				
Adjusted R ²	0.39				
F	<i>F</i> (4,323)=53.312, <i>p</i> =0.000				
D-W Value	2.174				

Dependent variable: Total score of learning engagement.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Analysis of Differences in Professional Identity Among Preschool Education Undergraduates

The overall level of professional identity among preschool education undergraduates is above average, consistent with previous research findings (Chen, Xu, & Zheng, 2019). Among the dimensions, professional cognition scored the highest, while professional behavior scored the lowest. This aligns with earlier studies on professional identity among university students (Li, 2018). The findings suggest that these students have a deep understanding and high cognitive level regarding their field of study. However, their professional learning behaviors do not match this level of understanding. This discrepancy could be attributed to various factors, such as limited practical exposure due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other uncontrollable circumstances. Many students have not yet had the opportunity to experience hands-on preschool education practice or gain insights into the realities of preschool work. Additionally, the university selected for this study does not offer sufficient lectures or exchange programs related to preschool education, limiting students' avenues for practical learning and preventing the full translation of professional cognition into specific professional actions.

The variance analysis results revealed significant differences in professional identity based on grade level, participation in practical activities, and student leadership roles. Higher-grade students displayed stronger professional identity than lower-grade students, consistent with the findings of Wang Haiyan (2021) in her study on professional identity differences among education undergraduates (Wang, 2021). With increased age and deeper engagement in preschool education courses and skills, students tend to develop a stronger sense of identity with their field. This progression can be attributed to the cumulative effect of coursework and practical activities as students advance through their academic years, leading to a more profound and comprehensive understanding of the historical development, current status, and prospects of preschool education,

as well as a growing emotional attachment to their field. Students who engaged in more frequent or diverse practical activities exhibited higher levels of professional identity, highlighting the positive impact of professional practice on identity development. During internships, students can witness the application of theoretical knowledge in real-life contexts, experience the genuine love and enthusiasm of children, and appreciate the sanctity and responsibility inherent in the teaching profession. These experiences deepen their understanding of the current state and future prospects of preschool education from both theoretical and practical perspectives, thereby enhancing their professional identity. Student leaders demonstrated higher levels of professional identity compared to non-leaders, contrasting with some previous research (Zhang & Xu, 2022). In this study, it is likely because student leaders had more opportunities to participate in and organize activities related to preschool education. These experiences provided them with more firsthand information about their field. Additionally, instructors tend to be more familiar with student leaders and may pay closer attention to their professional growth, further influencing their professional identity.

4.2 Analysis of Differences in Learning Engagement Among Preschool Education Undergraduates

The overall level of learning engagement among preschool education undergraduates is above average. Among the dimensions, dedication scored the highest, vigor scored the lowest, and absorption fell between these two, consistent with previous research findings (Guan, 2019). These students exhibit considerable effort in their studies, maintaining strong enthusiasm and the ability to fully engage in learning activities. However, they show limited resilience in learning, often experiencing fatigue and a tendency to give up when faced with challenges.

This outcome may be attributed to the current developmental state of the preschool education sector, which is thriving and shows promising trends. However, the employment prospects for undergraduates in this field are relatively narrow. Most graduates are employed as frontline preschool teachers, where the salary and working conditions do not sufficiently differentiate undergraduate qualifications from those of junior college graduates, and career advancement opportunities are limited. This mismatch between expectations and reality likely fosters pessimistic attitudes toward employment among preschool education undergraduates, as reflected in the low vigor scores.

The variance analysis revealed significant differences in learning engagement based on participation in practical activities and student leadership roles, with the differences in leadership roles being particularly significant. Students who engaged in more frequent or diverse practical activities demonstrated higher levels of learning engagement, suggesting that professional practice positively impacts learning engagement. Through participation in activities such as teaching and observing daily life in kindergartens, students gain a clearer understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in practice. This enhanced self-awareness motivates them to improve their professional and comprehensive practical skills. Student leaders exhibited significantly higher levels of learning engagement than non-leaders, indicating that assuming leadership roles positively influences learning engagement. As key members of the student community, leaders are often tasked with guiding their peers in academic and professional activities. This role model and exemplar effect likely compels them to hold themselves to higher standards and devote more effort to professional learning.

4.3 Correlation and Regression Analysis of Professional Identity and Learning Engagement Among Preschool Education Undergraduates

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between professional identity and learning engagement. This finding indicates that the more strongly preschool education undergraduates identify with their field, the greater their engagement in professional learning. In other words, the deeper their cognition, emotion, and belief in their field, the more likely they are to engage in learning activities with enthusiasm and perseverance.

This result aligns with previous studies. For example, Ren Chunhua (2016) found significant positive correlations between various dimensions of professional identity and learning engagement among preschool education undergraduates at Huangshan University (Ren, 2016). Yin Yufei (2021) reported that learning engagement among preschool education students increases as their professional identity strengthens (Yin, 2021). Similarly, Dai Yun (2021) concluded that professional identity positively predicts learning engagement among preschool education undergraduates (Dai, 2021).

Through linear regression analysis, it was further established that professional cognition, professional behavior, and professional cultivation positively predict learning engagement. Among these dimensions, professional behavior had the highest explanatory power, suggesting that encouraging students to engage in positive, outward professional behaviors significantly enhances their learning engagement. This finding can be explained by Skinner's reinforcement theory, which posits that when individuals receive appropriate reinforcement for their behaviors, the likelihood of those behaviors recurring increases. Thus, incentivizing students to adopt proactive professional behaviors reinforces and strengthens their engagement.

The predictive effect of professional cultivation was moderate, indicating that when universities' preschool education training programs and conditions align closely with students' expectations, their learning engagement improves. Bandura's reciprocal determinism theory underscores the interaction between environment, individuals, and behavior. Students' subjective perceptions of their academic environment influence their learning behaviors, while their behaviors, in turn, shape their perceptions of the environment and contribute to the development of that environment.

The predictive effect of professional cognition was relatively low but still significant, particularly in predicting resilience in learning. This finding suggests that enhancing students' understanding of their field contributes to their ability to better engage in learning. According to Bruner's cognitive structure theory, learners process information to gradually build their cognitive structure. Bruner emphasized that this structure is a critical internal factor for further learning, indicating that students' professional cognition directly influences their subsequent learning behaviors.

5. STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Expand Professional Practice Pathways to Enhance Professional Identity

Professional practice positively impacts professional identity, and universities, as designers and organizers of such activities, bear primary responsibility for cultivating students' practical abilities. While focusing on the academic knowledge of undergraduates, universities should also emphasize the development of professional practice skills. Universities should prioritize broadening

opportunities for practice education by establishing a sound educational philosophy, improving talent cultivation models for preschool education majors, and fully utilizing resources to expand practice-based education pathways. Organizing diverse and enriching practical activities can enhance students' academic vision and practical abilities, ultimately strengthening their professional identity and achieving holistic talent development. Specific measures include inviting experts and scholars in preschool education to deliver lectures or host exchange programs, encouraging interaction among students across different academic years, regularly organizing visits to kindergartens of various types, and arranging internships to ensure effective hands-on learning opportunities. Universities should also address student needs by offering tailored solutions to enhance management capabilities and academic standards. This can be achieved by establishing a "Student Feedback Box" system, distributing questionnaires, regularly collecting and analyzing students' views on training plans and measures related to professional practice, and implementing targeted adjustments to improve the relevance and suitability of these programs.

5.2 Improve the Student Leadership Mechanism to Enhance Learning Engagement

The findings indicate that serving as a student leader fosters a sense of role modeling and exemplary behavior among preschool education undergraduates, motivating them to set higher standards for their academic endeavors and devote more effort to professional learning. Thus, universities and faculty should strive to refine the student leadership appointment and work mechanisms. Universities should develop robust selection and evaluation systems for student leaders by designing scientific evaluation frameworks that enhance both academic and leadership skills. Organizing leadership training programs and implementing transparent and fair selection processes are essential to identifying and cultivating qualified student leaders. Introducing reward mechanisms can incentivize participation in student leadership elections and responsibilities, facilitating role transitions and providing support for academic and leadership development. Faculty responsible for managing and mentoring student leaders should innovate selection processes by moving beyond traditional sequential appointment models. Encouraging rotational roles among students can increase leadership opportunities and indirectly enhance their learning engagement, creating a more inclusive and dynamic environment for professional growth.

5.3 Improve Training Mechanisms, Deepen Professional Cognition, and Enhance Professional Identity and Learning Engagement

Based on the study findings, universities and educators can adopt a series of measures to strengthen the professional identity of preschool education undergraduates, thereby increasing their learning engagement. Based on the study findings, universities and educators can implement various measures to strengthen the professional identity of preschool education undergraduates, thereby increasing their learning engagement. First, universities must take responsibility for refining training models and educational mechanisms tailored to preschool education majors. This includes improving teaching conditions by providing high-quality faculty resources, adequate facilities such as dance studios, piano rooms, and art studios, and establishing comprehensive educational practice bases to ensure sufficient opportunities for observation and internships. Equally important is fostering mental and emotional support by encouraging students in their academic exploration, creating multiple incentive mechanisms to boost confidence, and monitoring their psychological well-being to provide timely interventions when necessary. Teachers also play a vital role in shaping students' professional cognition. At the beginning of their academic journey, teachers can

share personal or third-party career experiences to help students gain a clear understanding of the current status and future prospects of preschool education, thereby fostering professional trust. During coursework, teachers should aim to instill confidence through tailored teaching approaches, provide encouragement, address challenges, and stimulate interest in the field. As graduation approaches, organizing job fairs and inviting alumni to share their experiences can alleviate employment-related anxiety and enhance professional confidence. By implementing these strategies progressively and reinforcing them through continuous exposure, universities and educators can significantly enhance the professional cognition of preschool education undergraduates, ultimately promoting their professional identity and learning engagement. Through these strategies, implemented progressively and reinforced through continuous exposure, the professional cognition of preschool education undergraduates can be significantly enhanced, ultimately promoting their professional identity and learning engagement.

Author Information

Dai Yu, female, Han ethnicity, native of Taojiang, Hunan, is a lecturer at the School of Education Science, Zhaoqing University. Her primary research focus is preschool teacher education. (Corresponding author: 2897597669@qq.com)

Li Haofei, female, Han ethnicity, native of Heyuan, Guangdong, is a graduate student in the Preschool Education program at the School of Education, Qufu Normal University.

Funding Project

This research is part of the phased outcomes of the key project of the Zhaoqing Education Development Research Institute: "A Study on the Living Conditions of Preschool Teachers in the Context of Negative Population Growth" (Project No.: ZQJYY2024024).

REFERENCES

- Chen, Q. Z., Xu, H. Q., & Zheng, M. N. (2019). The relationship between professional identity and autonomous learning motivation of preschool education students: Sequential mediating effects of resilience and learning burnout. *Studies in Early Childhood Education*, (10), 56–66. <https://doi.org/10.13861/j.cnki.sece.2019.10.005>
- Dai, Y. (2021). The relationship between learning engagement and professional identity among undergraduate students majoring in preschool education: The mediating effect of resilience (Master's thesis). Shaanxi Normal University.
- Fang, L. T., Shi, K., & Zhang, F. H. (2008). Reliability and validity study of the Chinese version of the Learning Engagement Scale. *Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 16(6), 618–620.
- Guan, X. (2019). The relationship between professional identity and learning engagement among master students majoring in preschool education (Master's thesis). Shaanxi Normal University.
- Guo, J. P., & Ji, G. J. (2019). The relationship between college students' learning experience and learning outcomes: The mediating role of student engagement. *Psychological Science*, 42(4), 868–875. <https://doi.org/10.16719/j.cnki.1671-6981.20190415>
- Guo, X., & Liu, C. H. (2023). The relationship between professional identity and learning engagement of college students in the new era. *Journal of Changchun Normal University*, 42(5), 148–153.
- Huang, Z. D., & Zhuang, Y. (2016). Exploration of the current situation of college students' learning engagement and its relationship with life satisfaction. *Research on Continuing Education*,

(10), 123–126.

Liang, J. L., Cui, X. L., & Sun, Y. H. (2017). Development and reliability and validity analysis of the professional identity scale for undergraduate students majoring in preschool education. *Heilongjiang Researches on Higher Education*, (5), 99–102.

Li, R. L. (2018). Effects of professional identity on learning engagement among college students: The chain mediation of school belonging and academic self-efficacy (Master's thesis). South China University of Technology.

Qin, P. B. (2009). Characteristics and related research on college students' professional identity (Master's thesis). Southwest University.

Ren, C. H. (2016). The relationship between professional identity and learning engagement among undergraduates majoring in preschool education. *Journal of Huangshan University*, 18(6), 123–126.

Schaufeli, W. B., Salanova, M., Gonzalez-Roma, V., & Bakker, A. B. (2002). The measurement of engagement and burnout: A two-sample confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3(1), 71–92.

Wang, H. Y. (2021). The relationship between professional identity and learning engagement among undergraduates in normal universities (Master's thesis). Jiangxi Normal University.

Yin, Y. F. (2021). The effect of professional identity on learning engagement among preschool education students: A moderated mediation model (Master's thesis). Hunan Normal University.

Zhang, Y. M., & Xu, F. X. (2022). A study on the professional identity of preschool education students: Taking Changzhi University as an example. *Educational Observation*, 11(24), 102–105.