

Preschool Education a Case Study of Students' Professional Identity Enhancement

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Abstract: Preschool education is the beginning of lifelong learning, an important part of the national education system, and a significant social public good. As future teachers, preschool education students should understand the current situation of their professional perceptions and the factors influencing them, strive to improve professional identity, internalise learning motivation, take the initiative to learn, strengthen educational ideals and beliefs, enhance professional willpower, perceive the responsibility of being a teacher, and strive to become teachers with ideals and beliefs, moral sentiments, solid knowledge, and a loving heart.

1. Introduction

In November 2018, Several Opinions on Deepening Reform and Standardizing the Development of Preschool Education was issued, which pointed the way to the development of preschool education. It calls for vigorously strengthening the construction of kindergarten teachers and improving the teacher training system, and for guiding preschool education graduates to work in early childhood education, and improving the quality of teacher training. This project, from the research perspective of the professional identity of preschool education students, explores the current situation and influencing factors and proposes effective strategies to improve their professional identity, thus helping preschool education students further strengthen their professional ideal of teaching, preparing them to join the preschool education career, and helps the development of preschool education.

Preschool education is the beginning of lifelong learning, an important part of the national education system, and a significant social public service. Preschool education is a major livelihood project, which is related to the healthy growth of hundreds of millions of children, social harmony and stability, and the future of the country.

As future teachers, preschool education students should strive to enhance their sense of identity with the preschool education profession, internalise motivation to learn, take the initiative to learn, firmly believe in the ideals of education, feel the responsibility of being a teacher and strive to become good teachers with ideals and beliefs, moral sentiments, solid knowledge, and a loving heart. We are committed to contributing to the cause of preschool education and laying a solid

foundation for the development of a well-rounded person[1-3].

Therefore, understanding the current situation of preschool education students' professional perceptions and the factors influencing them, and how to improve their professional identity more effectively have become important elements of preschool education in the new era, and are also an urgent issue in front of the majority of educational researchers.

2. Definition of the Professional Identity of Preschool Education Students

2.1. About Preschool Education Students

The objective of training preschool education students is to cultivate inter-disciplinary talents with good ideological and moral qualities and solid professional knowledge of preschool education, who can engage in teaching and learning, research and management in childcare institutions, educational administration departments (kindergartens), and other relevant institutions.

Generally, students in undergraduate college will have a four-year study, while those in junior college will have two or three years of study. This study focuses on undergraduate preschool education students. The courses for undergraduate and junior college students are slightly different, with the junior college requiring courses like childhood education, mental health, drawing, dance, piano, and other areas, while the undergraduate studies are broad and also include educational psychology and statistics. In terms of different focuses, the undergraduate study is more research-oriented, while junior college study is more skill-oriented.

Teachers of preschool education need to have good moral qualities, advanced educational concepts, reasonable knowledge structures, and strong professional abilities. These qualities inevitably require preschool education students to have a great identification with the profession, to love it from the heart, to be willing to become preschool teachers, to faithfully perform their duties of teaching and educating, and to care for the growth of students.

2.2. About Professional Identity

In summary, preschool professional identity refers to the overall perception and acceptance of students, and the willingness to learn and explore with positive attitudes and active behaviors on a continuous basis.

Professional identity is divided into three aspects: cognitive, affective, and sustainable factors.

The cognitive factor refers to the cognitive identification with the major, i.e., the student's knowledge of the major they are studying, which is the basis for generating professional identity.

The affective factor refers to individuals' emotional connection with their professions. In the learning process, emotional identification gives the individual psychological security and emotional pleasure satisfaction. This internal emotional pleasure and satisfaction lead directly to positive behavioural motivation and external behavioural effects, resulting in a sustainable professional identity[4-5].

2.3. About the case studies

A case study is to research a particular individual, unit, group, or subject. This type of research, through collecting a wide range of relevant data, understands, organizes, and analyses in detail the creation and development of the subject, the internal and external factors, and their interrelationships, in order to develop an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the issues involved and to draw conclusions. The subject of a case study can be a single individual or a specific group of people. The case study in this research refers to a specific group of undergraduate

preschool education students.

3. Current Situation Regarding the Professional Identity of Preschool Education Students

Based on the documentary method, this study investigates the current situation of preschool education students' professional identity through questionnaire and interview methods, analyses the factors affecting their professional identity, and puts forward constructive suggestions on how to improve preschool education students' professional identity, which can contribute to the construction of early childhood teachers.

This study used a combination of questionnaire and interview methods to create the Questionnaire on Professional Identity and Influencing Factors of Preschool Education Students based on the results of literature and theoretical combining. A survey was conducted among 525 preschool education students on the current situation of professional identity as teachers.

3.1. Basic information from the preschool education students survey

Of the 525 preschool education students surveyed, 48 were male, accounting for 9.14% of the total, and most were female, accounting for 90.86% of the total. In terms of grade ratio, senior students were rarely in university because they were doing internships, so the online questionnaire was used to collect the data. In terms of the student profile, there are more students in arts and fewer in science.

3.1.1. Student Characteristics

Year: 27.8% (146) freshmen, 31.6% (166) sophomores, 24.4% (128) juniors and 16.2% (85) seniors.

Voluntary choice: 48.01% were chosen by themselves, 20.2% were requested by their parents, 22.19% were transferred by majors, 6.29% were recommended by teachers, relatives, and friends, and 3.31% by others.

3.1.2. Family Characteristics

Household status: 43% rural (226), 57% non-farm (299).

Parental occupation: 6.7% of parents are teachers (35) and 93.3% are non-teachers (490).

Parental education level (525 students had a total of 1024 parents): 20.8% (213) for undergraduate and above, 18.5% (189) for college, 29.1% (298) for high school or junior college, 15% (154) for junior high school, and 16.6% (170) for primary school and below.

Per capita monthly household income: 11.8% (62 people) over 5000, 18% (94 people) 4000-4999, 29.7% (156 people) 3000-3999, 27.4% (144 people) 2000-2999, 7.8% (41 people) 1000-1999, 5.3% (28 people) 999 and below people).

3.2. Survey on the Current Status of Professional Identity of Preschool Education Students

3.2.1. Survey on Professional Identity Perception

The Professional Identity Perception Survey refers to students' knowledge of the profession.

Awareness of the major was studied at two certain times: one is at the beginning of enrollment and the other is after a period of study. Awareness of the major increased from 2.32% to 9.27%, knowledge increased from 28.15% to 72.52%, and ignorance decreased from 18.21% to 1.32%. Overall, the change in the perception of the major is relatively significant, but further education in

all areas is needed, especially for students with 16.89% general knowledge.

3.2.2. Professional Identity Emotional Investigation

A survey on students' feelings towards their profession is to study whether they are satisfied with the profession and whether they would like to become preschool teachers after graduation.

In the employment intention survey, 29.14% of students were the most willing to work in the education sector, 53.31% were more willing, 13.58% were moderately willing and 3.97% were not willing. Employment intention can be further improved through teacher career awareness education, career planning, and career guidance.

Among those who are reluctant to pursue a career in education, most of them focus on their own personality reasons and the lower salary, which can be further enhanced through a variety of educational activities, career guidance, and sharing by outstanding alumni.

Regarding whether they would like to become teachers in remote areas, 17.88% of the students explicitly said yes, 62.91% made decisions depending on circumstances, and 19.21% firmly said no.

3.2.3. Professional Recognition Sustainability Survey

The sustainability of professional identity refers to the willingness to continue to work hard in the preschool profession and to become a good preschool teacher.

As to whether they could be a good teacher, taking the professional ethics of teaching as a basic guideline (being patriotic and law-abiding, being dedicated, caring for students, teaching and educating people, being models for students, insisting on lifelong learning), 72.19% said they could, 25.5% should work a little harder, and 2.32% said they could not.

As to whether they would like to continue to specialise in preschool education, 32.5% of the students wanted to continue their studies in preschool education, 26.7% wanted to work as a preschool teacher while taking a postgraduate course, 31.5% intended to continue working in preschool education, and 9.3% had no idea at the moment[6-7].

4. Analysis of the Survey on the Professional Identity of Preschool Education Students

4.1. Analysis of the Current Situation of the Professional Identity of Preschool Students

In general, preschool education students have a high degree of professional recognition. The data from the survey shows that most students are still willing to pursue a career in preschool education, especially those who involuntarily chose the preschool major when they first volunteered at the university, but after a period of professional study and training, their recognition of the preschool major has increased significantly.

From an objective point of view, on the one hand, it is because of the strong support from China for preschool education, which is currently in a booming stage of development, and on the other hand, the effectiveness of professional studies. The serious teaching of all the teachers in the college has greatly improved the professional choices of the students who were confused and strengthened their determination to join the preschool education career.

Subjectively, preschool education students' love for children is the foundation kernel of their professional identity, and secondly, the sense of professional well-being brought about by the practical experience of teaching practice in kindergartens further enhances preschool education students' awareness.

In addition, the main reasons why some students do not want to pursue a career in preschool education are focused on external factors rather than preschool education itself, such as lower salaries, stress, and personality unsuitability.

4.2. An Analysis of the Variability of Preschool Education Students' Professional Identity

In terms of gender, girls have a higher degree of professional recognition than boys. Some of the male students think that the professional curriculum is all very good, but they feel that they are not attentive enough and are afraid of not being good preschool teachers.

In terms of school years, sophomores have the highest level of identification with their majors, freshmen have yet to fully understand their majors, juniors are at the stage of thinking about their future after graduation, and seniors are directly facing the choice of employment after graduation, confused and longing.

In terms of family background, a higher proportion of students from better-off families choose to pursue a career in preschool education.

5. Analysis of the Factors Affecting the Professional Identity of Preschool Education Students

Through interviews, surveys, and analysis, what influences the professional identity of preschool education students are the following factors.

Salary. It is the issue that preschool education students struggle with the most. Many students do recognise the importance of the preschool profession, but the actual salary levels in kindergartens are low and students have to consider the issue of starting a family after graduation.

The heavy burden of work and the desire for steady rest days. Especially in private kindergartens winter and summer care and extended-hour education lead preschool education students to feel that they do not have enough time for relaxation and self-adjustment.

The social status. Preschool teachers are still in a relatively disadvantaged position. Many people generally believe that preschool teachers are low-skilled and simply do the job of babysitting, and do not recognise the professionalism and importance of the preschool profession.

In addition, some students are still hesitant about whether they will pursue a future career as preschool teachers.

6. Strategies to Enhance the Professional Identity of Preschool Education Students

6.1. Strengthening Educational Ideals and Improving Students' Willpower

With employment as the guide, the professional identity of preschool education students is improved through various practical activities such as the second classroom, activities of academic atmosphere construction, career planning and guidance, teacher training skills competition, lectures by outstanding alumni, and heart-to-heart talks, etc. At the same time, professional identity education is promoted through passive learning (lectures, etc.), active learning (reporting learning experiences), and interactive learning (exchanging learning experiences). In the process of practice, corrections and summaries should be made to help students choose their careers smoothly, realise their self-worth, and eventually grow up to be good teachers and contribute to the cause of education.

At the same time, the excellent deeds of educators such as "Guimei Zhang" and "Yi YU" should be learned by students, and students should be encouraged to cultivate the spirit of being not afraid of difficulties and hardships, and the courage to face challenges and setbacks directly and think calmly, to improve their willpower, to communicate more with friends and to seek advice from seniors, and to further strengthen their educational ideals[8-9].

6.2. Raising the salary of kindergarten teachers and strengthening the regulation of education

On the one hand, the salary standard of kindergarten teachers should be clarified, and faculty treatment should be improved appropriately. On the other hand, the education management of kindergarten teachers should be strengthened, and standardized requirements for the entry threshold of kindergarten teachers should be made clear, so as to improve the quality of the kindergarten teachers and maintain an overall good reputation. Effective regulation can make preschool education more standardized and is better to promote the flourishing of preschool education and can absorb more excellent talents to engage in preschool education.

7. Conclusions

Preschool education students are the future teachers of young children. They need to have a high degree of identification and a sense of belonging to the preschool education profession. Through investigation and analysis, this study combines the current situation of preschool education students' professional identity with practical and feasible suggestions for improving professional identity, further strengthening their professional ideals and beliefs, deepening their professional awareness, enhancing their professional identity, encouraging them to dedicate their lives to the preschool teaching profession and educate people, and guiding students to volunteer to shine where the country needs them and contribute to the country's education cause.

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