

Beyond Linguistic Competence: Integrating the 'Educator Spirit' into a Pre-service EFL Teacher Curriculum

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Abstract: Pre-service EFL teacher education often prioritizes "linguistic competence" at the expense of teachers' moral and social development. Responding to China's advocacy for the "Educator Spirit", this action research investigates its integration into the curriculum through a one-semester study with 60 pre-service teachers. A redesigned course operationalized the spirit into four dimensions: Ethical-Caring, Critical-Reflective, Socio-Cultural, and Identity. Data from teaching philosophies, lesson plans, reflective journals, and interviews revealed that a "value reconstruction" approach successfully shifted participants' focus from language instruction to holistic education. However, integration was uneven: internalization was strong in the Ethical-Caring and Socio-Cultural dimensions but markedly weaker in Critical Reflection. This process was characterized by identity tension, which reflective practice helped negotiate, leading to the development of "micro-practices." The study concludes that cultivating the Educator Spirit is a complex, differentiated process. It offers a dynamic internalization model and practical implications for designing value-embedded curricula, highlighting the need for targeted support to foster critical reflection.

1. Introduction

For decades, pre-service EFL teacher education has been predominantly preoccupied with a paradigm of 'linguistic competence' - measuring success through benchmarks of grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and fluency. However, this narrow focus risks producing teachers who are technically proficient yet pedagogically and ethically rudderless, ill-equipped to navigate the complex moral and social dimensions of the classroom.

So, teacher education century is facing a paradigm shift from training 'technicians' with teaching skills to training 'reflective practitioners' with moral positions, critical thinking and the ability to change. In China, this paradigm shift is concentrated in the policy advocacy of the 'Educator Spirit'. However, this concept faces significant challenges in academic research: it is often regarded as an obvious and static endpoint, rather than a complex and dynamic process of inner growth. Therefore, we urgently need to understand how it is concretely constructed in the learning experiences of pre-service teachers.

Based on the aforementioned requirements, this study aims to explore the following three questions:

1) What specific curriculum designs and teaching strategies prove effective when integrating the 'Educator Spirit' into a pre-service EFL curriculum, and what is their expected impact?

2) How can pre-service teachers balance the contradictions and negotiations of their own identity as language teachers while internalizing the "Educator Spirit"?

3) What observable changes have taken place in the participants' teaching philosophy and practices of participating after they are exposed to the redesigned curriculum?

To address these challenges, we implemented a semester-long action research initiative in English teacher education course. Through a cyclical approach combining curriculum planning, action, observation, and reflection, we collected data on pre-service teachers' perceptions of instructional strategies' effectiveness via questionnaires. The evolving understanding was tracked through in-depth interviews and reflective journals, while actual teaching practices were documented through classroom observations, micro-teaching video comparisons, and case studies of lesson plan designs.

2. Literature review

In the context of the global paradigm shift in teacher education from cultivating "technicians" to nurturing "reflective practitioners", the proposal of "Educator Spirit" in China has infused rich local values and contemporary connotations into the reconstruction of teachers' professional competencies. However, how to integrate the macro-level "Educator Spirit" into the micro-level EFL teacher training classroom is the core challenge currently faced by teacher education. This literature review systematically demonstrates the necessity and pathways for transforming concepts into practice through conceptual deconstruction, theoretical dialogue, and gap identification, aiming to lay a solid theoretical foundation for subsequent curriculum intervention research.

2.1 Deconstructing Core Concepts - The China Context and Operationalization of Educator Spirit

The "Educator Spirit" is a high-level requirement and value guidance for the teaching profession in China under the current era context. Its official definition originates from policy discourse, emphasizing that teachers should possess core qualities such as "ideals and convictions, moral integrity, pedagogical wisdom, dedicated attitude, benevolent heart, and pursuit of virtue" (Ministry of Education, 2023)^[1]. This concept elevates the role of teachers from the traditional scholar to the noble realm of moral mentor, aiming to cultivate great teachers who can guide students' comprehensive development. In academic circles, Chinese scholars have further elaborated and enriched the concept of "Educator Spirit". In 2023, Zhu Yx systematically defined it as a professional ethos integrating "mission-driven commitment, exemplary character, practical wisdom, and innovative courage"^[2]. Feng G (2024) emphasized that the essence of Educator Spirit lies in boundless dedication to education and selfless devotion to students, fundamentally rooted in upholding the educational mission of nurturing individuals^[3].

However, grand value concepts may become hollow slogans if not implemented in micro-classroom practices. Policy concepts need to be broken down into actionable steps based on practical circumstances. This study, drawing on policy documents and academic interpretations, adopts the multidimensional framework of teacher professional competence proposed by Kelchterman^[4] (2009) to operationalize the Educator Spirit in the context of EFL teacher education into the following four core dimensions:

Ethical Care: Refers to the fairness, compassion, and sense of responsibility demonstrated by teachers in educational practice. In EFL classrooms, this manifests as differentiated care and fair evaluation for students with varying language proficiency.

Critical Thinking: it refers teacher's willingness and ability to continuously review and improve

their teaching practices, teaching materials, and educational policies. This is demonstrated by the ability to analyze the values behind teaching decisions critically and to improve teaching.

Socio-Cultural: This refers to teachers' approach to teaching as a sociocultural practice that promotes social equity and cross-cultural understanding. In EFL instruction, this requires teachers to explore cultural and social issues within language materials, and foster students 'global citizenship awareness.

Identity: This refers to the fundamental transformation of teachers' self-concept from 'knowledge transmitters' to 'guides for students' growth through subject education. For EFL pre-service teachers, it represents the core process of internalizing external norms as personal professional identity.

2.2 Building Theoretical Bridges-Dialogue between "Educator Spirit" and International Teacher Education Theoretical Frameworks

These four operational dimensions are not isolated, they resonate deeply with key theoretical frameworks in global teacher education research. This integration of an international perspective not only provides a solid theoretical foundation for "Educator Spirit", but also enables it to engage in global academic discourse.

The Professional Ethical Dimension and the Dialogue Between Care Ethics and Professional Ethics: This dimension resonates deeply with Noddings' (1984) care ethics^[5], which positions educational relationships at the center of ethical practice. However, the "ethical ethos" of educators goes further by integrating the Chinese cultural tradition of "high learning makes a teacher, integrity sets an example," elevating "benevolence" from interpersonal care to a more socially normative professional virtue. This approach creates a beneficial contrast and complement to Western rule-based professional ethics.

Critical Practice Dimension and Dialogue with Reflective Practice and Critical Pedagogy: This dimension directly responds to Schon's critique of "technological rationality" (1983)^[6], with its "reflection-in-action" model providing a micro-foundational basis for "educational wisdom". It also connects with Freire's critical pedagogy (1970)^[7], which integrates "an active engagement" with social transformation. Our theoretical framework combines the essence of both-individual reflective wisdom and collective critical consciousness-offering a more comprehensive perspective for understanding teachers' practices in complex contexts.

Social and Cultural Dimensions in Dialogue with Global Citizenship Education: This dimension not only resonates with Freire's theory of social transformation but also aligns with Vygotsky's core concept that 'learning is a social activity'. It redefines English classrooms as platforms for cultivating cross-cultural understanding and social responsibility, thereby achieving theoretical integration between the local expression 'Hongdao Pursuit' and the international agenda of 'global citizenship education.'

Identity Dimensions in Dialogue with Teacher Identity Theory: This dimension serves as the psychological anchor of the framework. Research on teacher professional development generally holds that learning is fundamentally a continuous process of identity construction (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009)^[8]. This perspective views the internalization of 'ideals and beliefs' as a dynamic negotiation of identity formation, providing a crucial analytical tool for exploring the inner world of teacher candidates.

2.3 Identifying Gaps-Research Space from Theoretical Synergy to Practical Innovation

Through systematic analysis and dialogue, it becomes evident that existing research has established a solid foundation in conceptual interpretation and theoretical resonance, and the inevitable trend of transformation from technological paradigm to holistic educator paradigm has

been depicted clearly. However, as the path from "policy concepts" to "international theory" has been preliminarily established, a more critical research gap has gradually emerged: current studies exhibit significant gaps in the "practical integration" phase. There is a lack of empirical exploration through curriculum design and pedagogical systems to integrate the aforementioned operational dimensions, nor has their effectiveness and implementation process in discipline-specific teacher education classrooms been validated.

Specifically, existing literature remains insufficient to address the following core questions: In the traditional field of EFL teacher education courses dominated by "linguistic competence," what curriculum interventions can effectively promote coordinated development across multiple dimensions? What are the cognitive conflicts, emotional experiences, and identity negotiation mechanisms of teacher candidates when embracing this integrative identity? Ultimately, how does this process leave traces of transformation in their pedagogical philosophies and observable practical behaviors?

Therefore, this study aims to precisely address this gap through an action research approach, striving to explore effective pathways to transform Educator Spirit from theoretical concepts into intrinsic qualities and professional behaviors of teacher.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design: An Action Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative action research design to address the research questions. Action research is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between theory and practice, as it involves a spiral of cycles incorporating planning, acting, observing, and reflecting with the explicit goal of improving a specific educational context (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014)^[9]. This approach was deemed most appropriate because it allowed the researcher, in the dual role of instructor, to systematically design and implement curricular interventions aimed at integrating the 'Educator Spirit', while simultaneously studying the process and its impacts in real-time. The study unfolded over a single 16-week semester, encompassing one full action research cycle.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted in a mandatory "English Teaching Theory and Practice" course offered to third-year undergraduates in the English Teacher Education program at a normal university in Sichuan Province, China. The study involved 60 state-funded pre-service teachers aged 20-22, who were destined to become primary and secondary school teachers. As these students were under the researcher's mentorship, the researcher had established a rapport with them and ample opportunities for communication. All participants signed written informed consent forms, and all research data were collected anonymously.

3.3 Curricular Intervention and Data Collection Procedures

The existing course syllabus was redesigned to embed the four operationalized dimensions of the 'Educator Spirit' (Ethical-Caring, Critical-Reflective, Socio-Cultural, and Identity) into its core modules. For instance, a module on teaching methods incorporated critical analysis of textbook ideologies, and a lesson planning assignment required justifying design choices based on principles of equity and inclusion.

A multi-method data collection strategy was employed throughout the semester to ensure triangulation and to address the research questions comprehensively. The timeline and purpose of

each data source are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1 Data Collection Timeline and Alignment with Research Questions

Time Point	Data Collection Activity	Research Question Addressed
Week 1	Pre-test: Written teaching philosophy statement (e.g. My Ideal English Teacher) Pre-test: Initial lesson plan assignment.	RQ3 (Establishing a baseline)
Mid-Semester	Ongoing: Series of 4 guided reflective journals after key instructional modules. Mid-term: Open-ended feedback survey on the integrated curriculum	RQ2, RQ1
Final Week	Post-test: Final teaching philosophy statement Post-test: Final lesson plan and/or micro-teaching video recording. Conducted: 2 focus group interviews (n=6-7 per group) Conducted: 12 in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews.	RQ3, RQ1, RQ2
Throughout	Archived: All course design documents, teaching materials, and field notes.	RQ1 (Documenting the intervention)

3.4 Data Analysis

The qualitative data underwent a systematic analysis process guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis^[10]. This involved a recursive process of (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and journals; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes by collating codes; (4) reviewing and refining themes; (5) defining and naming final themes, and NVivo 15 software was utilized to manage and code the data. And to specifically address RQ3, a content analysis was performed on the pre- and post-test teaching philosophy statements and lesson plans. A coding scheme derived from the four 'Educator Spirit' dimensions was applied to quantify and qualify observable shifts in participants' expressed beliefs and planned practices.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

The study adhered to strict ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained, participants were informed of their right to withdraw, and all data were anonymized. And to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, several strategies were employed:

Triangulation: Cross-verification of findings from different data sources (e.g. interviews, journals, and artifacts).

Member Checking: Summaries of interviews and preliminary themes were shared with selected participants to confirm interpretive accuracy.

Reflexivity: The researcher maintained a reflective journal to critically document and scrutinize their own influence, biases, and positionality throughout the research process.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the integration of the Educator Spirit into a pre-service EFL teacher

curriculum. Through a systematic analysis of multi-source data, three core themes were identified, collectively depicting the pre-service teachers' dynamic trajectory from "language technicians" toward "holistic educators". This chapter presents these findings and discusses their theoretical implications.

4.1 Reconstructing the Teaching Philosophy: From Language Transmission to Holistic Education

To objectively assess the shift in participants' beliefs, a systematic content analysis of their pre- and post-course teaching philosophy statements was conducted. The results (see Table 2) reveal a significant but uneven reorientation in their focus.

Table 2 Frequency Analysis of Key Themes in Teaching Philosophy Statements (N=60)

Theme Category	Pre-test Frequency (%)	Post-test Frequency (%)	Trend
Linguistic Skills (e.g., fluent, grammar, pronunciation)	58 (96.7%)	35 (58.3%)	Significant Decrease
Exams & Scores (e.g., high scores, Gaokao)	35 (58.3%)	18 (30.0%)	Significant Decrease
Educational Values (e.g., moral character, values, guide)	15 (25.0%)	45 (75.0%)	Sharp Increase
Social Care (e.g., equity, social responsibility, care,)	8 (13.3%)	40 (66.7%)	Significant Increase
Critical Thinking (e.g., independent thinking, question)	5 (8.3%)	12 (20.0%)	Moderate Increase

4.1.1 Data Presentation

The tabular data reveals a striking pattern: while themes of "Educational Values" and "Social Care" saw dramatic increases, the incorporation of "Critical Thinking" remained relatively modest. This suggests that while students broadly embraced the ethical and caring roles of an educator, the disposition and ability to foster critical inquiry were less effectively internalized.

This uneven development is corroborated by specific excerpts. S11's initial philosophy stated: "A good teacher must have standard pronunciation and a large vocabulary to ensure students get high scores in Gaokao." In the post-test, the same student reflected a clear shift towards care but not necessarily critique: "A good teacher is like a caring friend in the classroom. We should love our students, be patient, and help them build confidence and good moral character." (Teaching Philosophy Statement) The emphasis is squarely on the Ethical-Caring dimension, with the Critical-Reflective dimension absent.

An analysis of lesson plan artifacts reinforced this finding. While 75% of final lesson plans contained explicit affect and value objectives related to care and morality, only about 25% included tasks designed to actively challenge students' assumptions or critique underlying power structures. For example, one final lesson plan on "Environmental Protection" included the objective: "Affective Objective: To cultivate students' love for nature and a sense of responsibility to protect the Earth." (Lesson Plan Artifact, S17) This demonstrates a commitment to values but frames it as the transmission of a positive value ("love for nature") rather than a critical engagement with complex issues (e.g., analyzing the political challenges of international climate agreements).

In interviews, students also highlighted this distinction. S25 noted: "I now see the importance of

caring for students' well-being. That feels like the foundation. But to be honest, the activities about critically questioning the textbook or discussing social controversies were much more difficult for me. I'm not sure if it's my place to encourage that, or if I have the skill." (Semi-structured Interview)

4.1.2 Discussion

The data reveals a clear hierarchy in the internalization of the Educator Spirit dimensions. The Ethical-Caring and, to a large extent, the Socio-Cultural dimensions were more readily adopted by the pre-service teachers. This is highly consistent with the traditional Confucian cultural concept of "the teacher is to transmit the way, impart knowledge, and resolve doubts" and the idea of "benevolence". This value has become a cultural gene, making it easier for students to develop a sense of cultural identity and emotional resonance, with less resistance in the internalization process. However, the Critical-Reflective dimension, which demands a more disruptive and questioning stance, showed only modest growth.

This disparity primarily stems from two factors. First, critical reflection requires questioning established authorities such as textbooks, curriculum standards, and preconceived knowledge, daring to challenge "standard answers". However, students conditioned by years of exam-oriented education have become accustomed to seeking standard solutions and adhering to fixed frameworks. This mindset naturally leads to resistance or avoidance when confronted with conventional challenges, both psychologically and practically. Secondly, the professional development of pre-service teachers may follow a progression-from the outside in, from the easy to the difficult. They first encounter and identify with the teacher's external role as a "compassionate mentor", then the Socio-Cultural role as a "classical scholar", and finally the role requiring high levels of intellectual autonomy and courage as a "critical guide". Critical reflection, being a higher-order cognitive ability, demands not only knowledge but also complex thinking skills. Students may not yet fully master these mental tools, and their low self-efficacy in this ability-such as concerns about "inadequate language skills" or "inability to manage classroom discussions" -severely hinders their willingness to practice critical pedagogy.

This discovery deepens our understanding of the integration process, revealing that cultivating "Educator Spirit" may follow a developmental trajectory where "care takes precedence over criticism." Pre-service teachers must first establish a solid professional identity and ethical confidence through caring and cultural practices, which then nurture the professional courage and wisdom required for critical practice. In teaching practice, it is essential to implement progressive and differentiated instructional support.

4.2. Negotiating Professional Identity: Tension and Growth in the Internalization Process

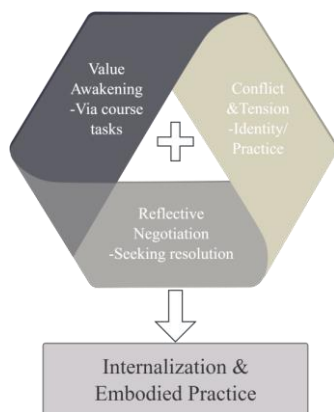


Figure 1 Model of Tension and Negotiation in Internalizing the Educator Spirit

Thematic analysis of reflective journals and interview data revealed that the pre-service teachers underwent a process of identity negotiation fraught with tension as they integrated the Educator Spirit. We conceptualize this as a dynamic model (see Figure 1), and supported by concrete data.

4.2.1 Data Presentation

Value Awakening: After a critical textbook analysis task, S28 wrote in her reflective journal: "This task opened a new window for me. I analyzed a dialogue between a doctor and a patient. I suddenly saw how the textbook implicitly portrays the doctor as the absolute authority and the patient as passive. This is not just language; it's a power relationship! As a teacher, I can no longer teach these materials unconsciously. I have a duty to help students see these hidden messages." (Reflective Journal, S28)

Conflict & Tension: Tensions manifested in the following two primary layers:

Identity Conflict: S05 confessed in a focus group interview: "I feel torn apart. On one side is the 'me' who was trained for years to be a language specialist-correcting every error, focusing on fluency. On the other is the 'me' who now believes that sometimes, nurturing a student's confidence to speak is more important than perfect grammar. Which 'me' should show up in the classroom? It's an internal battle." (Focus Group Interview)

Practice Anxiety: S19 expressed self-doubt in her journal: "I designed a role-play on gender stereotypes. But I'm paralyzed by the fear that a student might ask a question about transgender issues that I can't answer properly in English. My linguistic limitations might make me fail in my ethical duty to handle such a sensitive topic with the care it deserves." (Reflective Journal, S19)

Reflective Negotiation & Internalization: Facing these tensions, students engaged in active negotiation. S40's journal exemplifies this process: "I used to complain that exam pressure left no room for my educational ideals. But today I reflected: what is my sphere of influence? Maybe I can't change the Gaokao, but I can create 'micro-moments' of care. I can give feedback that builds character, not just corrects language. I can choose texts that inspire. This is my 'micro-practice'-my way of being an educator within the constraints." (Reflective Journal, S40) Furthermore, the data revealed specific tensions related to the internalization of the Critical-Reflective dimension, which proved particularly challenging. S19 expressed in her journal: 'My mentor teacher during the practicum told me that my lesson plan questioning the representation of women in the textbook was 'too controversial' and might upset students and their parents. I feel torn between what I learned in this course about empowering students to think critically and the practical realities and expectations of the school. It makes me hesitant to try again.' (Reflective Journal, S19) This entry highlights how external Socio-Cultural constraints and institutional practices actively shaped the negotiation process, creating an additional layer of conflict that specifically inhibited the robust adoption of a critical pedagogical identity.

4.2.2 Discussion

The dynamic model in Figure 1 demonstrates that internalizing the educational spirit is a multidimensional and complex process. Students' internal emotional conflicts and anxiety reflect evolving identity perceptions, with traditional concepts and identity boundaries being challenged—a finding that aligns closely with the theory of teacher identity, particularly the notion that 'professional development is characterized by narrative tension' (Kelchtermans, 2009).

The detailed journal entries reveal that this tension exists not only at the emotional level but also involves profound understanding of specific teaching materials. The "splitting" felt by students when pursuing linguistic precision and aligning with their values reflects the clash between their original "technical professional self" and emerging "value-oriented professional self." This indicates their dissatisfaction with being mere "technicians" and their growing desire to become "educators" with moral convictions. Furthermore, students' contemplation between "safe incompetence" and

"dangerous competence" demonstrates their awakening professional responsibility. Confronting these seemingly unsolvable contradictions, pre-service teachers exhibit remarkable initiative and creativity. For instance, S40 didn't dwell on "exam pressure" complaints but proposed the "micro-practice" strategy-selecting articles about "courage and integrity" when explaining reading comprehension questions. This transformation reflects cognitive growth and negotiation in their understanding of teacher identity. Students transform grand concepts into actionable teaching practices through meticulous attention to detail, successfully channeling external pressures and internal conflicts into autonomous initiative. This negotiation mechanism, driven by reflective practice, serves as the core motive force for the synergistic development of critical thinking and identity formation.

However, the internal deliberations of pre-service teachers remain profoundly shaped by their Socio-Cultural teaching contexts. As exemplified by Student S19, when students engage in critical reflection, the perceived "authority" of their advisors and entrenched traditional gender stereotypes often abruptly halt their nascent critical thinking. Therefore, cultivating critical thinking in practical teaching requires not only personal conviction but also strategies to overcome institutional resistance, effectively addressing the conflict between innovative pedagogical concepts and the conservative realities of the academic environment.

4.3. Observable Shifts: An Evidence Chain from Philosophy to Micro-Practice

Philosophical shifts and identity negotiations ultimately require evidence in concrete practice. Our analysis of lesson plans, teaching videos, and other artifacts identified tangible manifestations of the Educator Spirit.

4.3.1 Data Presentation

Shift in Lesson Planning (Artifacts): As noted, the integration of value-oriented objectives in lesson plans surged. A striking example is a final project artifact titled "A Thematic Unit for Rural Students," where a group designed a whole unit around the theme "Finding Your Voice." Their rationale stated: "Many students in rural areas feel silenced. This unit aims to use English learning as a means to build confidence and express their unique stories and cultural heritage." This project deeply embodied the Socio-Cultural and Ethical-Caring dimensions. (Group Project Artifact, Group 4)

Shift in Classroom Discourse (Observation): Analysis of micro-teaching videos revealed a marked evolution in evaluative language, moving beyond simple praise.

Pre-test Typical Language:

"Good!" "Correct answer." (Focused on result and accuracy)

Post-test Typical Language:

"I admire the courage it took for you to share that unique perspective. It makes us all think deeper."
(Valuing courage, uniqueness, and collective learning)

"The way you patiently explained the task to Zhang Qing shows great empathy and makes our classroom a supportive community." (Highlighting collaboration, care, and community building - ethical caring)

"Your answer is not only accurate but also demonstrates you've critically analyzed the author's underlying assumptions." (Connecting content to higher order thinking - critical reflective)

Evidence from Interviews: Students were aware of these subtle changes. S47 mentioned in her interview: "I catch myself now. Instead of just saying 'good job,' I try to name what was good about it. Was it their creativity? Their persistence? Their kindness to a peer? I want my words to show I see the whole person, not just the answer"(Semi-structured Interview, S47). However, consistent with the

findings from the philosophy statements and identity negotiations, instances of language explicitly designed to promote critical thinking (e.g., "What is another way to interpret this character's action?" or "Why might the author have chosen to present the facts this way?") were observed less frequently and delivered with less confidence in the micro-teaching videos than those demonstrating care and encouragement. This asymmetry reinforces the conclusion that the Critical-Reflective dimension, while acknowledged, was less fully embodied in their immediate teaching practices compared to the Ethical-Caring dimension.

4.3.2 Discussion

These transformations demonstrate an "evidence chain" evolving from philosophical propositions to pedagogical practices. This progression not only validates curriculum effectiveness but also reveals the complex interplay between "practical knowledge" development and "embodied learning" in teacher professional growth. Students' progression—from merely describing isolated knowledge points or practicing language skills to guiding peers in uncovering textual values and designing unit themes—embodies the concrete transformation of educational philosophy into instructional design. The shift from mechanical textbook recitation to instinctive, spontaneous use of evaluative phrases like "I admire your courage..." reflects students' growing ethical awareness and practical application. However, micro-lecture videos show critical discourse being comparatively scarce compared to supportive encouragement, revealing a critical gap in evidence chain analysis. While students may cognitively recognize the importance of critical thinking and incorporate it into lesson plans when given sufficient time, real-time interactions often succumb to ingrained habits and deep-seated anxieties (e.g., fear of losing control). This trajectory highlights a developmental path: pre-service teachers must first solidify their identity as caring practitioners before naturally integrating more innovative critical teaching methods into classroom interactions after building professional confidence.

This complete yet fractured evidence chain—from philosophical propositions (RQ1) and identity negotiation (RQ2) to concrete design and interaction (RQ3)—powerfully demonstrates that the "Educator Spirit" is not only widely embraced by students but is also beginning to profoundly influence their professional cognition and teaching practices. It further reveals that cultivating Educator Spirit isn't a unified, holistic process. Instead, it resembles a non-equilibrium development model where different dimensions require multi-level integration. We must embrace and leverage this developmental imbalance to design spiraling upward curricula, gradually nurturing a multidimensional and more comprehensive Educator Spirit.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This action research has systematically explored the pathways, processes, and outcomes of integrating the 'Educator Spirit' into a pre-service EFL teacher curriculum. This concluding chapter synthesizes the core findings, elucidates their theoretical and practical implications, reflects on the study's limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

5.1 Key Conclusions

Through a one-semester action research, the central conclusion of this study is that a curricular approach centered on 'value reconstruction,' rather than 'content addition,' can effectively foster the adoption and internalization of the 'Educator Spirit' among pre-service EFL teachers; however, this process is characterized by unevenness and asynchronicity across its different dimensions. Specifically, the study demonstrates:

The Primacy of Philosophical Reconstruction: Research demonstrates that integrating the "Educator Spirit" into specific pedagogical content through the "value reconstruction" strategy can effectively guide pre-service teachers to achieve a fundamental transformation in their teaching philosophy-shifting focus from "how to teach language" to contemplating "how to nurture through language." In the teaching concepts of them, ethical caring and Socio-Cultural dimensions are internalized more profoundly and extensively, which may stem from their strong resonance with traditional cultural narratives and the manifestation of empathy.

The Centrality of Identity Negotiation: Research reveals that pre-service teachers internalize the "Educator Spirit" not through passive absorption, but through an active process of constructive transformation marked by internal tension. The "role conflicts" and "practical anxieties" they encounter do not hinder this internalization, but rather serve as the core driving force for their professional evolution from "language technicians" to "educators." Through reflective practice, they successfully translate macro-level concepts into personal "micro-practices," demonstrating professional agency in realizing educational ideals within practical constraints. As a pivotal mechanism, reflective practice facilitates professional growth.

The Differential Depth of Integration: Research reveals that cultivating "Educator Spirit" is a non-synchronous and uneven process. Ethical caring and Socio-Cultural dimensions, with their high cultural compatibility and strong emotional resonance, are more readily embraced and reflected in teaching practices. In contrast, critical thinking dimension demonstrate insufficient development both in pedagogical philosophy and practical implementation, showing relatively shallow internalization and slower progress. This primarily stems from critical reflection challenging deep cognitive habits, requiring greater practical courage and facing external environmental pressures. These findings suggest that value cultivation should respect inherent hierarchical development patterns while adopting more targeted and supportive intervention strategies.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The main theoretical contribution of this study lies in: combining localized China education policy discourse with international teacher education theory, and proposing a dynamic model to interpret the internalization process of teachers. The "Educator Spirit" is regarded not as a static, interpretative policy slogan, but rather operationalized into a four-dimensional, observable, and researchable analytical framework, providing a theoretical tool for empirical research on macro-level policy concepts. A grand narrative filled with value judgments is transformed into an academic concept that can be understood and tested by the international academic community, achieving a transition from political discourse to academic concepts, and providing a model for the international dissemination of China's distinctive teacher education discourse system.

5.3 Practical Implications

Derived from the conclusions, this study provides the following practical implications for teacher educators and curriculum designers:

In designing teacher education curriculum, we recommend adopting "value reconstruction methods" to integrate educators' spirit as the "soul" into subject teaching modules. This involves designing integrated activities such as critical textbook analysis and caring classroom management tasks to achieve deep integration of subject knowledge and values. Additionally, differentiated support should be provided: for high-difficulty dimensions like critical reflection, more concrete scaffolding teaching methods-such as thinking toolkits and discussion frameworks for controversial topics-along with continuous and safe practice opportunities should be implemented to enhance pre-service teachers' confidence and professional competence.

For teacher educators: first, they must prioritize and guide conflicts. Educators should create a safe dialogue environment that encourages and accepts the internal conflicts students experience during the internalization process. By guiding pre-service teachers to transform contradictions and difficulties into driving forces for professional growth through structured reflection, educators can help them navigate these challenges. Furthermore, teacher educators should lead by example, demonstrating "process-oriented care" in their language expression and critical thinking patterns. This allows students to internalize this spirit through practical experiences, gradually integrating it into their daily teaching practices.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations, which naturally point toward future research directions.

Methodologically, this study employs a single-case action research approach, with conclusions grounded solely in specific curricular frameworks and cultural contexts, thus limiting their generalizability. Furthermore, the experimental time frame of one-semester proves insufficient to track the long-term retention and evolution of educators' professional ethos after pre-service teachers enter the education profession.

Future research could therefore: Conduct comparative studies across different regions and disciplines to examine the applicability and effectiveness of the proposed model and strategies in diverse contexts. Besides, longitudinal tracking studies of graduates could also be implemented to investigate the stability and evolution patterns of the Educator Spirit states across different career stages, as well as their interactions with factors like occupational burnout and teaching self-efficacy. Additionally, subsequent studies could design and evaluate specific teaching models targeting the "critical reflection" dimension to explore more effective support strategies.

Moving towards an EFL teacher education that transcends "linguistic competence" means placing the cultivation of "educators" over "technicians" at its core. This study confirms that while this transformation is challenging and its pathways are complex, it is both feasible and imperative through deliberate curriculum design and a profound attentiveness to the inner world of pre-service teachers.

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