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The Impact of Tertiary EFL Teachers' Professional Identity on Job Burnout in Hubei Province China

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ABSTRACT: *In order to explore the relationships of tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity and job burnout, a quantitative survey was conducted on 565 tertiary EFL teachers in Hubei Province in central China. The results indicated that teachers with different educational background and teachers teaching different types of students experience different levels of burnout; Tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity were significantly negatively related to their job burnout; The valence and self-presentation in professional identity can be used to predict teachers' job burnout. Therefore, tertiary EFL teachers should try to enhance their occupational belongings so as to alleviate their current job burnout and promote their sustainable development.*

Key words: *Tertiary EFL teachers, Professional identity, Job burnout*

1. Introduction

After entering the 21st century, college English teaching in China has experienced large-scale curriculum reform. The implementation of *National Criteria of Teaching Quality for Undergraduate English Majors* and *Guidelines on College English Teaching* provided a vision for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching reform and prescribed a series of standards for English teaching curriculum. English teaching in colleges and universities in China is experiencing a trend to transform teaching English for general purpose to teaching English for specific purpose as well as for academic purpose. Under such background, tertiary EFL teachers, as the main force of the implementation of English teaching, face great pressure, which might lead to job burnout in their development.

Besides that, there also exist a great imbalance in tertiary EFL teachers' gender, professional title, education background (Wang & Wang, 2011) and they are often marginalized under current assessment mechanism in colleges and universities (Wang, 2016) compared with teachers teaching other subjects. Therefore the understanding of the inner world of tertiary EFL teachers, especially their professional identity, has become a major way to promote their career development, which is also of great importance to improve foreign language teaching in colleges and universities in China. Parker (1998) believed that the essence of teaching was not the application of a specific teaching method, but the extent to which teachers integrated their identity into teaching. From this point of view, teachers' professional identity would

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certainly affect their job burnout. Teachers with low professional identity are more likely to suffer job burnout (Hu, 2016; Zhang, 2019). In recent years, the phenomenon of job burnout among tertiary EFL teachers has attracted researchers' increasing attention, and some found that teacher professional identity determines the attitude of teachers' work behavior, which deeply affects the level of teachers' job burnout.

This paper would review the researches on the relationship of tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity and job burnout in order to further clarify the internal mechanisms and gain an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity and job burnout in Hubei Province in China, and then provide some useful enlightenment to alleviate their job burnout and promote their professional development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Professional Identity

In China, the research on EFL teachers' education and development has just started, which mainly focus on teachers' mastery of the language and linguistic theory, neglecting their inner world. Wu (2008) pointed out that the essence of EFL teachers' development lies in the development of their professional identity. Therefore studies of EFL teachers' professional identity from the perspective of sociology, philosophy and linguistics provide a new research direction in the field of foreign language teacher development.

Teachers' professional identity is a process in which an individual gradually develops from his own experience and confirms his role as a teacher, which can be also regarded as the degree to which an individual teacher identifies with the career he is engaged in Wei (2005). Researchers believed that teachers' identity in their career would affect their efficiency of work, career development and their ability and willingness to perform education reform in the teaching practice (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). As for teachers, how to develop their professional identity and their understanding of their professional identity is of vital importance on their career development.

Many theoretical studies on teacher professional identity have been found in literature, but only few authors clearly state the definition in their research. Lim (2011) proposed that "professional identity formation involves a continuous process of identification, interpretation, reinterpretation and negotiation of self-images, teaching and learning experiences, and professional roles associated with a certain sociocultural and institutional context. This process involves struggles and tensions which are a result of the integration of the different perspectives, expectations and professional roles". Martínez-de-la-Hidalga and Villardón-Gallego (2016) believed that "there is not a consensual definition of professional identity. Usually, it refers to the way teachers see themselves professionally as a result of how they interpret the continuous interactions that occur in professional contexts. It is shaped by the interactions that are established between personal, professional and situational dimensions".

Chinese Scholar Wei (2005) is an expert in teacher professional identity, early in her master's dissertation, she proposed that professional identity is a process in which individuals establish their professional roles according to their own experiences, which can be regarded as their degree of recognition of their own occupation. Furthermore, she designed a questionnaire to measure primary and secondary school teachers' professional identity by deconstructing it into six dimensions: cognition, will, emotion, expectation, skills and values.

Considering the definitions mentioned above, it can be seen that teachers' professional identity is clearly associated with the interactions that occur in a professional context. Along with further studies of professional identity in the group of teachers, domestic scholars also gradually deepen their research in this field. Quantitative researches are mainly carried out in China, and the content of the research is mainly embodied in the analysis of the current situation of teachers' professional identity and its correlations with other variables.

2.2. Teacher Job Burnout

As early as the mid-1970s, American psychologist Freudenberger began his exploration of job burnout. He transplanted the concept of job burnout from psychology to the field of education, which caused a research upsurge of teacher job burnout. Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) takes a closer look at job burnout, who described burnout as a chronic response caused by an individual's inability to effectively cope with constant stress at work. She further divided job burnout into emotional exhaustion, depersonalization

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and reduced personal accomplishment. To be specific, the state of emotional exhaustion is usually caused by stress at work; depersonalization refers to such problems as weak interpersonal relationships, lack of closeness to others, or decreased interest in work; Reduced personal accomplishment includes a lack of success experience in work, lack of motivation, or lack of self-confidence.

It is widely recognized that job burnout influences the teacher's moral behavior, and hinders achievement of education goals. A burned-out teacher affects school culture and may even affect his or her colleagues' work satisfaction (Friedman & Gavish, 2003). In the 1980s, teachers' job burnout gradually attracted researchers' attention and became one of the research directions in the field of teacher education in the following three decades. Many researchers have pointed out that the profession of teachers has its own particularity, and it is more stressful compared with other professions.

Chinese scholars (Yang & Yang, 2002) made a deep analysis on teachers' job burnout, and they insisted that teachers' job burnout would have a great negative impact on their physical and mental health, on their career development, and even on the whole education system and society studied the impact of teacher burnout on education, and he concluded that teachers' job burnout would directly affect their educational and teaching ability, who had a poor relationship with their students, which would certainly affect students' learning efficiency in class.

As can be seen from previous literature that teacher job burnout is common among teachers in China, and it has a negative impact on teachers' career, professional development, work status and physical and mental health to a certain degree. Empirical studies about teachers' job burnout may also lead to different results due to different regions, genders, professional titles and so on.

2.3. Studies on the Relationship of Teacher Professional Identity and Teacher Job Burnout

As for studies on the correlations of teachers' professional identity and job burnout, found out that there was a significant negative relationship between teachers' professional identity and job burnout, that is, when teachers have high sense of professional identity, their burnout level is relatively low. In the sense teachers' burnout level can be predicted by their professional identity to some extent. Therefore, improving teachers' professional identity, such as providing more material and spiritual support, can promote their love for work, stimulate their working enthusiasm and reduce their sense of burnout.

Ye and Sun (2014) concluded in their research that teachers of different ages and different years of teaching had significant differences in their overall level of job burnout, especially in the dimension of emotional exhaustion, and they further confirmed that teacher professional identity can predict job burnout. Xu, Yang, Zhang, and Zhou (2015) analyzed the generation of PE teachers' professional emotion from the psychology, which followed the process of "feeling- cognition-experience-reaction". Finally, they put forward some strategies to convert PE teachers' job burnout to professional identity. First, school administrators should pay attention to the assessment of pre-service PE teachers' professional quality as well as to the cultivation of professional emotion. Second, a good working environment and favourable academic research atmosphere should be created to stimulate the enthusiasm and motivation of PE teachers. Thirdly, extensive emotional communication activities can be carried out to correctly guide and care for their emotional world. Finally, specific and feasible rewards and punishments policies should be formulated for PE teachers.

Although existing studies have proved that there is a significant correlation between teachers' professional identity and job burnout, studies targeting at Chinese tertiary EFL teachers are rare. Furthermore, earlier studies mainly focus on theoretical analysis, but lack of long-term follow-up empirical study or action research. Last but not least, previous studies look at the variable of teacher professional identity as one simple dimension, but in fact it can also be divided into many sub-dimensions, and different dimensions do not have equal impact to predict job burnout. Therefore this research attempts to contribute to previous literature by providing a more though investigation of the relationships of tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity and their job burnout.

2.4. Research Questions

With an attention to tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity and job burnout, the following research questions were explored in this study:

1. What are tertiary EFL teachers' perceptions of their professional identity and job burnout?
2. Is there a significant relationship between tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity and job burnout

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?

3. Which dimension of tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity contributes most to their job burnout?

3. Method Sample

According to the statistics of Ministry of Education, there are altogether 129 higher colleges and universities in Hubei Province. First stratified sampling is used to divide all these 129 universities into four different clusters according to different categories (Comprehensive University, Normal University, University of Science and Engineering and University of Finance and Economics), and then cluster sampling is employed to select twelve universities from each group. Online questionnaires were distributed to EFL teachers in these 12 universities. A total of 600 questionnaires were issued and 565 were recovered, with a recovery rate of 94.16%.

Table 1 shows the general information of the participants. It can be seen that the number of female teachers far exceed that of male teachers. Teachers aged between 31 and 40 account for the largest group (59.5%), and the majority has 11 to 15 years of teaching. It can be also found that most tertiary EFL teachers have got a master's degree (64.4%), but only 6.4% of them possess a doctorate degree. Teachers with a professional title of lecture occupy the largest group, while only 4.8% has got the title of professor. There is not much difference in the majors of their students.

Table-1. Overview of the Participants.

Project	Option	N	Percentage
Gender	Male	103	18.2%
	Female	462	81.8%
Years of Teaching	Below 30 years old	23	4.1%
	31-40	336	59.5%
	41-50	139	24.6%
	Above 51 years old	67	11.9%
	Less than 5 years	27	4.8%
	5-10 years	102	18.1%
	11-15 years	305	54.0%
	More than 16 years	131	23.2%
Highest Degree	Bachelor's degree	165	29.2%
	Master's degree	364	64.4%
	Doctorate and above	36	6.4%
Professional Title	Teaching Assistant	32	5.7%
	Lecturer	352	62.3%
	Associate Professor	154	27.3%
	Professor	27	4.8%
Students Major	English majors	312	55.2%
	Non-English majors	253	44.8%

3.2. Instruments

After the screening and cleaning of the original data, confirmatory factor analysis was used to test the validity of the instruments, whose results showed that the validity of the two questionnaires were good. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for teacher professional identity was 0.541 and the Composite Reliability (CR) was 0.825. While the AVE for teacher job burnout was 0.584 and the CR was 0.808. The values of AVE all surpass the threshold of 0.5, and the CR values for the constructs and sub- constructs all exceed the limit of 0.6 (Hair, Sarstedt, Matthews, & Ringle, 2016) (See Table 2 below).

Table-2. AVE and CR for the Constructs.

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Construct	AVE (above 0.5)	CR (above 0.6)
Teacher Professional Identity	0.541	0.825
Teacher Job Burnout	0.584	0.808

3.3. Teacher Professional Identity Scale

Kremer and Hofman (1985) questionnaire of "Professional Identity Scale (PRIS)" was adapted to measure tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity. This questionnaire used a five-point Likert Scale with 1 refers to strongly disagree and 5 refers to strongly agree. On the basis of the testing of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in a pilot study, 16 of the original 17 questions were left to perform the real study. There were four sub-dimensions in this questionnaire, namely valence, centrality, solidarity and self-presentation. The Cronbach's α is 0.927, indicating that the reliability of the scale is good (see Table 3).

Table-3. The Reliability of Teacher Professional Identity.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.927	16

3.4. Job Burnout Inventory - Educator Survey

The most widely used Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey was employed to evaluate tertiary EFL teachers' job burnout. This burnout inventory used a seven-point Likert Scale, with 0 meaning never and 6 meaning every day. In the pilot study, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were tested, and 21 of the original 22 questions were left to perform the real study. Those 21 Questions have been further divided into three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced sense of achievement. Emotional exhaustion refers to the excessive consumption of individuals' emotional resources, which lead to the decrease of their enthusiasm for the work they are engaged in. Depersonalization refers to the cold and distant attitude towards their students, which result in gradual reluctance to interact with others. Reduced sense of achievement is the lack of sense of success in work and the sense of achievement from work reduced, often feel their work lack of progress, or even reduced. Table 4 shows the Cronbach's α (r = 0.947), indicating that it reliability is good.

Table-4. The Reliability of Teacher Job Burnout.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.947	21

4. Results

To determine whether there was a significant relationship between teacher professional identity and job burnout, software SPSS25.0 was used to process descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression analysis. First, descriptive analysis was adopted to show the general description of the main variables. Secondly, correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationship of teacher professional identity and job burnout. Finally, regression analysis was utilized to prove which dimension of tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity contributes most to their job burnout.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

The descriptive statistics of all sub-dimensions of tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity and job burnout are shown in table

5. The overall average score of professional identity was 3.65, and the standard deviation 0.789, which means that EFL teachers' professional identity is not very high.

Table-5. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables.

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Descriptive Statistics	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teacher Professional Identity	565	1.56	5.00	3.65	.789
Teacher Job Burnout	565	1.28	7.00	3.69	1.186

Of all the four dimensions, the value of self-presentation > solidarity > centrality > valence. The mean of job burnout was 3.69, and the standard deviation 1.186, which is a little higher than medium. Of all the three dimensions, the value of emotional exhaustion is the highest, while the value of personal accomplishment is the lowest.

Table-6. Descriptive Statistics of the Sub – Constructs.

Variable	Sub - Constructs	Mean	SD
Teacher Professional Identity	Valence	3.59	0.964
	Centrality	3.67	1.066
	Solidarity	3.69	0.952
	Self-Presentation	3.74	0.955
Teacher Job Burnout	Emotional Exhaustion	3.73	1.423
	Depersonalization	3.67	1.355
	Personal Accomplishment	3.62	1.443

Table-7. Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Professional Identity.

	N	Mean	Deviation	t	p
Female	103	3.606	0.867	-0.640	0.522
Gender	462	3.661	0.771		
Male					
below 30	23	3.973	0.437	2.382	0.069
31-40	336	3.638	0.780		
Age	139	3.569	0.838		
41-50					
upon 51	67	3.776	0.796		
Less than 5 years	27	3.796	0.608	2.824	0.038
5-10 years	102	3.808	0.699		
Years of Teaching	305	3.570	0.807		
11-15 years					
16-20 years	131	3.688	0.826		
Bachelor	165	3.663	0.752	3.324	0.037
Highest Degree Master	364	3.615	0.810		
Doctorate	36	3.967	0.678		
Teaching Assistant	32	3.865	0.606	1.937	0.122
Lecturer	352	3.598	0.793		
Professional Title	154	3.735	0.808		
Associate Professor					
Professor	27	3.613	0.771		
English majors	312	3.616	0.779	-1.166	0.244
Student Major	253	3.694	0.801		
Non-English majors					

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Independent-Samples T-Test and ANOVA were performed to determine whether there were significant differences between different groups of teachers in relation to their professional identity and job burnout.

Table 7 shows that tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity has no significant differences in their gender, age, professional title and student type, since the p-values higher than 0.05, while there were significant differences between in the years of teaching and teachers' highest degree. It can be seen that teachers who have working for 5 to 10 years have higher sense if identity that those who have worked for 11 to 15 years, and teachers with a doctorate degree tends to have much high professional identity then teachers with a master degree.

According to Table 8, no significant differences were found in tertiary EFL teachers' job burnout regarding their gender, age, years of teaching or professional title since the p-values are higher than 0.05, but significant differences were found in their highest degree and student type. Teachers with a master degree were more burned out than teachers with a doctorate degree. Regarding student type, teachers teaching non-English majors tended to suffer job burnout than those teaching English major students.

Table-8. Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Job Burnout.

Category	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
Gender	Female	103	3.789	1.191	0.980	0.328
	Male	462	3.662	1.185		
Age	below 30	23	3.870	1.096	0.642	0.588
	31-40	336	3.720	1.167		
	41-50	139	3.634	1.290		
	upon 51	67	3.553	1.086		
Years of Teaching	Less than 5 years	27	3.749	1.100	1.982	0.116
	5-10 years	102	3.779	1.258		
	11-15 years	305	3.742	1.200		
	16-20 years	131	3.466	1.094		
Highest Degree	Bachelor	165	3.533	1.150	4.091	0.017
	Master	364	3.786	1.189		
	Doctorate	36	3.360	1.210		
Professional Title	Teaching Assistant	32	3.854	0.923	0.662	0.576
	Lecturer	352	3.681	1.181		
	Associate Professor	154	3.622	1.215		
	Professor	27	3.901	1.370		
Students Major	English majors	312	3.491	1.128	-4.354	0.000
	Non-English majors	253	3.924	1.213		

4.2. Correlation of Tertiary EFL Teachers' Professional Identity and Job Burnout

It has been found that there was a significant negative correlation between tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity and job burnout, with a correlation coefficient of -0.251.

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Table-9. The Causal Effects of Teacher Professional Identity on Teacher Job Burnout.

Construct		Path	Construct	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
Teacher Burnout	Job	<---	Teacher Professional Identity	-.251	.086	-2.911	.004	Significant

In the dimension of valence identity, the partial regression coefficient P is -0.21, P<0.05, which has a significant regression relationship with job burnout. The influence of ability identity on job burnout is negative, that is, the stronger EFL teachers' valence is, the lower the degree of job burnout will be. Similarly, the dimension of self-presentation in identity has a significant regression relationship with job burnout, with the partial regression coefficient P is -0.137, P<0.05. The influence of self- presentation on job burnout is negative, that is, the stronger the self-presentation of EFL teachers, the lower the degree of job burnout.

Table-10. Coefficients[a] of Sub-Constructs of Teacher Profession Identity and Job Burnout.

Unstandardized Coefficients			**Standardized Coefficients**		
Model	**B**	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
(Constant)	5.260	.239		22.012	.000
Valence	-.210	.062	-.170	-3.386	.001
Centrality	-.079	.057	-.071	-1.396	.163
Solidarity	-.005	.064	-.004	-.083	.934
Self-Presentation	-.137	.059	-.111	-2.315	.021

Note: a. Dependent Variable: Teacher Job Burnout

5. Discussions

5.1. Tertiart EFL Teachers' Professional Identity and Job Burnout Level

Tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity in Hubei Province in China is at a medium level, among which, the solidarity is the highest, meaning that the company of their colleagues provide teachers with a sense of belonging. At the same time it can also be inferred that EFL teachers in Hubei Province can correctly and clearly understand their profession as college teachers and have high expectations for their career development.

Analysis of tertiary EFL teachers' demographic information shows that job burnout does exist, but it is not particularly serious. However, tertiary EFL teachers' personal accomplishment is relatively low, which is greatly related to their valence, namely their love for being a teacher. At present, the society has diversified assessment criteria to evaluate the success of college students, and many students do not recognize the efforts of their teachers when they succeed in the society, resulting in a low sense of achievement of teachers. EFL teachers with different educational background have different burnout level. Teacher with a doctorate degree seem to suffer less from job burnout. Maybe richer learning experience enables them to have deeper theoretical knowledge and broader vision about teaching, and they are more willing to apply what they have learned into practice. Meanwhile, combined with the type of students they teach, it seems that teachers teaching English major students have more sense of accomplishments.

5.2. Relationship between EFL Teachers' Professional Identity and Job Burnout

The findings of this study support previous literature in the sense that teacher professional identity are important factors predicting teacher job burnout. Teachers' professional identity and job burnout are significantly negatively correlated. To be specific, when a teacher has the feeling that teaching is attractive, and finds out the value in teaching, he or she is less likely to feel bored in work.

Besides that, this study also enriches previous literature with the finding that the valence and self presentation can be used to predict the job burnout. If teachers have more recognition in these two aspects, they are more likely to take pride in their career. No matter how tired they feel at work, they are not prone to suffer job burnout. Specifically speaking, when teachers have high recognition and identification with the functions and values of the schools they work in, they can take pride in their profession and recognize various

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norms of their school. From this point of view, no matter how tiring and hard their work is, they are not likely to suffer job burnout.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

On the basis of this empirical study, it is found that tertiary EFL teachers' professional identity can significantly predict job burnout. Therefore, teachers' job burnout can be relieved through the improvement of their professional identity, which may be beneficial not only for EFL teachers but also for the teachers in general. On the on hand, school administrators should try to cultivate teachers' occupational values in terms of management system, spirit and culture in the new era. They should help teachers to set the people-oriented philosophy in the process of educating students. Furthermore, school administrators should actively plan and organize a variety of collective activities to enhance teachers' sense of belonging to let teachers to experience relaxing, happy and free atmosphere feel the friendship and warmth of their colleges in the campus. Colleges and universities should attach great importance to teachers' experience at work, and it is necessary to actively organize teachers to participate in the construction of school culture and make teachers feel they are the masters of their school. Only in this way can the teaching quality of the school be better improved. When the schools enjoy high prestige in society, the status of teachers and their sense of belonging to the profession will be simultaneously improved. Last but not least, schools should pay attention to the improvement of EFL teachers' academic qualifications, encourage teachers to actively take part in further studies to improve their theoretical, practical and academic skills. As for teachers, they should face up to their profession, recognize the nature of their profession, have the courage to shoulder the responsibility of education and set up correct professional values. In the process of teaching, they should learn to establish a friendly relationship with students. While guiding and helping students to learn scientific and cultural knowledge, their own professional ability will also be improved. All in all, tertiary EFL teachers' job burnout can be eased through the improvement of their professional identity. Democratic and equal communication system between teachers and school leaders should be established so as to enhance teachers' understanding and recognition of the schools' philosophy and values. In addition, when devoted themselves to work, teachers should also find proper ways to release their pressure to so as to avoid physical and mental exhaustion.

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