Pre-Service English Teachers' Professional Identity and English Learning Self-Efficacy: Influences and Implications

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Abstract: *This study examines pre-service English teachers' professional identity and English learning self-efficacy within China's post—course-competition–certificate framework. Survey data from 267 PESTs revealed a multidimensional structure of professional identity, including value, willingness and expectation, efficacy, and will. Professional identity was positively correlated with English learning self-efficacy, especially academic behavior and language-use efficacy. Voluntary choice of teacher education, competition participation, and award attainment predicted higher professional identity, while job priorities shaped professional will. The findings highlight the importance of competition-based mastery experiences and course–certificate alignment in enhancing PESTs' learning confidence and professional growth, offering implications for optimizing vocational teacher education programs.*

Keywords: Pre-Service English teachers, Professional identity, English learning self-efficacy, Post–course–competition–certificate framework.

1. Introduction

Professional identity and English learning self-efficacy are key psychological constructs influencing pre-service English teachers' (PESTs') academic development, teaching readiness, and long-term career commitment. As expectations for teacher professionalism rise in China, PESTs must internalize professional values while developing adequate English competence. Research shows that professional identity fosters learning motivation and career persistence, whereas self-efficacy predicts academic performance and emotional stability. Yet few studies examine their relationship within vocational teacher education.

China's ongoing vocational education reform, particularly the "post–course–competition–certificate" integrated model, offers a new context for exploring PESTs' development. This model aligns professional roles, course content, skill competitions, and certificate standards, providing enriched opportunities for competence building and mastery experiences. As competition-based and certification-oriented training grow in importance, understanding their impact on PESTs' identity and self-efficacy becomes crucial.

This study investigates the status, influencing factors, and interrelationship of these constructs, offering empirical evidence to enhance course design and talent cultivation under the new framework.

2. Literature Review

Professional identity and English learning self-efficacy have emerged as key constructs in understanding PESTs' development, academic engagement, and long-term career commitment. As educational reforms intensify the demands on teacher professionalism, PESTs must form a stable professional identity while developing adequate linguistic competence and confidence, especially in English. Although prior research acknowledges that these two constructs are interconnected, many studies address them separately. Synthesizing existing scholarship and empirical findings from the present study, this chapter reviews theoretical foundations, influencing factors, and the interrelationship between PESTs' professional identity and English learning self-efficacy, forming an integrated framework for later analysis.

2.1 Professional Identity of Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs)

2.1.1 Definition

Professional identity encompasses pre-service teachers' (PSTs) perceptions, values, expectations, and emotional attachment toward the teaching profession. It is both self-referential and socially shaped, reflecting personal understandings of teaching roles and societal expectations. Prior studies indicate that professional identity involves cognitive, emotional, and value-based components (Cai, 2013; Chen, 2014). Deng et al. (2022) further emphasize that identity develops through alignment between personal interpretations of teaching and external evaluations of the profession.

This study adopts the four-dimensional conceptualization proposed by Wang et al. (2010): professional value, professional willingness and expectations, professional efficacy, and professional will. The structure aligns with the scale employed here and is supported by empirical correlations among dimensions, demonstrating internal coherence.

2.1.2 Structural Dimensions

There is broad scholarly consensus that professional identity is multidimensional. Liu's (2012) four-factor structure — value, expectations, will, and efficacy—closely corresponds to the present study. Similar findings appear across PST populations in other disciplines. For example, Guo et al. (2021) identify cognitive, affective, and motivational components among music education PSTs.

2.2 Factors Influencing Professional Identity

2.2.1 Family Influences

Family expectations and support significantly shape student motivation and career decision-making. As Guo (2011) suggest, parental expectations, encouragement, and support shape students' self-evaluations and career-related decisions. Although this study did not directly measure family factors, differences based on reasons for choosing teacher education (personal decision vs. influence of others) indicate that external influences—including family—may indirectly affect professional identity.

2.2.2 School-Level Influences

School experiences, course quality, and teaching practices are core determinants of PESTs' identity formation (Li, 2020). Effective instructional models and practicum opportunities strengthen commitment to teaching.

2.2.3 Social Influences

Societal recognition of teaching, labor market conditions, and policy reforms also contribute to identity formation. As professional salary reforms elevate the social status of teaching (Cai, 2013; Peng, 2021), PSTs tend to internalize more positive expectations. Such contextual shifts influence career choice intentions and long-term commitment.

2.2.4 Personal Influences

Individual factors—such as self-efficacy, motivation, emotional stability, past learning experiences, and academic success—are repeatedly identified as key determinants of professional identity (Li, 2010).

2.3 English Learning Self-Efficacy

2.3.1 Conceptual Definition

English learning self-efficacy refers to learners' beliefs about their capacity to successfully accomplish English-related tasks. It encompasses cognitive judgments and emotional appraisal and reliably predicts performance outcomes (Wang, 2009). Guo (2011) notes that self-efficacy is shaped by mastery experiences, goal-setting, evaluation systems, and social persuasion.

This study adopts Jiang et al.'s (2020) validated three-factor model: academic behavior efficacy, language-use efficacy, and negative coping efficacy.

2.3.2 Measurement Tools

Numerous instruments measure English learning self-efficacy, but Jiang et al.'s (2020) scale is particularly suited to Chinese PSTs as it incorporates both positive and negative efficacy components. The scale has gained traction in recent Chinese research (Guo, 2010), ensuring methodological alignment with national studies.

2.4 Factors Influencing English Learning Self-Efficacy

2.4.1 Mastery Experiences

Past success is the strongest predictor of self-efficacy. Wang (2009) stresses the need for structured goal-setting and positive feedback, while Cheng (2014) advocates designing achievable tasks to build incremental success.

2.4.2 Goal Setting

Goal clarity greatly improves students' perceived competence. Studies recommend multi-level goals tailored to learners' current abilities (Wang, 2009; Cheng, 2014).

2.4.3 Evaluation Methods

Monolithic exam-oriented assessment weakens self-efficacy (Wang, 2009). Multiperspective evaluation—integrating formative assessment—supports student confidence and autonomy.

2.4.4 Teacher–Student Relationships

Positive teacher–student relations significantly promote self-efficacy (Guo Huimin, 2010; Wang, 2009). Supportive interactions increase motivation, emotional security, and confidence.

2.5 Relationship Between Professional Identity and English Learning Self-Efficacy

Although few studies directly explore the relationship between these constructs, existing literature shows that self-efficacy influences learning engagement and career motivation (Xie & Yin, 2022).

2.6 Summary

Existing studies show that professional identity and English learning self-efficacy are vital to PESTs' development, yet they are often examined separately. With China's "post–course–competition–certificate" reforms reshaping teacher preparation, understanding how these constructs interact becomes essential. This study addresses the research gap by exploring their current status, influencing factors, and interrelationship within vocational teacher education.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Subjects

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Variable	Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	27	10.1
	Female	240	89.9
	Total	267	100
Grade	First year	97	36.3
	Second year	168	62.9
	Third year	2	0.7
	Total	267	100

To investigate the factors influencing PESTs' professional identity and related psychological constructs, data were collected from students enrolled in teacher education programs at a vocational institution. A total of 267 pre-service

teachers participated in the survey. Among them, 27 were male (10.1%) and 240 were female (89.9%). The participants included 97 first-year students (36.3%), 168 second-year students (62.9%), and 2 third-year students (0.7%).

3.2 Research Instruments

3.2.1 The Professional Identity of PESTs

To measure the professional identity of PESTs, this study utilized the Professional Identity Scale developed by Wang et al. (2010). This scale comprises 12 items (Items 9-20) and is divided into four dimensions, which are Professional Willingness and Expectation, Professional Will, Professional Value, and Professional Efficacy. Each dimension is designed to capture a specific aspect of professional identity among PESTs.

The original scale's Cronbach's α for the four subscales—Professional Willingness and Expectation, Professional Will, Professional Value, and Professional Efficacy—were .70, .65, .64, and .73, respectively, with an overall α of .78. Test-retest reliability over two weeks for 32 participants yielded coefficients of .80, .60, .73, .73, and .91 for the subscales and overall scale, respectively, all exceeding .60, thus meeting psychometric standards.

In this study, the Cronbach's α for the overall Professional Identity scale was .80. For the four sub-dimensions, the internal consistency coefficients were: Professional value (α = .76), Professional willingness and expectation (α = .85), Professional efficacy (α = .88), and Professional will (α = .64). Note that Item 20 was reverse-scored. Details are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Professional Identity of PESTs

Dimension	Items	N	Cronbach's α
Professional value	9-11	3	0.76
Professional willingness and expectation	12-14	3	0.85
Professional efficacy	15-17	3	0.88
Professional will	18-20	3	0.64
Total (Professional Identity)	9-20	12	0.80

Note: Item 20 is scored in reverse.

3.2.2 English Learning Self-Efficacy of PESTs

To investigate undergraduates' perceived self-efficacy in the context of English learning, the English Learning Self-Efficacy Scale for Undergraduates (ELSES-U), initially developed by Jiang et al. (2020) based on qualitative coding, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), was adopted. The scale consists of 19 items, covering three major dimensions: Academic Behavior Efficacy, Language Use Efficacy, and Negative Coping Efficacy. The instruction for the present study was: "Please evaluate the extent to which each statement describes your perceived capability in English learning." A higher score indicates a stronger sense of English learning self-efficacy.

The psychometric properties of the original scale demonstrate strong reliability and validity. Internal consistency (Cronbach's α) for the three dimensions is .865 for Academic Behavior Efficacy, .913 for Language Use Efficacy, and .756 for Negative Coping Efficacy, while the overall scale shows a high reliability coefficient of .930. The ELSES-U scale is

therefore a psychometrically sound instrument for assessing English learning self-efficacy among Chinese undergraduates.

In this study, the Cronbach's α for the overall English Learning Efficacy scale was .89. For the three sub-dimensions, the internal consistency coefficients were: Academic Behavior Efficacy (α = .87), Language Use Efficacy (α = .94), and Negative Coping Efficacy (α = .83). Items 36–39 were reverse-scored. Details are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: English_Learning_Efficacy of PESTs

Dimension	Items	N	Cronbach's α
Academic Behavior Efficacy	21-26	6	0.87
Language Use Efficacy	27-35	9	0.94
Negative Coping Efficacy	36-39	4	0.83
Total (English_Learning_Efficacy)	21-39	19	0.89

Note: Items 36-39 are scored in reverse.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were first calculated to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and overall performance on each scale. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to examine gender differences in key variables. One-way ANOVA was used to test group differences across, Professional competition participation, award attainment, and job priorities. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to explore the relationships between professional identity, its subdimensions, and English learning self-efficacy.

4. Research Results

4.1 Group Differences in Professional Competition Participation

Table 4: Independent Samples Test of Professional Competition Participation on Professional Identity

Variable	Professional Competition Participation	N	M	SD	F	p
Professional_Value	Yes	79	3.60	.76	.40	.53
	No	188	3.52	.83		
Professional_Willingness_and_Expectation	Yes	79	4.56	.59	.04	.84
	No	188	4.55	.56		
Professional_Efficacy	Yes	79	4.23	.81	5.99	.02*
	No	188	4.18	.70		
Professional_Will	Yes	79	3.12	.69	.01*	.93
	No	188	3.08	.71		
<Total>Professional_Identity	Yes	79	3.88	.48	.00	.96
	No	188	3.83	.48		

Note: *$p<.05$

From Table 4, the analysis examined whether participation in professional competitions influenced different dimensions of professional identity. A significant difference was found in professional efficacy, where students who had participated in competitions (M = 4.23, SD = .81) scored higher than those who had not (M = 4.18, SD = .70), F = 5.99, p < .05. This suggests that competition participation positively contributes to students' perceived competence in their professional abilities.

For professional value, professional willingness and expectation, professional will, and overall professional identity, no significant differences were found between

students with and without competition participation (all p > .05). These results indicate that involvement in competitions does not substantially influence students' professional values, aspirations, determination, or overall sense of professional identity.

4.2 Group Differences in Award Attainment

From Table 5, the analysis examined whether different levels of awards in professional competitions influenced pre-service English teachers' professional identity across its dimensions. Significant differences were found in professional willingness

& expectation and professional efficacy. For professional willingness and expectation, F = 4.29, p < .01, students who received department-level and college-level awards (M = 4.64 and M = 4.62, respectively) scored higher than those with no awards (M = 4.55), whereas students with provincial-level awards (M = 3.00) scored substantially lower. This suggests that receiving mid-level awards may enhance students' aspirations and expectations toward the profession, while lower scores among provincial-level award recipients may reflect individual variability due to the extremely small sample size.

Table 5: ANOVA Test Results on the Effects of Professional Competition Awards on Professional Identity

Variable	Professional Competition Awards	N	M	SD	F	p
Professional_Value	No Award	220	3.51	.83	.91	.46
	Department-Level Award	22	3.76	.76		
	College-Level Award	22	3.65	.62		
	Provincial-Level Award	2	3.17	.71		
	National-Level Award	1	4.33	.		
	Total	267	3.54	.81		
Professional_Willingness_and_Expectation	No Award	220	4.55	.56	4.29	.00**
	Department-Level Award	22	4.64	.46		
	College-Level Award	22	4.62	.46		
	Provincial-Level Award	2	3.00	1.41		
	National-Level Award	1	5.00	.		
	Total	267	4.55	.57		
Professional_Efficacy	No Award	220	4.17	.73	2.95	.02*
	Department-Level Award	22	4.33	.50		
	College-Level Award	22	4.44	.76		
	Provincial-Level Award	2	3.00	1.41		
	National-Level Award	1	3.00	.		
	Total	267	4.19	.73		
Professional_Will	No Award	220	3.08	.71	.41	.80
	Department-Level Award	22	3.02	.51		
	College-Level Award	22	3.26	.84		
	Provincial-Level Award	2	3.00	.00		
	National-Level Award	1	3.33	.		
	Total	267	3.09	.71		
<Total>Professional_Identity	No Award	220	3.83	.49	2.22	.07
	Department-Level Award	22	3.94	.38		
	College-Level Award	22	3.99	.38		
	Provincial-Level Award	2	3.04	.88		
	National-Level Award	1	3.92	.		
	Total	267	3.85	.48		

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01

A significant difference was also observed in professional efficacy, F = 2.95, p < .05. Students with department-level and college-level awards (M = 4.33 and M = 4.44, respectively) scored higher than those without awards (M = 4.17), indicating that recognition in competitions may strengthen students' perceived competence and confidence in their professional abilities.

For professional value, professional will, and overall professional identity, no significant differences were found across award levels (all p > .05). These results indicate that receiving awards does not substantially influence students' values, determination, or overall sense of professional identity, suggesting that these aspects remain relatively stable regardless of competition achievements.

4.3 Group Differences in Motivations for Selecting Teacher Education as a Major

From Table 6, the analysis examined whether the reason for choosing teacher education (personal decision vs. influence of others) affected different dimensions of professional identity. A significant difference was found only in professional willingness and expectation, F = 4.16, p < .05. Students who chose teacher education based on personal decision (M = 4.59, SD = .53) scored higher than those influenced by others (M = 4.45, SD = .65). This suggests that students who voluntarily select the major tend to hold stronger aspirations and expectations toward their professional development.

For professional value, professional efficacy, professional will, and overall professional identity, no significant

differences were found between the two groups (all p > .05). These results indicate that reasons for choosing teacher education do not substantially influence students' value orientation, perceived professional competence, determination, or their overall sense of professional identity.

Table 6: Independent Samples Test on the Effects of Reason for Choosing Teacher Education on Professional Identity

Variable	Reason for Choosing Teacher Education	N	M	SD	F	p
Professional_Value	Personal Decision	195	3.61	.80	.0	.8
	Influence of Others	72	3.36	.81	3	6
Professional_Willingness_and_Expectation	Personal Decision	195	4.59	.53	4.16	.04*
	Influence of Others	72	4.45	.65		
Professional_Efficacy	Personal Decision	195	4.31	.68	2.37	.13
	Influence of Others	72	3.86	.77		
Professional_Will	Personal Decision	195	3.19	.69	.26	.61
	Influence of Others	72	2.82	.68		
<Total>Professional_Identity	Personal Decision	195	3.93	.45	.95	.33
	Influence of Others	72	3.62	.49		

Note: *p<.05

4.3 Group Differences in Job Priorities

From Table 7, the analysis examined whether different job priorities influence pre-service teachers' professional identity across its dimensions. A significant difference was found in professional will, F = 5.00, p < .01. Students who prioritized job security and work–life balance (M = 3.34, SD = .57) scored higher in professional will than those who prioritized salary and benefits (M = 2.93, SD = .75). This suggests that students who value stability and balanced life tend to show stronger determination and persistence toward the teaching profession compared with those who focus primarily on financial incentives.

For professional value, professional willingness and expectation, professional efficacy, and overall professional identity, no significant differences were found among the various job-priority groups (all p > .05). These results indicate that students' job priorities do not substantially affect their value orientation, expectations, perceived competence, or their overall sense of professional identity.

Table 7: ANOVA Test Results on the Effects of Job Priorities on Professional Identity

Variable	Job Priorities	N	M	SD	F	p
Professional_Value	Salary and Benefits	120	3.48	.86	.97	.42
	Social Status	5	3.47	1.15		
	Job Security and Work-Life Balance	94	3.57	.69		
	Career Advancement Opportunities	38	3.59	.85		
	Other	10	3.97	.82		
	Total	267	3.54	.81		
Professional_Willingness_and_Expectation	Salary and Benefits	120	4.60	.50	1.03	.39
	Social Status	5	4.40	.89		
	Job Security and Work-Life Balance	94	4.47	.62		
	Career Advancement Opportunities	38	4.63	.59		
	Other	10	4.53	.61		
	Total	267	4.55	.57		
Professional_Efficacy	Salary and Benefits	120	4.15	.76	.74	.57
	Social Status	5	4.60	.89		
	Job Security and Work-Life Balance	94	4.18	.64		
	Career Advancement Opportunities	38	4.31	.78		
	Other	10	4.17	.97		
	Total	267	4.19	.73		
Professional_Will	Salary and Benefits	120	2.93	.75	5.00	.00**
	Social Status	5	3.00	1.18		
	Job Security and Work-Life Balance	94	3.34	.57		
	Career Advancement Opportunities	38	3.02	.74		
	Other	10	3.10	.27		
	Total	267	3.09	.71		
Professional_Identity	Salary and Benefits	120	3.79	.50	.81	.52
	Social Status	5	3.87	.65		
	Job Security and Work-Life Balance	94	3.89	.43		
	Career Advancement Opportunities	38	3.89	.50		
	Other	10	3.94	.57		
	Total	267	3.85	.48		

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01

4.4 Correlation Between Professional Identity and English Learning Efficacy

Professional identity shows significant positive correlations with English learning efficacy (r = .437, p < .01), professional value (r = .699, p < .01), professional willingness and expectation (r = .605, p < .01), professional efficacy (r = .769, p < .01), and professional will (r = .637, p < .01). These results indicate that students with stronger professional identity tend to report higher perceptions of their value orientation, expectations, competence, determination, and their English learning efficacy.

English learning efficacy is also significantly and positively correlated with all positive dimensions of professional identity, including professional value (r = .246, p < .01), professional willingness and expectation (r = .209, p < .01), professional efficacy (r = .472, p < .01), and professional will (r = .251, p < .01). This suggests that stronger confidence and ability in English learning are associated with more positive professional self-perceptions.

Regarding the sub-dimensions of English learning efficacy, academic behavior efficacy (r = .568, p < .01) and language use efficacy (r = .349, p < .01) both exhibit significant positive correlations with overall professional identity, indicating that

students who perform better behaviorally or in language-related tasks tend to possess stronger professional identity. Negative coping efficacy, however, shows no significant correlation with professional identity (r = –.052, p > .05), suggesting that students' negative coping tendencies in English learning are relatively independent of their professional identity.

Within English learning efficacy, academic behavior efficacy is strongly correlated with total English learning efficacy (r = .760, p < .01), and language use efficacy also shows a strong correlation (r = .914, p < .01), indicating strong internal consistency among the positive efficacy dimensions. In contrast, negative coping efficacy is negatively but weakly correlated with English learning efficacy (r = .258, p < .01), reflecting that students with higher overall English learning efficacy experience fewer negative coping tendencies.

Overall, the correlation pattern suggests that **positive dimensions of English learning efficacy are closely and positively associated with professional identity**, while **negative coping efficacy is largely unrelated**, reflecting its conceptual distinctiveness. Full results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Correlation Between Professional Identity and English Learning Efficacy (N=267)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Professional_Identity	1.00								
2. English_Learning_Efficacy	.44**	1.00							
3. Professional_Value	.70**	.25**	1.00						
4.Professional_Willingness_and_Expectation	.61**	.21**	.20**	1.00					
5. Professional_Efficacy	.77**	.47**	.30**	.49**	1.00				
6. Professional_Will	.64**	.25**	.29**	0.10	.32**	1.00			
7. Academic_Behavior_Efficacy	.57**	.76**	.32**	.39**	.59**	.25**	1.00		
8. Language_Use_Efficacy	.35**	.91**	.20**	.14*	.37**	.22**	.59**	1.00	
9. Negative_Coping_Efficacy	-0.05	.26**	-0.04	-0.11	-0.02	0.01	-0.07	-0.03	1.00

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

5. Discussion

The present study investigated pre-service English teachers' (PESTs') professional identity and English learning self-efficacy, as well as the factors influencing both constructs. The findings reveal several meaningful patterns that deepen the understanding of PESTs' psychological development and provide important implications for teacher education.

First, the study confirms that PESTs' professional identity is a multidimensional construct consisting of professional value, willingness and expectations, efficacy, and will. The strong internal correlations among these components support earlier theoretical models (Liu, 2012; Cai, 2013), indicating that PESTs' identity is formed through the integration of cognitive, emotional, and motivational evaluations of the profession. The particularly high correlation between professional efficacy and overall identity (r = .769**) suggests that PESTs' belief in their competence plays a central role in their identity formation. This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing self-efficacy as a key predictor of professional development and career commitment (Zhang & Wang, 2013).

Second, the results demonstrate that English learning self-efficacy is significantly associated with professional identity, supporting the idea that academic confidence can reinforce professional self-understanding. Both academic behavior efficacy and language-use efficacy showed substantial positive correlations with professional identity, indicating that PESTs who perform well and feel confident in English learning are more likely to internalize positive attitudes toward teaching. This is consistent with previous studies highlighting the role of learning success and emotional confidence in strengthening PESTs' professional values and expectations (Wang, 2009; Cheng, 2014). Interestingly, negative coping efficacy showed no meaningful correlation with professional identity, suggesting that maladaptive learning tendencies may operate as an independent construct that does not directly shape PESTs' career perceptions.

Third, the study found significant group differences in several dimensions of professional identity, reinforcing the importance of personal experiences and motivational factors. Students who voluntarily chose teacher education scored significantly higher in professional willingness and expectation than those influenced by others. This supports the finding that autonomous motivation enhances engagement and career clarity (Guo, 2011). Similarly, PESTs who received awards in professional competitions showed higher professional efficacy, indicating that recognition and achievement experiences enhance perceived competence—a core predictor of long-term career persistence. These results highlight the value of encouraging PESTs to participate in competitions, practicum activities, and skill-enhancement programs.

Furthermore, job priorities also shaped PESTs' professional development. Individuals who prioritized job security and work-life balance demonstrated significantly stronger professional will than those who emphasized salary. This finding reflects broader social changes in PESTs' career motivations, consistent with recent research reporting that younger generations seek stable yet meaningful career paths rather than purely financial incentives (Peng, 2021). It also suggests that policies improving teacher working conditions may positively contribute to strengthening PESTs' professional commitment.

Overall, the findings underscore the reciprocal and reinforcing relationship between English learning self-efficacy and professional identity. PESTs with greater learning confidence tend to perceive themselves as more competent future teachers, while a stronger professional identity may further motivate them to persist in academic learning and overcome challenges. This interaction suggests that enhancing English learning experiences through supportive teaching, diversified assessment, and structured goal setting may indirectly contribute to strengthening PESTs' professional identity.

6. Conclusion and Implications

6.1 Conclusion

This study examined the relationships between pre-service English teachers' professional identity, English learning self-efficacy, and various demographic and experiential factors. The findings highlight the multidimensional nature of professional identity and its close association with English learning self-efficacy. Professional efficacy and professional value emerged as the strongest predictors of overall identity, supporting the view that competence beliefs play a central role in shaping PESTs' occupational commitment. Moreover, academic behavior efficacy and language-use efficacy significantly correlated with professional identity, suggesting that PESTs' confidence in English learning contributes positively to their professional development.

Group comparisons further revealed meaningful differences. Students who voluntarily chose teacher education demonstrated stronger professional willingness and expectations. Participants with professional competition experience or awards reported higher professional efficacy, aligning with the idea that achievement-based mastery experiences enhance confidence and career readiness. Job priority differences also influenced professional will, indicating the impact of career motivations on professional identity formation.

Overall, the findings confirm a reciprocal relationship between learning self-efficacy and professional identity, emphasizing the need for integrated strategies within teacher education programs.

6.2 Implications

6.2.1 Strengthening Competency Development Through "Post–Course–Competition–Certificate" Integration

The national "post–course–competition–certificate" initiative emphasizes aligning professional posts, course standards, skills competitions, and vocational certificates to create a coherent talent training system. Competition-based learning has been shown to connect course content with authentic work tasks and industry standards. Given that competition participation significantly improved PESTs' professional efficacy in this study, institutions should incorporate competition tasks, project-based learning, and certificate-oriented skill modules into English and teacher-education courses.

6.2.2 Using High-Level Competitions to Enhance Learning Efficacy and Professional Awareness

National vocational skills competitions serve as powerful drivers of teaching reform, helping students develop technical expertise, resilience, teamwork, and innovative problem-solving abilities. Since mastery experiences are a key source of both self-efficacy and professional confidence, teacher education programs should encourage PESTs to engage in competitions, micro-teaching contests, English teaching showcases, and practicum-based challenges. These platforms simulate real teaching contexts, thus strengthening both language competence and classroom readiness.

6.2.3 Enhancing Motivation and Career Commitment Through Targeted Guidance

The study finds that PESTs motivated by personal choice hold stronger professional willingness. This suggests that career education, professional exploration workshops, and reflective activities should be integrated early in the course to help students clarify motivations and develop long-term career goals.

6.2.4 Creating Supportive Learning Environments to Develop English Learning Efficacy

Given the positive association between English learning efficacy and professional identity, English instruction for PESTs—particularly those majoring in education—should emphasize scaffolded feedback, authentic language-use tasks, and formative assessment. As highlighted in policy documents, competitions and certificate training both offer effective models for authentic assessment and situated learning.

6.3 Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. The sample was drawn from a single institution, which may restrict generalizability. In addition, cross-sectional data cannot determine causal relationships between the variables. Future research should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to examine how the interaction between self-efficacy and professional identity evolves over time. Qualitative methods may also provide richer insights into the mechanisms underlying PESTs' emotional, motivational, and cognitive experiences.

Project

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