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## A Case Study of Preschool Teacher Professional Identity of Preschool Education Major Male Graduates in Chinese Private Colleges and Universities

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### Abstract

Since the implementation of the three-year action plan for preschool education in China, the number of preschool teachers has urgently increased, and male kindergarten teachers are even more sought after. Through interviews with research cases, it can be learned that the influencing factors of male graduates of preschool education major in private colleges and universities engaging in preschool teacher occupation, such as salary, social status, work pressure, gender, interpersonal relationships, etc. These factors will make their recognition of engaging in preschool education career biased. In order to effectively alleviate this problem, research suggests to conduct specialized training in career planning, strengthen career identity, pay attention to the psychological changes of male students majoring in preschool education and establish professional confidence, expand professional knowledge and skills, and increase employment opportunities. In summary, the professional identity of boys majoring in preschool education towards engaging in preschool education can be described as mixed, which is the norm in the

transitional stage of professional growth. Male students majoring in preschool education should improve their knowledge and skills level, develop potential advantages, conduct appropriate professional training and psychological adjustment, which will surely improve their career development and ultimately lead to the "no perplexity" and the great future.

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**Keywords**

Professional identity, male teachers, preschool education, China, professional growth.

## Introduction

*Research background.* Since the implementation of the three-year action plan for preschool education in China, many inclusive kindergartens have been built, rebuilt and expanded in society [Duan Bihua, 2021, 71-74]. The increase in the number of kindergartens has resulted in the shortage of preschool teachers, which makes the kindergartens urgently need to be supplemented with a certain number of preschool teachers. Among the supplemented preschool teachers, male teachers are very popular. Mainly because of the unique gender charm of male kindergarten teachers, masculinity can not only bring children a rich and colorful sports experience, enhance their physical fitness, but also influence their mental outlook, bringing positive energy of active sunshine, happiness, and upward mobility. So, in recent years, kindergarten recruitment has provided superior job conditions and benefits for male teachers in kindergartens, and colleges and universities have also catered to market demand and encouraged boys to apply in preschool education majors.

The voice and orientation of preschool teachers in society are different. For a long time, people have known preschool teachers as non-professionals, and preschool teachers are often referred to as "nannies" or "aunts", leading to the low social status of preschool teachers [Lu Chunming, Wu Heng, Huang Mingming, 2020, 25-31]. There are certain misunderstandings and bias in social recognition, which make preschool teachers in a very difficult situation. This dilemma also makes many boys studying in preschool majors hesitant to pursue a career in early childhood education in the future, without any memories or fantasies.

During their college years, male students majoring in preschool education have already learned relevant professional basic knowledge and practical skills. During their senior year, they also experienced internships and internships in kindergartens [He Jianqing, Tang Linren, 2020, 149-156], and are about to face career choices and employment opportunities. The social public opinion and the pressure of job selection make them sniff at the future work of preschool teachers [Tian Xiuyu, Yan Zhonglian, 2020, 2-6]. It can be seen that it is particularly important to study the recognition of male graduates of preschool education major to preschool teachers' career for effectively alleviating this bad situation.

*Research object.* This research takes student S as the research object. Student S is a senior male student majoring in preschool education at a private university in China, and is now facing the choice of graduation and employment. In school, he carefully studied the theory and practice courses of

preschool education, and participated in educational probation and practice organized by the school for many times. The internship units included both public kindergartens affiliated to the university and private international kindergartens. He has some experience in practical teaching in kindergartens, is familiar with the basic work of kindergartens, takes the lead in obtaining the certified teacher of kindergartens and has the ability to lead classes independently in kindergartens.

*Research purpose.* The research aims to understand the theory of employment career identity of graduates by consulting relevant literature, and to conduct interviews to understand the degree of professional identity of male senior students majoring in preschool education in private universities towards engaging in preschool education. Based on their views on preschool education, the research aims to identify their demands for future career development, summarize the factors that affect their career choices in early childhood education, and propose reasonable suggestions. This will help more preschool male students understand the future development trends and career plans of their major, solve psychological doubts in early childhood education, and better engage in the future career of early childhood education [Su Xiaojuan, Hu Guoqiang, 2020, 63-67].

*Research methods.* The research mainly adopts literature research method, case study method, and interview method.

#### (1) Literature Research Method

Through literature research, relevant literature of China and other countries is collected, the research context is sorted out, and the theoretical basis is found to lay a certain foundation for conducting research.

#### (2) Case Study Method

By screening suitable male graduates in preschool education and conducting individual interviews with them, the collected data has been comprehensively and systematically integrated to understand the current status of professional identity among male graduates in preschool education, and case studies are used as the basis for research.

#### (3) Interview Method

The researchers conduct an interview with male graduate S of preschool education major from a private university in China to understand his current status of professional identity, and conduct a deep analysis of the materials to understand whether he is willing to enter this profession, analyze the reasons, and understand his views on this profession and the situation of male kindergarten teachers. During the epidemic, interviews have been conducted through video interviews. The researchers promise to keep the personal information of the interviewees confidential and to speak freely without any worries. The researchers record the interview in detail through screen recording to ensure its authenticity and effectiveness.

*New research ideas.* The research object has new ideas. In previous studies, most of the studies focused on the identification of preschool education graduates with preschool teachers, and there was little gender distinction. This research focuses on the professional identity of male preschool education graduates to preschool teachers. Male teachers themselves account for a minority in the teaching profession, and male preschool teachers' professional identity is even more valuable.

#### *Research value*

##### (1) Theoretical Value

Research has certain theoretical value. At present, all graduates of preschool education major are the main subjects of existing research, and female teachers account for the majority of teachers. This research explores the professional identity of Preschool teacher of male graduates of preschool

education major from the perspective of male graduates, which enriches the existing theory of professional identity of preschool teachers, and also provides a theoretical reference for the cultivation and employment planning of male students of preschool education major in colleges and universities.

#### (2) Practical Value

Research has certain practical value. Based on the professional identity of male students majoring in preschool education, the research provides suggestions and references for male students majoring in preschool education in their career choice, employment, career development and planning, helps alleviate the scarcity of male preschool teachers, and increases the social concern about boys majoring in preschool education working as preschool teachers.

*Paper structure.* Firstly, the authors of this paper clarify the research questions and design corresponding interview outlines based on the research objectives; Secondly, they strictly screen the research subjects, organize interview activities, and record interview results in details; Thirdly, the authors conduct an analysis based on the interview results, analyzing the degree of identification of senior male students majoring in preschool education with engaging in the preschool education profession, and drawing effective conclusions; Finally, they provide reasonable suggestions to help preschool professional boys enhance their professional confidence and increase their sense of identification with the preschool education profession.

## Scientific Research Demonstration

### *Theoretical basis*

#### (1) Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Maslow believes that individuals have five basic needs, from low to high: physiological, safety, belonging and love, respect, and self-actualization needs. Only when the lower level needs of an individual are met can they generate higher level needs. Teachers' professional identity belongs to a higher level of needs in the hierarchy of needs. Therefore, the premise for preschool teachers to obtain professional identity is to meet basic survival and living needs, such as salary can support living expenses, and working environment is safe and comfortable. After basic needs are met, there will be a higher level of self-learning and growth needs, as well as seeking recognition from others to obtain psychological satisfaction, and the level of professional recognition in early childhood education will correspondingly increase.

#### (2) Identity Theory

According to the object, identity theory can be divided into self-identity theory and social identity theory. Giddens (1998) has proposed that self-identity is a process of self-awareness and reflection that individuals gradually form through their own experiences and the influence of external environments. Self-identity is generated through the interaction between oneself and the outside world, which includes both the part of one's own initiative and the influence of the external environment. In the process of work, teachers recognize and accept themselves, clarify their identity and role, and form correct and positive self-identity, making preschool education professional identity a reality. Henry Tafel, John Turner and others put forward the social identity theory, which means that when individuals construct self-concept, they will go through three main processes: categorization, identification and comparison according to the membership and group category in social groups. As a member of society, individuals also pay attention to their status, reputation, and rank in similar professions, which also affects their identification with their profession.

## **Interview results of student s's professional identity in preschool education**

### **(1) The Working Environment Is Good, and the Service Targets Are Young**

During the interview, student S provided a general evaluation of kindergarten work. When asked, "What do you think of kindergarten work?" "What do you want to say to the younger students who will work in preschool education in the future?" S replied with a happy smile, "I really enjoy every day working in kindergarten. The working environment in kindergarten is very good. Whether in terms of physical or psychological environment, every day brings me fresh feelings, as if I have returned to my childhood and become a child myself. The various indoor corners and outdoor areas in the kindergarten are reminiscent of the childhood small world [Lan Jijun et al., 2020, 58], full of childlike innocence, so I am very satisfied with the working environment." From the expression on his face when describing, it can also be seen that he is truly intoxicated, talking and laughing, and happily recalling.

Student S excitedly shared his feelings of getting along with children in kindergarten: "Every day when I walk into kindergarten, I feel very excited to see the lovely children in my class again. They are really interesting, and every day there are new stories. I really enjoy being with them. The children are innocent and cheerful, and I am willing to serve them. I feel like I have become younger." Student S also shared his experience with his younger junior fellow students: "If they really like children and enjoy having a happy day, working in kindergarten is really a good choice." It can be seen that student S is very satisfied with the working environment and service objects in kindergarten.

### **(2) Low Salary Level and Average Welfare Benefits**

The kindergarten where student S interned is located in a third-tier city, and the salary and benefits of the kindergarten are not high. "My internship salary is around 800-1000 yuan. And I can earn around 1800-2500 yuan after becoming a regular employee. Adding the bonuses and other benefits, I can ultimately earn around 2700 yuan. This salary level is considered moderate in the local area. This can only be for my own personal expenses, I can't support my family, after all, I am a boy who takes on heavy responsibilities. My family and friends have also advised me to change careers. In the future, the pressure will become even greater, and living will become even more difficult, so I am also hesitant." It can be seen that the salary level affects his professional identity towards engaging in preschool education work [Zhou Bin, 2020, 27]

Student S summarized his work experience in different kindergartens and said, "The salary in public kindergartens is not high, but the five social insurance and one housing fund are guaranteed. Unlike some private kindergartens, which only receive salary and do not provide five social insurance and one housing fund, I also have to five social insurance and one housing fund by myself. It's not as good as being in a stable staffing of government affiliated institutions, and coupled with vacation, I can accompany my parents well, which makes me feel very happy." "Welfare can only meet individual needs, and salary is the main source of support for the family economy. Only when the salary is high enough, can the benefits enjoyed be meaningful." It can be seen that student S values salary more, and the current salary is not considerable.

### **(3) Low Social Status and High Work Pressure**

When asked about the social status recognition of kindergarten teachers, student S clearly felt very distressed. "Now when I go out to some social occasions and others ask me what kind of job I do, I can only answer that I work as a logistics worker in kindergarten, not as a head teacher in kindergarten. They will definitely feel that it's not good for a boy to work in kindergarten, and I also feel embarrassed

and will receive some contempt and ridicule. In the eyes of others, preschool teachers still remain in the perception of 'aunts', and I am too lazy to explain." Student S's response regarding the social status of preschool teachers seemed very helpless and disappointed.

If economic pressure is a common pressure among young people in the new era, the work pressure of kindergarten teachers will make other industry practitioners feel incredible. Student S said, "I also have many concerns every day, such as the safety of young children, various assessments in the unit, and the selection of professional titles. As a boy, my various skills are relatively weak and I do not have an advantage in these jobs. Whenever it comes to environmental innovation, I am always clumsy and anxious, and I have to work overtime to complete many tasks during skill competitions." It can be seen that student S feels that working as a boy in kindergarten is somewhat inadequate in many aspects, and his sense of professional identity is poor.

#### (4) Restricted Job Activities and Subtle Interpersonal Relationships

Society generally believes that female teachers are meticulous and meticulous in their work, making them suitable for childcare and education work. Male teachers are lively and outgoing, and they are physical responsibilities in kindergartens. They are suitable for work such as logistics, security, and physical training in kindergartens. For a long time, male teachers have indeed led the class, making up a minority. Student S said, "When I first arrived at the kindergarten to lead the class, many parents didn't understand why there were male teachers in the kindergarten. They thought that male teachers would definitely not be meticulous and it would be inconvenient to handle children's daily lives. They had some grudges towards me. And every time I rehearse dance in kindergarten, I feel awkward among female teachers." Student S smiled helplessly during the expression process, indicating that job activities are also limited by gender, which is an endless source of bitterness.

Working in kindergarten not only involves interacting with young children, but also other levels of interpersonal relationships [Liu Fang, 2020, 108], such as parents, principals, other teachers, administrative personnel, etc. When talking about "How do you feel about your relationships in kindergarten?", student S said: "When I first arrived in kindergarten, I felt a sense of isolation, female teachers would automatically isolate male colleagues, so in the kindergarten I often help female colleagues to do some small things, and gradually they also know who I am, everyone gets along very well, and everyone is willing to work with me. The principal still has great affirmation for me, and listens to my thoughts on some things, perhaps because boys have more jumping and innovative ideas. I think I am quite valued and the principal gives people a very friendly feeling." The eyes of classmate S showed confidence: "At first, the parents of my class were not very receptive to male teachers. Later, through my diligent efforts and patient communication with parents of young children, many parents recognize me very much and trust me to hand over the children, making my teaching work much easier." It can be seen that "compared to other jobs, male teachers working in kindergartens need to bear a certain amount of interpersonal pressure and consume more time and energy in interpersonal communication".

## Conclusions

### *Carrying out specialized training on career planning to strengthen professional identity*

Private colleges and universities cultivate applied talents in the field of preschool education. Most students will enter frontline positions such as kindergartens or early childhood education institutions after graduating from their senior year, while a small number of students will choose to take

postgraduate entrance exams or switch careers [Yao Mantuan, Liang Yun, 2020, 1558-1561]. Boys majoring in preschool education have a strong career vision. On the one hand, they are unwilling to become male kindergarten teachers, and on the other hand, they are confused about what else they can do in this major. This requires managers of preschool education majors in private colleges and universities to increase vocational planning training when formulating talent cultivation plans [Pu Yao et al., 2019, 61-68], so that students have a clear understanding of their future career direction, training goals, and knowledge and skills required for employment at the beginning of enrollment [Zhang Haijiao, 2019, 1-20]. In the training, it is necessary for the schools to add the special topic of male kindergarten teachers, introduce the job characteristics and responsibilities of male kindergarten teachers, broaden the employment ideas of male students, and encourage them to become kindergarten logistics personnel, administrative personnel and physical fitness teachers in addition to becoming class teachers, so that male students can have a vision for their future careers. It is also necessary to strengthen practice, regularly organize students to go to kindergarten internships, understand the future industry in advance, achieve the unity of knowledge and action, gradually adapt to the environment and system of kindergartens, and strengthen professional identity [Chen Xinpei, 2019, 167-168].

*Paying attention to the psychological changes of boys majoring in preschool education and establishing professional confidence*

With the development of the times, the country's emphasis on preschool education has increased, and society has gained a new understanding of preschool education majors. In recent years, more and more colleges and universities have opened undergraduate programs in preschool education, and more and more male students are voluntarily applying for the program. However, in the process of college education, some boys find it relatively difficult to learn theoretical knowledge, and their artistic abilities feel inferior, often feeling inadequate. The confident young men who entered school are poured with cold water, gradually becoming haggard and uncertain about their future. Managers of preschool education majors in colleges and universities should always pay attention to the psychological changes of preschool boys, organize male students to carefully study relevant national policies and documents on preschool education [Wang Guan, et al., 2019, 36-38], give special care to preschool boys in terms of theory and skills, listen to their ideas, and together find a way out for male preschool education. It is a necessity to clarify the gender advantages of boys working in kindergartens, transform "cold water" into a "nutrient solution" for growth, and regain their professional confidence.

*Expanding professional knowledge and skills, and increasing employment weight*

In the "Analects of Confucius", Confucius said, "I tried to not eat all day and not sleep all night to think, and it is not beneficial. It's better to learn." If boys majoring in preschool education are worried about the salary, social status, gender limitations, interpersonal relationships, and other factors of future preschool education work, they may not be able to eat or sleep, then it's better for them to appreciate the meaning of Confucius' words. Anxiety and confusion cannot solve the current worries, and pain and confusion cannot be formed in a day. In the final analysis, it is because one's professional knowledge and skills are not solid enough, and one's professional confidence is insufficient. Diligence leads to idleness, action leads to contemplation, and destruction follows. There is a must for the students to correct themselves and strive to improve themselves, and they will have the opportunity for promotion. Male students majoring in preschool education can better utilize their gender advantages, tap into their potential sports, logical thinking, and innovative abilities, and engage in work such as physical fitness development, thinking expansion, creative activities, toy development, and children's book editing for young children. Good treatment, status, and interpersonal relationships are never

achieved through complaints, but through personal learning, creation, and inspiration [Yang Weipeng, Zhang Dandan, 2018, 9-12]. "If you enjoy learning, you approach wisdom; if you work hard, you approach benevolence; if you know shame, you approach courage." The cultivation of unity of knowledge and action is the best employment tool for students. As the saying goes, every action produces a top scorer. A graceful gentleman values harmony but difference, and he won't care about the eyes of the world. It can be said that "they don't understand me and I don't hold grudges. I am still a person of noble character".

In summary, the professional identity of boys majoring in preschool education towards engaging in preschool education can be described as mixed, which is the norm in the transitional stage of professional growth. "People are not born with knowledge, who can have no doubts?" Male students majoring in preschool education should improve their knowledge and skills level [Shi Xiaoling, 2016, 22-23], develop potential advantages, conduct appropriate professional training and psychological adjustment, which will surely improve their career development and ultimately lead to the "no perplexity" and the great future.

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## Тематическое исследование профессиональной идентичности учителей-мужчин в дошкольных образовательных учреждениях Китая

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### Аннотация

Высокие темпы экономического развития Китая привели к возросшему спросу на дошкольные образовательные услуги. В стране с полутора миллиардным населением ежегодно рождается около 20 млн детей, которые нуждаются в дошкольных учреждениях. Поскольку педагог – тяжелая и ответственная работа, требующая огромной энергии, поступать в университет на педагогический факультет, чтобы потом стать учителем, решаются далеко не все юноши. У многих сложился гендерный стереотип, что с детьми должны заниматься только женщины, так как педагогика у них в крови. По этой причине многие мужчины не хотят работать в образовательных учреждениях. В рамках данного исследования выявлены критерии выбора места работы у студентов мужчин, а также их заинтересованность в трудоустройстве в дошкольные учреждения. Главным фактором при выборе места работы для мужчин является зарплата. Для многих это важный показатель социального положения. Для эффективного решения этой задачи, в данном исследовании авторы рекомендуют укрепить профессиональную идентичность, расширить профессиональные знания и навыки, увеличить социальную значимость педагогов дошкольного образования.

### Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

Синь Циюань, Мэн Линцзюнь, Тянь Яньцзюнь. A Case Study of Preschool Teacher Professional Identity of Preschool Education Major Male Graduates in Chinese Private Colleges and Universities // Педагогический журнал. 2023. Т. 13. № 8А. С. 74-83. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2023.58.91.056

**Ключевые слова**

Профессиональная идентичность, преподаватель, дошкольные учреждение, дошкольное образование, профессиональный рост.

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