

A Conceptual Review on Professional Identity and Foreign University Teachers' Retention Intention in Guangxi China

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Abstract

This paper presents a conceptual review exploring the intricate relationship between professional identity and retention intention among foreign university teachers in China. Drawing upon a range of scholarly literature, the review examines how cultural integration, professional development, and institutional support shape the experiences and career trajectories of these educators within the Chinese higher education landscape. Subsequent discussions highlight the nuanced nature of retention intention, influenced by professional belonging, job satisfaction, and the capacity to harmonize one's professional identity with the cultural context. The findings reveals that successful cultural and professional integration enhances job satisfaction and retention intention, while challenges in these areas can lead to attrition. The conclusion underscores the need for educational institutions to foster supportive environments that promote the professional growth and well-being of foreign university teachers. the paper contributes to the understanding of factors influencing foreign university teachers' professional identity and retention intention in China, offering insights for policymakers and institutional leaders seeking to improve the recruitment and retention of international teaching staff. The paper argues that such environments are essential not only for the retention of these educators but also for the broader success of the educational system. Overall,

Keywords: Professional Identity, Retention Intention, Sustainability Development, Tertiary Education, University Teacher.

Introduction

In the field of international higher education, the professional identity of university teachers emerges as a pivotal factor influencing their career trajectories and their commitment to their institutions. This is particularly pronounced in the context of China, where the rapid expansion of higher education has led to an increased reliance on foreign university teachers. Amidst the global teacher shortage that has left an estimated 18 million primary school positions vacant as of 2019, China faces its own unique set of challenges in retaining these valuable educational professionals (Wiggin et al., 2021). The retention intention of foreign university teachers in China is a complex interplay of personal and professional satisfaction, work conditions,

cultural integration, and economic incentives. A conceptual review of this issue is thus imperative to understand the intricate layers of professional identity and how it correlates with foreign teachers' decisions to either stay in their roles or seek opportunities elsewhere. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the factors that mold the professional identities of foreign university teachers in China and how these identities, in turn, impact their retention intentions. Through an exploration of existing literature, including insights from Wiggan et al (2021); and Lu et al (2022), this review will unpack the multifarious elements that contribute to the decision-making processes of these educators, ultimately affecting the educational landscape within China.

The retention of qualified teaching personnel is a cornerstone of robust educational systems worldwide, yet a critical shortage of teachers has emerged as a significant global issue. This scarcity stems from multifaceted reasons such as more attractive career alternatives, challenges in the working environment, inadequate training, and personal pressures unrelated to work (Bunting, 2005). Specific to China, the retention of foreign university teachers is further compounded by unique systemic factors that clash with the professional identities and personal aspirations of these educators (Norton, 2001). The increasing turnover not only incurs direct and indirect costs but also severely impairs educational quality, with students receiving less individualized attention as educators grapple with larger class sizes and increased workloads (Wiggan et al., 2021).

This conceptual review delves into the intricacies of professional identity and how it shapes the retention intentions of foreign university teachers in China. It examines the nexus between the educators' personal goals and the structural realities of Chinese educational institutions. Further, it explores how the consequent job dissatisfaction and potential burnout from unmanageable class sizes and extraneous stress factors can lead to a decline in educational standards and teacher turnover, posing a significant threat to the academic and developmental outcomes of students (Lu et al., 2022).

As education is pivotal in nurturing human capital, fostering economic growth, and encouraging civic engagement, understanding and addressing the factors influencing foreign teachers' decisions to remain in or leave their positions in China is of paramount importance. This review seeks to present a holistic view of these dynamics, contributing to the discourse on educational policy and teacher retention strategies in international contexts.

Literature Review

Professional Identity

The concept of professional identity is a multi-dimensional construct that significantly influences the retention intention of foreign university teachers, particularly within the rapidly internationalizing educational landscape of China. As Paige et al (2003), assert, cultural integration plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of these educators, with the ability to effectively communicate and implement bilingual teaching strategies being central to their professional success and satisfaction. Furthermore, the professional development programs and continuous support tailored to the regional educational goals, as observed by Hénard and Roseveare (2012), are essential for fostering a strong professional identity.

The sense of community and belonging, cultivated through collaboration with local teachers and the broader community, is instrumental in nurturing foreign teachers' sense of identity and shared purpose within the educational framework (Lock, 2006). This is particularly relevant in Guangxi, where the fusion of international teaching practices with local cultural attributes creates a stimulating environment that is conducive to professional identity formation (Gu & Lundvall, 2006).

The empirical research of Hong (2010), and Hamilton et al (2018), reinforces the positive correlation between a well-established professional identity and job retention. This relationship is further exemplified in the context of Guangxi, where the educational institutions' role in offering clear communication, orientation programs, and an inclusive environment is critical in retaining foreign teachers (Sun, 2022).

The impact of professional identity on educators' employment choices is underscored by Beijaard et al (2000), who highlight the significance of cultural adaptation and institutional support in the construction of professional identities. Izadinia (2015), and Healey and Hays (2012), further elaborate on the profound influence of mentoring and alignment with institutional or cultural standards on professional identity.

However, retention is not solely influenced by professional identity; job satisfaction, work-life balance, and adaptability to cultural differences are also pivotal. Studies by Mosadeghrad et al (2008), Das & Baruah (2013), and Toropova et al (2021), elucidate how these factors collectively affect the decision-making process of international educators regarding their tenure in current positions. The research by Froese-Germain (2014) and Johari et al. (2018) indicates that the maintenance of work-life balance is a critical determinant for retention, while Warshawski et al. (2017) emphasize the impact of cultural barriers on retention rates.

The alignment of personal and organisational objectives is another facet influencing retention intentions. Rotondi (2022), suggests that congruence between an educator's personal values and those of the institution enhances their likelihood to remain. Similarly, Chen et al. (2021), observe that professional development opportunities aligned with educators' identities positively affect retention. Hanum et al. (2023), conclude that adequate support enables individuals to navigate professional challenges more effectively, thus strengthening their professional identity and inclination to stay.

In summary, the literature suggests that the professional identity of foreign university teachers is intricately linked to their retention intentions, influenced by a complex interplay of cultural integration, institutional support, community engagement, and personal well-being within the educational milieu of China.

Professional Values

The foundational professional values that teachers hold are essentially the ethical benchmarks and guiding beliefs that shape their actions, inform their decision-making processes, and guide their interactions within the scholastic milieu. These core tenets are rooted in a steadfast commitment to the creation of an educational space that is not only supportive but also inviting, thereby enhancing the learning experience. They extend to the

nurturing of student welfare and advancement, while also safeguarding the esteem and integrity of the teaching vocation itself.

Educators collectively uphold certain professional ethics, most notably a pledge to provide instruction of the highest caliber, to celebrate and respect the individuality of every student, and to cultivate a classroom environment imbued with fairness and equal opportunity (Aktan et al., 2020). Furthermore, these educators place immense importance on their own professional development and the pursuit of knowledge throughout their careers, recognizing that such growth is imperative for the continuous enhancement of their pedagogical practices.

In their interactions with students, colleagues, and parents, educators are known for their integrity, accountability, and transparency, thereby fostering trust and building strong, respectful relationships. This is in line with the findings of Sahin and colleagues (2015), who posited that educators often employ their professional ethics as a guiding compass, one that directs their efforts in promoting the comprehensive growth of their students and contributing to the broader aims of the educational system. By adhering to and exemplifying these ethical standards, teachers not only position themselves as exemplary figures for their pupils but also as advocates for their academic and personal triumphs within the journey of education.

Professional Behavioral Inclination

The concept of professional behavioral inclination encapsulates the innate proclivity of individuals to conduct themselves in a manner that is congruent with the established norms, ethics, and principles of their chosen vocation (Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013). This encompasses a spectrum of behaviors critical to the teaching profession including the display of respect, sensitivity, and a capacity for tolerance towards students, colleagues, and the students' families. Such professional conduct is underpinned by the necessity for maintaining confidentiality, upholding professional boundaries, and creating an educational atmosphere that is both secure and welcoming to all.

Korthagen (2017) has elaborated on this concept, identifying that inherent within professional conduct is the capacity for effective communication, collaboration, and a lifelong commitment to educational growth. Professionals adhering to ethical standards are more inclined to assume accountability for their decisions, exercise moral judgement, and manifest integrity in their actions. The embodiment of professional ideals and norms is pivotal, cultivating a demeanor that is at once sincere and consistent, engendering trust and respect from colleagues, clients, and all stakeholders involved.

The natural inclination to align one's behavior with the profession's core values, ethics, and standards is instrumental in creating a respectful and productive work environment, thereby enhancing the prestige and trustworthiness of the profession itself. The subsequent sections will delineate the essential elements of professional behavioral tendencies, delineating the intrinsic patterns that characterize educators' conduct within their professional roles. This exploration will encompass the educators' preferred pedagogical methodologies, their interpersonal dynamics, ethical considerations, introspective reflections on their practice, and their adaptability to diverse educational needs. An in-depth understanding and nurturing of

these attributes are imperative, not only for the efficacy of the individual educators but also for the overarching triumph of the educational framework they operate within.

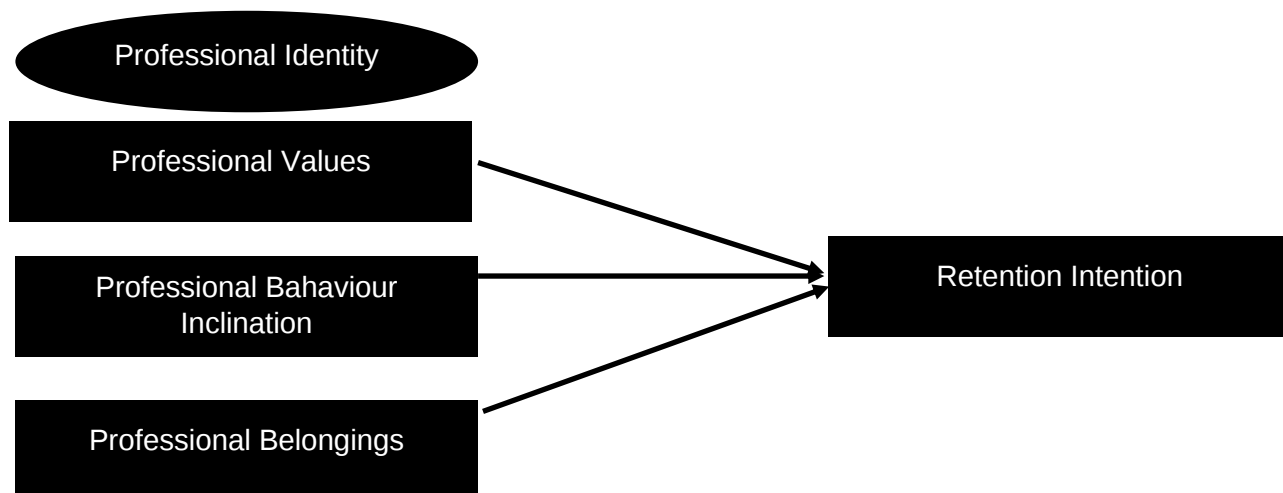
Professional Belonging

In the intricate tapestry of China's educational fabric, the notion of professional belonging for University Foreign Teachers extends well beyond a simple sense of placement within a professional community. It embodies a complex, layered interweaving of relationships and cultural immersion. These international educators are not merely visitors; they are integral participants who must cultivate a diverse set of competencies to adeptly traverse the multifarious and richly woven educational culture of China. This culture, steeped in millennia of traditions and a profound depth of beliefs, demands a thorough engagement and a sensitive approach to educational practices (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018).

To truly thrive in this setting, foreign teachers must do more than adapt; they must harmonize their professional practices with the nuanced subtleties of China's cultural norms, which includes an appreciation for the country's historical ethos and contemporary societal values. They must skilfully blend an understanding of local customs and pedagogical expectations with their own educational philosophies. This alignment is not just about fitting in; it's about weaving their professional identities into the very fabric of the educational system, creating a seamless integration that respects and enhances the cultural milieu in which they operate (Berry, 2008).

It is this deep-rooted alignment, this intellectual and emotional synchrony with the local culture, that enables foreign educators to contribute meaningfully to the academic community and foster a genuine sense of belonging. By doing so, they bridge gaps between diverse teaching methodologies and the indigenous learning styles, crafting a reciprocal educational experience that benefits both students and teachers alike. It is this delicate balance, this thoughtful synthesis of professional identity and cultural acuity, that forms the cornerstone of their success and fulfillment as educators in China's vibrant academic landscape.

Conceptual Framework



Discussion

The paper suggests a focus on the intersection of professional identity and retention intention among foreign university teachers in China. In this discussion, this paper synthesizes the findings from the provided literature to explore how these two concepts interact within the unique context of the Chinese higher education system.

Professional identity emerges as a central theme in the literature, with foreign teachers in China facing the challenge of integrating their own cultural and professional backgrounds with the local educational norms and expectations. This integration is not just about cultural assimilation; it requires a nuanced understanding of local customs, traditions, and teaching philosophies (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018; Berry, 2008). As foreign educators navigate this complex landscape, their professional identity evolves, influenced by their experiences and the degree to which they can align their own educational philosophies with those of the host country.

Retention intention, on the other hand, is closely tied to the notion of professional belonging and the satisfaction that comes from feeling integrated within the academic community. Teachers who are able to successfully merge their professional identity with the cultural context of China are likely to experience a stronger sense of belonging and, consequently, a greater desire to remain in their positions (Lu et al., 2022). This sense of belonging is reinforced by the support and development opportunities provided by educational institutions, which can foster a strong alignment with regional educational goals and contribute to a shared sense of purpose among educators (Hénard & Roseveare, 2012; Sun, 2022).

However, the literature also points to significant challenges that can impact both professional identity and retention intention. For instance, excessive workloads, insufficient compensation, and the struggle to balance professional and personal life can erode job satisfaction and weaken the professional identity of foreign university teachers (Wiggan et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2022). This, in turn, can lead to a diminished intention to stay, as the costs—both personal and professional—begin to outweigh the benefits of working in a foreign academic environment.

It is clear from the literature that fostering a strong professional identity and encouraging retention among foreign university teachers in China requires a holistic approach. This includes acknowledging the complexities of cultural integration, providing robust support systems, facilitating professional development, and recognizing the individual needs and contributions of each educator (Gu & Lundvall, 2006; Hong, 2010; Hamilton et al., 2018).

To conclude, the discussion reveals that the professional identity of foreign university teachers in China is not static but is continually shaped by their interactions with the cultural and institutional environment. The intention to remain in the profession is similarly dynamic, influenced by a myriad of factors that range from personal satisfaction to professional growth opportunities. Universities that seek to retain high-quality foreign educators must therefore be cognizant of these factors and strive to create an environment where professional identity is not just preserved but is allowed to flourish, thereby enhancing retention intention and contributing to the overall success of the educational system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the interplay between the professional identity of foreign university teachers and their intention to remain within the Chinese educational system is a multifaceted and evolving dynamic. The literature underscores that professional identity is profoundly influenced by the degree of cultural and institutional integration experienced by foreign teachers. Those who successfully navigate the complexities of the Chinese educational culture and align their professional ethos with local practices are more likely to develop a robust sense of belonging, which in turn positively influences their retention intentions.

Nevertheless, the challenges associated with cultural adaptation, work demands, and the search for a work-life balance are significant factors that can impede this sense of belonging and threaten retention. It is incumbent upon educational institutions to create supportive environments that not only recognize the unique contributions of foreign educators but also actively facilitate their professional development and well-being.

The synthesis of research indicates that a concerted effort to enhance the professional identity of foreign university teachers through targeted support, respect for cultural diversity, and opportunities for personal and professional growth will likely lead to higher retention rates. As such, the future of international education in China hinges on the ability of institutions to cultivate and sustain an academic environment that honors the intercultural exchange, encourages pedagogical innovation, and values the contributions of its diverse teaching staff.

Ultimately, the success of China's educational engagement with the global academic community will be measured by its capacity to attract, develop, and retain talented foreign educators who feel professionally fulfilled and personally valued within its borders. This, in turn, will enrich the educational experiences of students and fortify the international standing of Chinese universities.

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