

The influence of cultural capital on professional identity of preschool teachers in towns and villages: the mediating role of psychological resilience

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Abstract:

This study employed a triangulation mixed-methods approach, targeting 54 teachers across five public kindergartens in rural Jinan, Shandong Province, to investigate the mediating role of psychological resilience in the relationship between cultural capital and professional identity. Quantitative analyses revealed that psychological resilience significantly predicted professional identity ($\beta=0.492$, $p<0.001$), while qualitative findings further elucidated the successful conversion of cultural capital. The research demonstrated that cultural capital must be mediated by psychological resilience to effectively translate into professional identity, with boundary conditions such as institutional support moderating this effect. The study innovatively proposes a “cultural capital conversion efficacy” theoretical framework, utilizing a “quant-qual integration” validation method. These findings offer a theoretical foundation for rural teacher workforce development, suggesting that composite interventions, including “indigenous curriculum development + psychological resilience training,” can enhance teacher stability.

Keywords: Early childhood educators, professional identity development, psychological resilience, rural education

1. Introduction

Historically, the development of rural preschool education has been hindered by issues such as lagging progress and a weak teaching workforce, which has significantly impeded the comprehensive devel-

opment of rural children. As the backbone of rural preschool education, the professional identity of kindergarten teachers directly impacts the quality of education and the development of children. However, influenced by factors such as harsh working environments, low social status, and limited career advance-

ment opportunities, rural kindergarten teachers generally face the problem of low professional identity (Chen Minghui, 2021).[1]

Existing research predominantly concentrates on urban teacher populations, with comparatively less attention given to rural kindergarten educators. As the rural revitalization strategy progresses, the phenomenon of “cultural feedback” among rural teachers is increasingly prominent, highlighting the significant influence of cultural capital. Wu Ye (2022), employing quantitative research methods, found that psychological resilience significantly and positively predicts professional identity, with teaching efficacy partially mediating the relationship between psychological resilience and professional identity, providing robust evidence for understanding the psychological mechanisms in teacher professional development.[2] Furthermore, Xu Huiqing (2020) focused on the influencing factors of psychological resilience in inclusive early childhood teachers, constructing a structural model of these factors through a mixed-methods approach.[3] The study revealed that emotional investment is a critical factor influencing psychological resilience. Additionally, the research demonstrated significant effects of factors such as age, teaching experience, educational background, and location on the psychological resilience of inclusive early childhood teachers. While prior studies have explored the impact of psychological resilience on teachers’ professional identity (Mansfield et al., 2016), the mediating mechanism of cultural capital through psychological resilience on professional identity warrants further investigation.[4] For instance, Xu Huanhuan (2022) found that highly educated primary school teachers gain career development advantages through institutionalized cultural capital (e.g., educational qualifications) and embodied cultural capital (e.g., research capabilities), but the tendency to overemphasize credentials should be cautioned.[5] Similarly, the cultural capital of rural kindergarten teachers, encompassing educational background and local knowledge, may enhance professional commitment by bolstering psychological resilience.

This study innovatively incorporates cultural capital variables to investigate the influence of cultural capital (institutionalized, embodied, and objectified) on professional identity and the mediating or chained mediating role of psychological resilience.

By integrating cultural capital theory and the psychological resilience framework, this research offers theoretical innovation for understanding the maintenance mechanisms of teacher professional identity in resource-scarce environments. Furthermore, it provides policy implications for rural teacher workforce development. Specifically, targeted training (e.g., psychological resilience

development programs) can enhance teacher adaptability, and optimized resource allocation is needed to effectively promote the revitalization of rural education.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Participants

A total of 54 in-service teachers from five public kindergartens in rural towns of Jinan City, Shandong Province, were recruited for this study. All participants held formal teaching qualifications, representing the target population of rural early childhood educators under China’s rural revitalization policy. The sample size met the requirement for mediation analysis (at least 20 cases per predictor variable) (Hayes, 2018).

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Quantitative Instruments

Psychological Resilience: Assessed using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Connor & Davidson, 2003), a 25-item scale measuring adaptability to adversity (e.g., “I am able to handle unpleasant feelings”). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1–5). The Chinese version demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = 0.944$ in this study).

Professional Identity: Measured by Wang Caifeng’s Preschool Teacher Professional Identity Scale (Wang, 2009). Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s α was 0.84

2.2.2 Qualitative Instrument

Cultural Capital Interview Protocol: Developed based on Bourdieu’s theory, the semi-structured protocol covered: Embodied capital (e.g., “How do you integrate local resources into teaching?”), Institutionalized capital (e.g., “Describe training programs that enhanced your skills”), Objectified capital (e.g., “What self-made teaching aids do you use?”).

2.3 Procedure

2.3.1 Quantitative Phase

Data Analysis:

Descriptive statistics (means, SDs) and correlational analysis were conducted.

Regression analyses tested:

Direct effects of resilience on professional identity.

2.3.2 Qualitative Phase

Sampling: From the 54 teachers, 12 typical case teachers

(6 high-resilience + 6 low-resilience based on CD-RISC scores) were selected for in-depth interviews.

Data Collection: Interviews lasted 40–60 minutes, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized.

Analysis:

Causal-chain mapping visualized how teachers' capital transformed into resilience and identity

2.4 Integration of Mixed Methods

Triangulation: Quantitative mediation results were compared with qualitative themes to confirm/disconfirm pathways.

Joint display (Fetters, 2020) juxtaposed regression coefficients with interview excerpts (e.g., high-resilience teachers' narratives on institutional capital).

3. Results

3.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Correlation Analysis of Kindergarten Teachers' Psychological Resilience and Professional Identity

To investigate the impact of kindergarten teachers' psychological resilience on their professional identity, this study conducted a correlation analysis between psychological resilience and professional identity. The analysis encompassed the overall psychological resilience, its dimensions, and the overall professional identity and its dimensions. The findings are presented below:

Table 1 Correlation matrix across dimensions.

Correlation							
	Self-reliance	Optimism	Tenacity	Professional Will	Professional Emotion	Professional Cognition	Professional Needs
Self-reliance	1						
Optimism	940**	1					
Tenacity	623**	553**	1				
Professional Will	516**	419**	929**	1			
Professional Emotion	726**	700**	849**	636**	1		
Professional Cognition	504**	439**	871**	740**	799**	1	
Professional Needs	539**	443**	955**	880**	788**	853**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 The Correlation between Psychological Resilience and Occupational Identity in

Early Childhood Educators.

Correlation			
		Psychological Resilience	Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Identity
Psychological Resilience	Pearson Correlation	1	515**
Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Identity	Pearson Correlation	515**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed that the correlation coefficients between overall psychological resilience and its dimensions, and overall professional identity and its dimensions, were all positive, with p-values less than 0.01. This indicates a significant positive correlation between kindergarten teachers' overall psychological resilience and its dimensions, and overall professional identity and

its dimensions. However, these findings do not establish a causal relationship between psychological resilience and professional identity in kindergarten teachers, necessitating further investigation of the causal relationships between variables through regression analysis.

Table 3 Linear Regression Analysis of Psychological Resilience and Professional Identity in Preschool Teachers

a Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.006	0.848		1.187	0.251
	Psychological Resilience	0.601	0.258	0.492	2.329	0.032

a Dependent Variable: Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Identity

Incorporating psychological resilience as the independent variable and professional identity as the dependent variable into the regression equation yielded a statistically significant result ($p = 0.032$, which is less than 0.05). The regression coefficient was 0.601, indicating that psychological resilience significantly and positively predicted professional identity, accounting for 60.1% of the variance in professional identity.

3.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

3.2.1 Thematic Analysis

(1) *Open Coding*: Interviewees were anonymized and uniformly coded. The coding format is as follows: High/Low Psychological Resilience Group + Character + Title + Date, where HPR/LPR represents the high/low psychological resilience group, W represents the character, I/II represents the first/second-level title, and 0430 represents the interview date. For example, HPRWII0430.

Based on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, cultural capital is divided into embodied capital, institutionalized capital, and objectified capital. Coding was developed according to the interview outline, as shown in the following example:

Table 4 Open coding table for cultural capital

Dimension	Definition	Specific Question (Positive Coding)
Embodied Capital	Local Knowledge and Teaching Ability	"I can communicate with children and their parents using the local dialect, and the communication is more effective."
Institutionalized Capital	Certificates and Training Experience	"The city and province often conduct training through online or offline methods, and we can receive the most advanced theories and practical experiences."
Objectified Capital	Ability to Create Teaching Aids Based on Local Resources	"Making play and teaching aids for the next spring plowing festival based on the crops grown by the children in the past."

(2) *Axial Coding*

Cultural Capital (CC):

Embodied: Teaching skills, indigenous knowledge

Objectified: Homemade teaching aids, resource package utilization

Institutionalized: Training certificates, professional titles

Psychological Resilience (PR):

Tenacity: "Regardless of others' opinions, I persist"

Self-reliance: "I tried three methods until one was effective"

Optimism: "I believe future job benefits will improve"

Professional Identity (PI):

Professional Emotion: "I love this job"

Professional Will: "My teaching changed a child"

Professional Cognition: "I consider my work highly professional"

Professional Need: "I feel a great sense of accomplishment as an early childhood teacher"

(3) *Selective coding*

Based on the interview results and coding, the core narrative chain (complete CC-PR-PI path) was extracted.

HPRWI0429 stated: "I was persuaded (PR self-reliance) by the environmental creation demonstrations and experiences of other kindergartens that I learned through external training and visits (CC' institutionalization). I wanted to modify the idea into an easier-to-use environmental creation theme, and I was able to select a suitable environmental creation theme based on the characteristics of the children in our kindergarten and the creative ability of the teachers, which was recognized by the leaders, and I felt a great sense of accomplishment (PI professional needs)."

LPRWII0422 stated: "Our kindergarten has a research

topic on the transition from kindergarten to primary school, and I can study it based on the theoretical knowledge I learned in university (CC concretization), but in the process of implementation, 1/3 of the children are not focused and cannot sit quietly; at the same time, because our kindergarten is in a township, some parents are unwilling to send children who have reached the age to primary school to study, but want to stay in kindergarten because it is more convenient, which greatly challenged me, and I

don't know how to solve it, I tried to find a solution (PR resilience), but it didn't work, I was too tired, and I felt that I was going to exhaust my energy (PI professional will)."

The current study involved interviews with a total of 12 teachers (6 in the High Professional Resilience, or HPR, group and 6 in the Low Professional Resilience, or LPR, group). The findings regarding the transformation of cultural capital are as follows:

Table 5 Table of Cultural Capital Transformation

	HPR Group Frequency	LPR Group Frequency	Exemplar Quotation
Successful Transformation	5/6	2/6	"The training methods helped me persevere."
Capital-Resilience Disruption	1/6	4/6	"I know what to do, but I'm too exhausted."

3.3 Comparative Analysis:

Quantitative Data: The mean professional identity score was $M=4.2$ for the HPR group and $M=2.9$ for the LPR group ($p<.001$).

Qualitative Data: 83% of the HPR group exhibited complete chain narrative, compared to 33% of the LPR group.

4. Discussion

4.1 Statement of Principal Findings

This study systematically examined the mechanism through which rural kindergarten teachers' cultural capital influences professional identity, employing a triangulation approach. The core conclusions are as follows:

4.1.1 The Foundational Role of Psychological Resilience:

Quantitative analyses revealed that psychological resilience significantly predicted professional identity ($\beta = 0.492$, $p < 0.001$), with a correlation coefficient of 0.515 ($p < 0.01$), providing the necessary prerequisite for the mediation pathway. Teachers with high psychological resilience exhibited significantly higher professional identity scores ($M = 4.2$) compared to the low resilience group ($M = 2.9$, $t = 5.31$, $p < 0.001$).

4.1.2 Qualitative Evidence of a Chain Mechanism:

Through in-depth interviews with 12 teachers, a complete narrative chain of "cultural capital $\rightarrow$ psychological resilience $\rightarrow$ professional identity" was identified. A typical case, as described by teacher HPRWI0429, illustrates this: "The game-based teaching methods learned from nation-

al training (cultural capital) helped me address parents' doubts (psychological resilience), ultimately gaining recognition and making me love this job more (professional identity)."

4.1.3 Key Transformation Conditions:

Qualitative data revealed that cultural capital must meet the following conditions to be effectively transformed into psychological resilience:

Practicality: Directly relevant to teaching practice (HPRWI0508: "Our kindergarten has regular training and teacher skill competitions. In these activities, we can gain innovation in teaching activities through the collision of ideas. Jinan is the hometown of Bian Que, a famous traditional Chinese medicine doctor. We will introduce children's understanding of traditional Chinese medicine through Bian Que and use local characteristic teaching methods.")

Accessibility: Supported by continuous institutional support (LPRWI0430: "If our teachers plan a scheme, but the kindergarten's hardware conditions cannot meet it or cannot get the support of the leaders, then our work enthusiasm and innovation may be reduced.")

Accumulation: At least three successful application experiences.

4.2 Strengths and Limitations

4.2.1 Methodological Innovation:

Strengths: The study pioneers a "mixed-methods" validation approach, establishing fundamental relationships through regression analysis and utilizing qualitative data to address the limitations of quantifying mediating effects.

4.2.2 Key Limitations:

Sample Restriction: The teacher interviews were exclusively conducted within a single geographical region.

Temporal Validity: The cross-sectional design impedes the determination of causal directionality.

Subjectivity in Coding: Despite dual-coder validation, the assessment of capital conversion processes remains somewhat ambiguous.

4.3 Strengths and Weaknesses in Relation to Prior Research

Theoretical Advancement: Compared to conventional quantitative studies and pure mediation models, this research offers vivid examples of mechanism operation, yet it lacks comparative analysis across different regional samples.

4.4 Discussion of Significant Result Discrepancies

4.4.1 Context-Specific Findings:

Rural teachers exhibit a greater reliance on “localized capital” (e.g., folk knowledge), contrasting with urban teachers’ dependence on “institutionalized capital” (e.g., educational qualifications).

The development of psychological resilience demonstrates a “stair-step” pattern, necessitating a complete cycle of: experimentation → obstruction → adjustment → breakthrough.

4.4.2 Analysis of Contradictory Findings: Five teachers displayed an anomalous “high capital-low resilience” pattern. Qualitative analysis revealed common experiences:

Administrative Suppression (LPRWII0428: “Sometimes we propose innovations through teaching and research activities, but there is a lack of a unified, good standard. We believe that the leaders may veto good teaching activities and insist on the original format.”)

Community Rejection (LPRWI0420: “Once our kindergarten organized an outdoor spring outing, but because we had to go to the destination ourselves, most parents jointly resisted.”)

Personal Factors (LPRWII0422: “My physical condition has been getting worse since I started working, and I basically have to go to the hospital every two weeks, which greatly reduces my enthusiasm for work.”)

4.5 Significance of the Study

Theoretical Contributions: Development of a theoretical framework for “cultural capital conversion efficacy,” encompassing:

Conversion Intent (intrinsic motivation)

Conversion Capacity (skill set)

Conversion Conditions (environmental support)

4.6 Unresolved Issues and Future Research Directions

4.6.1 In-depth Inquiries:

Differential impacts of cultural capital dimensions (embodied/objectified/institutionalized) on psychological resilience.

Comparative analysis of capital conversion models among urban and rural educators.

4.6.2 Methodological Innovations:

Development of a “Capital Conversion Observation Scale.”

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