



## The Influence of Parenting Styles on Preservice Teachers' Professional Identity: The Mediating Role of Personality Traits

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### Abstract

This study explores the mechanism through which parenting styles influence preservice teachers' professional identity, with a focus on the mediating role of personality traits. Using the Short Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran (s-EMBU), the Chinese Big Five Personality Inventory - Brief Version (CBF-PI-B), and the Professional Identity Scale for Preservice Teachers (PISPT), a questionnaire survey was conducted among 118 preservice teachers majoring in primary education at a Chinese university. The results indicate that: (1) The parenting style perceived by preservice teachers is predominantly characterised by emotional warmth, and their overall professional identity is above the moderate level; however, the professional identity of third-year students is significantly lower than that of first- and second-year students. (2) Maternal emotional warmth is significantly positively correlated with teacher professional identity, whereas parental rejection and overprotection show no significant correlation with professional identity. (3) Hierarchical regression and mediation analysis demonstrate that maternal emotional warmth does not exert a significant direct effect on professional identity; instead, agreeableness plays a fully mediating role in this relationship, with the mediation effect accounting for 71.50% of the total effect. This study reveals a profound pathway through which the family emotional environment influences preservice teachers' professional identity—specifically, by shaping agreeableness, an interpersonally oriented personality trait, which in turn indirectly promotes professional identity. It is recommended that teacher education programmes capitalise on the emotional support function of family education, whilst integrating the cultivation of agreeableness as a core component of professional psychological quality training to foster preservice teachers' professional identity.

**Keywords:** preservice teachers; teacher professional identity; parenting styles; personality traits; mediating role.

## 1. Introduction

In September 2018, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued the *Opinions on the Implementation of the Outstanding Teacher Training Programme 2.0*, which asserted that building a high-quality teaching force is a vital pillar of the national strategy to strengthen education, necessitating continuous improvement in teachers' professional capabilities and the optimisation of the teacher force structure (Ministry of Education, 2018). The *Outline of the National Plan for the Construction of a Powerful Education Country (2024–2035)* subsequently incorporated a "highly qualified teacher force system" into its eight major systems of construction (CPC Central Committee & State Council, 2025). Furthermore, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China emphasised the need to "promote the spirit of educators and cultivate a high-level teaching force". These policy directives underscore the national prioritisation of enhancing professional quality and cultivating outstanding teachers. For preservice teachers, teacher professional identity serves as the psychological foundation for their future career in education (Cheng et al., 2008). Previous research suggests that the formation and maintenance of a strong professional identity is a key benchmark of professional teaching (Wang et al., 2010; Yang, 2014). Moreover, teacher professional identity profoundly influences instructional efficacy, work attitudes, and subsequent career trajectories (Zhu & Che, 2021). Consequently, fostering high levels of professional identity is a core objective of initial teacher education. Given that the initial teacher education stage is a critical window for identity formation, investigating the current status and determinants of preservice teachers' professional identity is of substantial practical significance.

## 2. Literature Review

Compared to the professional identity of inservice teachers, the conceptualisation of preservice teachers' identity places greater emphasis on "future orientation" and their transitional status as "quasi-teachers". Guo et al. (2021) argued that preservice teachers' professional identity manifests as a rational understanding, positive attitude, and favourable affect towards the teaching profession, alongside a genuine acceptance of the role, an active willingness to teach, and a comprehensive identification with their status as teacher candidates. From a structural perspective, Wei et al. (2013) divided teacher professional identity into four dimensions: professional values, role values, professional belonging, and professional behavioural inclinations. Focusing on tuition-free preservice teachers, Zhao et al. (2011) and Zeng et al. (2011) proposed dimensions such as professional affection, professional will, and value identification, which have been widely adopted in subsequent empirical inquiries (Chen, 2024; Luo et al., 2021; Xu, 2020).

As children's primary educators, parents and their parenting styles exert a profound and lasting influence on their offspring's personality development and career trajectories (Shi & Feng, 2022). Personality traits, in turn, are regarded as crucial predictors of professional identity (Schepens et al., 2009). Under the Big Five framework, traits such as agreeableness and extraversion have been shown to correlate positively with teacher professional identity (Wang, 2018). Parental emotional warmth and understanding facilitate the development of positive personality traits and psychological adaptability in children, thereby fostering positive professional identity; conversely, maladaptive parenting practices, such as rejection and overprotection, are often associated with negative personality traits that may undermine professional identity (Liu, 2008; Yuan et al., 2011). Guided by these findings, several researchers have suggested that parenting styles may directly or indirectly influence preservice teachers' professional identity through individual internal variables such as personality (He & Tan, 2024; Liang & Wu, 2025; Sugrue, 1997; Feng et al., 2010).

On this basis, the present study posits that parenting styles within family education influence preservice teachers' professional identity, and that this influence is likely mediated by personality traits. To test this hypothesis, we conducted an empirical study on primary education preservice teachers at a Chinese university to explore the relationships among parenting styles, personality traits, and professional identity. The ultimate goal is to propose practical recommendations for enhancing teacher professional identity from a family-education perspective, thereby contributing to the cultivation of high-quality teachers and supporting national educational goals in the new era.

## 3. Research Design

### 3.1 Participants

Using convenience sampling, preservice teachers majoring in primary education at a Chinese university were recruited to participate in the study. First- to third-year students completed the survey online. A total of 130 questionnaires were collected, yielding 118 valid responses (an effective response rate of 90.77%). The sample consisted of 23 male students (19.5%) and 95 female students (80.5%). Regarding grade distribution, there were 77 first-year students (65.3%), 27 second-year students (22.9%), and 14 third-year students (11.9%). In terms of geographical origin, 47 students (39.8%) were from urban areas and 71 (60.2%) were from rural areas. Additionally, 14 students (11.9%) were only children, while 104 (88.1%) had siblings.

### 3.2 Research Instruments

#### 3.2.1 Parenting Style Questionnaire

Parenting styles were assessed using the Chinese version of the Short Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran (s-EMBU), revised by Jiang et al. (2010). The scale comprises paternal and maternal subscales, each containing 21 items across three dimensions: emotional warmth, overprotection, and rejection. Responses are rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ('never') to 4 ('always'). In the current study, the overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was 0.84. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) yielded a Bartlett's test of sphericity  $p < 0.005$  and a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.747. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) demonstrated a good fit for the three-factor model ( $\chi^2/df = 2.48$ ,  $TLI = 0.98$ ,  $CFI = 0.99$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.05$ ), indicating high reliability and structural validity.

#### 3.2.2 Big Five Personality Questionnaire

Personality traits were measured using the Chinese Big Five Personality Inventory - Brief Version (CBF-PI-B), developed by Wang et al. (2011). The inventory consists of 40 items assessing five dimensions: agreeableness, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 6 ('strongly agree'). In this study, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients for the five dimensions ranged from 0.802 to 0.884. EFA showed a Bartlett's test of sphericity  $p < 0.005$  and a KMO of 0.77.

#### 3.2.3 Teacher Professional Identity Scale

Preservice teachers' professional identity was measured using the Professional Identity Scale for Preservice Teachers (PISPT) developed by Wang et al. (2010). The scale contains 12 items across four dimensions: professional will, professional willingness and expectation, professional efficacy, and professional value. Responses are rated on a 5-point

Likert scale from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'). The overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in the current study was 0.775. EFA yielded a Bartlett's test of sphericity  $p < 0.005$  and a KMO of 0.802. CFA indicated a favourable model fit ( $\chi^2/df = 1.33$ ,  $GFI = 0.92$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ ), demonstrating acceptable reliability and construct validity.

### 3.3 Common Method Bias Test

To control for potential common method bias, Harman's single-factor test was performed by entering all 94 items into an unrotated exploratory factor analysis. The results revealed 22 factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for 79.26% of the total variance. The first principal factor explained only 15.73% of the variance, which is well below the conventional 40% threshold. Thus, common method bias was not a threat to the validity of the findings.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Status and Difference Analysis of Parenting Styles, Personality Traits, and Teacher Professional Identity

As shown in Table 1, the mean scores for paternal emotional warmth ( $M = 2.51$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ), maternal emotional warmth ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ), overall personality traits ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ), and overall teacher professional identity ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ) were all higher than their respective theoretical midpoints of 2.5, 2.5, 3.5, and 3. This indicates that perceived parental emotional warmth, positive personality traits, and teacher professional identity among the surveyed preservice teachers were all above the moderate level.

To examine the demographic differences in perceived parenting styles, personality traits, and professional identity, independent-samples  $t$ -tests and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted. The  $t$ -test results (see Table 1) revealed that male students scored significantly higher than female students on paternal overprotection ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 0.56$  vs  $M = 2.08$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and maternal overprotection ( $M = 2.5$ ,  $SD = 0.58$  vs  $M = 2.12$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). One-way ANOVAs showed significant main effects of grade across all dimensions except for overall personality traits. Post-hoc comparisons indicated that on both paternal and maternal emotional warmth, first-year students scored significantly higher than second- and third-year students. On parental rejection, first-year students scored significantly lower than second- and third-year students. Regarding parental overprotection, first-year students scored significantly lower than second-year students (and significantly lower than third-year students on paternal overprotection). Crucially, on teacher professional identity, first- and second-year students scored significantly higher than third-year students.

**Table 1: Status and Difference Tests of Parenting Styles, Personality Traits, and Teacher Professional Identity**

Variable	Father's Warmth	Father's Overprotection	Father's Rejection	Mother's Warmth	Mother's Overprotection	Mother's Rejection	Personality Traits	Professional Identity
<b>M<math>\pm</math>SD</b>	2.51 $\pm$ 0.63	2.13 $\pm$ 0.47	1.62 $\pm$ 0.53	2.61 $\pm$ 0.63	2.20 $\pm$ 0.50	1.70 $\pm$ 0.58	3.95 $\pm$ 0.42	3.84 $\pm$ 0.37
<b>Male</b>	2.66 $\pm$ 0.64	2.35 $\pm$ 0.56	1.71 $\pm$ 0.63	2.69 $\pm$ 0.62	2.50 $\pm$ 0.58	1.83 $\pm$ 0.59	3.91 $\pm$ 0.47	3.93 $\pm$ 0.45
<b>Female</b>	2.47 $\pm$ 0.63	2.08 $\pm$ 0.44	1.59 $\pm$ 0.50	2.59 $\pm$ 0.64	2.12 $\pm$ 0.45	1.66 $\pm$ 0.58	3.96 $\pm$ 0.41	3.82 $\pm$ 0.35
<b>t</b>	1.283	2.463*	0.965	0.697	3.401***	1.302	1.242	-0.425
<b>Only Child</b>	2.66 $\pm$ 0.72	2.21 $\pm$ 0.67	1.71 $\pm$ 0.60	2.66 $\pm$ 0.76	2.30 $\pm$ 0.67	1.88 $\pm$ 0.82	3.93 $\pm$ 0.40	3.90 $\pm$ 0.36
<b>Non-Only</b>	2.60 $\pm$ 0.62	2.13 $\pm$ 0.44	1.60 $\pm$ 0.52	2.60 $\pm$ 0.62	2.18 $\pm$ 0.48	1.67 $\pm$ 0.52	3.95 $\pm$ 0.42	3.84 $\pm$ 0.37
<b>t</b>	0.985	0.595	0.749	0.354	0.860	1.298	-0.213	0.613
<b>Urban</b>	2.58 $\pm$ 0.58	2.15 $\pm$ 0.48	1.59 $\pm$ 0.53	2.67 $\pm$ 0.66	2.23 $\pm$ 0.49	1.67 $\pm$ 0.53	3.96 $\pm$ 0.42	3.88 $\pm$ 0.50
<b>Rural</b>	2.46 $\pm$ 0.60	2.13 $\pm$ 0.47	1.63 $\pm$ 0.53	2.56 $\pm$ 0.62	2.17 $\pm$ 0.51	1.70 $\pm$ 0.62	3.94 $\pm$ 0.42	3.82 $\pm$ 0.46
<b>t</b>	1.075	0.267	-0.449	0.952	0.587	-0.282	0.188	0.813
<b>Year 1 (1)</b>	2.65 $\pm$ 0.69	1.99 $\pm$ 0.46	1.44 $\pm$ 0.46	2.76 $\pm$ 0.67	2.07 $\pm$ 0.52	1.51 $\pm$ 0.55	3.95 $\pm$ 0.43	3.87 $\pm$ 0.38
<b>Year 2 (2)</b>	2.24 $\pm$ 0.46	2.45 $\pm$ 0.40	1.96 $\pm$ 0.56	2.32 $\pm$ 0.49	2.46 $\pm$ 0.40	2.00 $\pm$ 0.54	3.93 $\pm$ 0.46	3.88 $\pm$ 0.37
<b>Year 3 (3)</b>	2.22 $\pm$ 0.28	2.35 $\pm$ 0.27	1.95 $\pm$ 0.26	2.32 $\pm$ 0.32	2.38 $\pm$ 0.28	2.12 $\pm$ 0.35	3.95 $\pm$ 0.31	3.60 $\pm$ 0.18
<b>F</b>	6.04**	13.25***	16.38***	6.81**	7.87**	13.59***	0.04	3.51*
<b>Post-Hoc</b>	1>2**, 1>3**	2>1***, 3>1*	2>1***, 3>1***	1>2**, 1>3**	2>1**	2>1***, 3>1***	-	1>3***, 2>3**

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

## 4.2 Correlation Analysis among Parenting Styles, Personality Traits, and Teacher Professional Identity

Bivariate correlation analysis (Table 2) showed that parenting styles, personality traits, and teacher professional identity were significantly correlated. Parental emotional warmth was significantly positively correlated with the total professional identity score, and showed positive associations with the sub-dimensions of professional expectation and professional efficacy. Among the personality dimensions, agreeableness, openness, and extraversion had the strongest positive correlations with professional identity, while neuroticism was negatively correlated with professional identity. In contrast, parental rejection and overprotection did not exhibit statistically significant correlations with any of the professional identity dimensions.

**Table 2: Inter-correlations Among Parenting Styles, Personality Traits, and Professional Identity**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	1													
2	.911**	1												
3	-0.493**	-0.454**	1											
4	-0.475**	-0.438**	.859**	1										
5	-0.171	-0.231*	.561**	.543**	1									
6	-0.178	-0.197*	.529**	.615**	.859**	1								
7	.320**	.318**	.476**	.517**	.663**	.723**	1							
8	-0.160	-0.186*	.268**	.316**	.210*	.287**	.197*	1						
9	.125	.124	-0.086	-0.074	-0.035	.010	.019	-0.174	1					
10	.189*	.194*	-0.159	-0.168	-0.148	-0.036	.041	.065	.388**	1				
11	.213*	.214*	-0.092	-0.130	-0.052	.035	.096	-0.206*	.568**	.435**	1			
12	.269**	.284**	-0.200*	-0.265**	-0.092	-0.171	-0.051	-0.371**	.417**	.297**	.562**	1		
13	.179	.166	-0.050	-0.049	-0.007	.068	.104	.112	.722**	.673**	.785**	.626**	1	
14	.241**	.270**	-0.148	-0.156	-0.113	-0.041	.077	-0.196*	.358**	.496**	.424**	.403**	.436**	1

Note: 1 = Father's Warmth, 2 = Mother's Warmth, 3 = Father's Rejection, 4 = Mother's Rejection, 5 = Father's Overprotection, 6 = Mother's Overprotection, 7 = Parenting Styles, 8 = Neuroticism, 9 = Conscientiousness, 10 = Agreeableness, 11 = Openness, 12 = Extraversion, 13 = Personality Traits, 14 = Professional Identity. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

## 4.3 Regression Analysis of Parenting Styles and Personality Traits on Teacher Professional Identity

To investigate the predictive effects of parenting styles and personality traits on preservice teachers' professional identity, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted while controlling for gender, grade, geographical origin, and only-child status. First, the six dimensions of parenting styles were entered simultaneously into the model. The results (see Table 3) indicated that parenting styles did not explain a significant proportion of variance in professional identity ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.045$ ,  $F = 0.87$ ,  $p = 0.519$ ). Subsequently, a simplified model was constructed, entering only maternal emotional warmth (the parenting dimension most strongly correlated with professional identity). In this simplified model, maternal emotional warmth significantly and positively predicted professional identity ( $\beta = 0.195$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). When the Big Five personality dimensions were added, the explanatory power of the model increased substantially ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.276$ ,  $F = 9.1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.297. Notably, agreeableness emerged as a significant positive predictor of professional identity ( $\beta = 0.422$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results suggest that the direct predictive effect of parenting styles on professional identity is limited, and their impact may instead be mediated through personality traits.

**Table 3: Regression of Teacher Professional Identity on Parenting Styles and Personality Traits**

Predictor	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Mother's Warmth	0.010	0.110	.912
Neuroticism	-0.053	-0.585	.559
Conscientiousness	0.092	0.881	.381
<b>Agreeableness</b>	<b>0.422</b>	<b>4.494</b>	<b>.000</b>
Openness	0.064	0.543	.588
Extraversion	0.118	1.109	.270
<b>Model Fit</b>	$R^2 = 0.357$ , Adjusted $R^2 = 0.297$ , $F = 5.895$ , $p < 0.001$		

#### 4.4 Mediation Effect Test of Personality Traits between Parenting Styles and Teacher Professional Identity

Given the high correlation between paternal and maternal emotional warmth ( $r = 0.911$ ), and that maternal emotional warmth was more strongly correlated with professional identity, maternal emotional warmth was selected as the representative parenting style variable. Based on the hierarchical regression results, only agreeableness was entered into the mediation test. Controlling for gender, geographical origin, grade, and only-child status, mediation analysis was performed using Model 4 of the PROCESS macro (v3.5).

The results (Table 4) indicated that the mediating effect of agreeableness on the relationship between maternal emotional warmth and professional identity was significant (indirect effect size = 0.0819, accounting for 71.50% of the total effect), with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval of [0.0244,0.1535], which excluded zero. Crucially, the direct effect of maternal emotional warmth on professional identity was not statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.0326$ ,  $SE = 0.051$ ,  $p = 0.524$ ). Thus, agreeableness plays a complete mediating role in the relationship between maternal emotional warmth and professional identity.

**Table 4: Mediation Test of Agreeableness between Maternal Emotional Warmth and Professional Identity**

Effect Type	Path	$\beta$ / Effect	SE	$t$	$p$	95% CI
Total Effect	Mother's Warmth → Professional Identity	.1145	.0562	2.036	.044	[0.003,0.2259]
Direct Effect	Mother's Warmth → Professional Identity (controlling for Agreeableness)	.0326	.0510	0.639	.524	[-0.0686,0.1338]
Indirect Effect	Mother's Warmth → Agreeableness → Professional Identity	.0819	.0329	-	-	[0.0244,0.1535]
Path a	Mother's Warmth → Agreeableness	.2789	.0944	2.954	.004	[0.0918,0.466]
Path b	Agreeableness → Professional Identity (controlling for Mother's Warmth)	.2936	.0494	5.942	.000	[0.1957,0.3915]

Note: Bootstrap sampling 5000 times, controlling for gender, grade, geographical origin, and only-child status.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Family Education and the Status of Preservice Teachers' Professional Identity

The descriptive results indicate that the preservice teachers' perceived scores for parental emotional warmth were above the moderate level (Father:  $2.51 \pm 0.63$ ; Mother:  $2.61 \pm 0.63$ ), whereas scores for parental overprotection and rejection were relatively low. This suggests that the family environments in which these students grew up were predominantly supportive and positive, which is highly conducive to healthy personality development. Among the three parenting dimensions, emotional warmth scored highest, followed by overprotection, while rejection scored lowest. This suggests that this group generally experiences high levels of care, understanding, affirmation, and respect from their parents, and rarely encounters severe criticism, coldness, or intrusive control.

Regarding gender differences, male students perceived significantly higher levels of parental overprotection than female students did (paternal:  $p = 0.015$ ; maternal:  $p = 0.001$ ). This suggests that parents employ differential parenting practices based on gender, showing a tendency to overprotect male children. In contrast, no significant gender differences were found on the rejection dimension ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Regarding grade differences, first-year students reported significantly higher levels of parental emotional warmth, and significantly lower levels of rejection and overprotection, than second- and third-year students. No significant differences on these dimensions were found between second- and third-year students. A plausible explanation is that first-year students have just transitioned from secondary school to university, which often represents their first period of prolonged separation from home and independent living. Parents may naturally feel anxious and be more eager to offer emotional support and practical assistance during this adjustment phase. As students progress to higher grades, their autonomy and critical thinking increase, prompting them to view parent-child dynamics more maturely. Consequently, they may become more sensitive to parental interference, leading to higher perceived scores for rejection and overprotection. The lack of significant differences between second- and third-year students suggests that this cognitive shift primarily occurs during the transition from the first to the second year of university, after which it stabilises.

Regarding professional identity, the overall mean score was above the moderate level ( $M = 3.84 \pm 0.37$ ), reflecting a generally high level of professional identity among these preservice teachers. However, third-year students' scores were significantly lower than those of first- and second-year students ( $p < 0.05$ ), with no significant difference between the first and second years, demonstrating a declining trend as grade level increases. This decline may be due to the fact that the third year is a critical period for teaching practicums and employment preparation, and the complexities of real

classroom environments and competitive labour markets may clash with students' initial idealised career aspirations. Conversely, first- and second-year students have not yet engaged deeply with actual teaching practices, meaning their professional identity is built on abstract value identifications, which tends to yield higher scores.

## 5.2 The Influence of Family Education on Preservice Teachers' Professional Identity

In this study, preservice teachers' personality traits were significantly correlated with their professional identity. Specifically, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness exhibited significant positive correlations, while neuroticism showed a significant negative correlation with professional identity. Further hierarchical regression analysis showed that agreeableness significantly and positively predicted professional identity ( $\beta = 0.422$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), while conscientiousness, extraversion, openness, and neuroticism did not emerge as significant predictors. This is highly consistent with the interpersonal, socio-emotionally demanding nature of the teaching profession, pointing to agreeableness as a core personality foundation for professional identity.

Regarding parenting styles, maternal emotional warmth was significantly and positively correlated with professional identity ( $r = 0.27$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), whereas paternal emotional warmth was only marginally significant ( $r = 0.179$ ,  $p = 0.054$ ). Parental rejection and overprotection showed no significant correlation with professional identity. Although maternal emotional warmth emerged as a significant predictor when entered alone in the hierarchical regression ( $\beta = 0.195$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), its coefficient fell to non-significance once the Big Five traits were controlled ( $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $p = 0.912$ ), while agreeableness remained a robust predictor ( $\beta = 0.422$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Mediation analysis confirmed that agreeableness fully mediated the relationship between maternal emotional warmth and professional identity, accounting for 71.50% of the total effect. This indicates that the impact of the family emotional environment on professional identity is not direct (e.g., through direct advice or superficial persuasion), but rather operates indirectly by shaping the individual's core personality traits. As primary emotional caregivers within families, mothers who offer warmth, acceptance, and understanding facilitate the development of interpersonal qualities such as trust, cooperation, altruism, and empathy in their children. Teaching is inherently an interpersonal profession that relies heavily on social-emotional investment; as the Chinese proverb goes, "love the teacher, believe the way" (*qin qi shi, xin qi dao*), meaning that teachers must be warm, approachable, and empathetic (Zhou, 2014). Preservice teachers raised in warm, maternal environments are likely to develop higher levels of agreeableness. This trait not only helps them build positive relationships with students and peers, but also fosters a stronger internal identification with the caring role of a teacher, ultimately enhancing their professional identity.

In summary, our findings show that maternal emotional warmth does not directly elevate preservice teachers' professional identity; instead, it operates through the development of agreeableness. This yields critical insights for teacher education. While guiding families to support their children, initial teacher education programmes should also focus on nurturing preservice teachers' interpersonally oriented personality traits. Practical training, such as teacher-student interaction simulations and reflective journals during practicums, can help translate parental emotional support into intrinsic psychological resources for professional identity.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that while preservice teachers' professional identity is generally above the moderate level, it tends to decrease in higher grades, reaching a low point in the third year. Maternal emotional warmth is significantly and positively associated with professional identity, operating indirectly through the cultivation of agreeableness. Agreeableness plays a complete mediating role, accounting for 71.50% of the total effect. This suggests that the family emotional environment shapes preservice teachers' professional identity in a subtle, cumulative manner, operating through personality development rather than direct persuasion. Reflecting on these findings, we offer the following recommendations:

### 6.1 Emphasising the Emotional Support Function of Family Education

The influence of family education on preservice teachers' professional identity is long-term and pervasive. This study demonstrates that maternal emotional warmth remains a vital predictor of professional identity even after students enter university. Parents should maintain healthy emotional connections with their children during their university years. This is especially important during the third year, a sensitive period when students face the dual pressures of teaching practicums and career preparation. Families should serve as a stable emotional anchor rather than focusing solely on career placement. Through active listening, validation, and emotional support, parents can help their children cushion the shock of reality and rebuild their career confidence. Teacher educators can also use parent-teacher communications or home-school platforms to help parents understand the developmental stages of teacher professional identity, enabling more targeted emotional support.

### 6.2 Optimising Parenting Styles by Replacing Excessive Interference with Emotional Warmth

Although our data did not show a direct negative effect of parental rejection and overprotection on professional identity, the positive predictive power of maternal emotional warmth suggests that active positive emotional expression is far

more important than the mere absence of negative behaviours. Parents should interact with their children with warmth and acceptance, validating their efforts and progress in teacher education, and respecting their career autonomy. For male students, who perceived significantly higher levels of parental overprotection, parents should avoid control "in the name of love". They should avoid over-managing academic and career decisions, giving their sons space to explore independently and take on responsibility.

### 6.3 Integrating the Cultivation of Agreeableness into the Core of Preservice Teachers' Professional Psychological Quality Training

Our finding that agreeableness fully mediates the relationship between maternal emotional warmth and professional identity highlights the importance of interpersonally oriented personality traits in teaching. The essence of teaching is to cultivate virtue and nurture people (*li de shu ren*), which is highly human-centred. The trust, altruism, cooperation, and empathy associated with high agreeableness are the psychological foundations for building positive teacher-student relationships, achieving teaching efficacy, and finding professional value. Teacher education programmes should recognise that professional identity cannot be built through professional knowledge alone; it requires nurturing personality traits that align with the teaching profession. We recommend incorporating modules on interpersonal communication, educational empathy, and collaborative group work into initial teacher education. Through reflective practice, diary writing during field experiences, and peer support groups, programmes can systematically enhance students' agreeableness. Finally, targeting the third-year professional identity decline, specialised career counselling should be introduced to help students draw positive emotional resources from their practicum experiences, helping them transition from a passive career choice to an active, joyful commitment to teaching.

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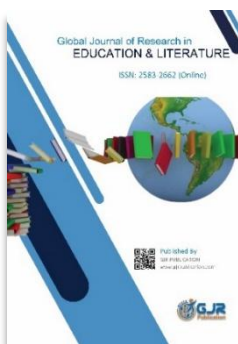
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