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A Study on the Influence of Chinese University English Teachers' Emotions on Their Professional Identity

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ABSTRACT

Emotions, as a form of expression of human inner feelings, play a vital role in teachers' professional development and affect the sense of professional identity. The current study, aims at identifying factors influencing teachers' emotional expression and management; exploring the effects of emotional triggers on teachers' professional identity; and analyzing the effects of Chinese University English teachers' emotions on their professional identity. Employing ten English teachers in one of the universities in China, a semi-structured interview was used in this study to investigate the factors influencing their emotions and professional identity. It also gauges how these factors impact teachers' professional identity. The findings generated three (3) themes of the factors that affect the expression and management of teachers' emotions. These are "sense of accomplishment and job satisfaction," "happiness from student interactions and hopefulness", and "frustration from high workload and lack of support." The study found that personal traits and emotional intelligence, physical condition, working pressure, working environment and support, career development opportunities, social expectations, social recognition, and student feedback are the main factors affecting English teachers' emotions and their professional identity. Besides, sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, happiness, frustration and anxiety are the emotional states that influence English teachers' self-image of professional identity. This study links emotions to teachers' professional identity, highlighting key factors affecting English teachers' emotions. The findings have important implications for teacher training programs, educational

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policies, and classroom practices, providing insights into how to support teachers' emotional well-being and strengthen their professional identity.

Keywords: College English Teachers; Emotions; Professional Identity

1. Introduction

English education plays an increasingly prominent role in higher education. After entering the university, students can choose different branches of English studies, and the demand for English learning becomes more diverse. With the diversification of academic programs and the growing emphasis on global competencies, university students today pursue a wide range of English-related learning goals. This expanding demand places new expectations on college English teachers, who are expected not only to provide effective language instruction, but also to meet the needs of students with varying levels of English proficiency and learning motivations. At the same time, the uneven English proficiency of students not only tests teachers' teaching ability but also significantly affects their emotional state [1]. On the one hand, when teachers are able to successfully guide students with low English proficiency to make gradual progress or inspire the potential of students with high proficiency, they will feel a great sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. This positive emotional feedback can enhance teachers' self-confidence and professional identity, prompting them to explore new teaching areas more actively and to continuously improve their professionalism. On the other hand, teachers may feel frustrated and powerless when facing students with poor English proficiency. The accumulation of long-term negative emotions will affect teachers' physical and mental health and potentially leading to burnout. Therefore, as an important force in cultivating students' comprehensive English ability, college English teachers' emotional state is a great importance in improving teaching quality and promoting students' all-round development [2].

Emotions are the core of human individual experience and constitutes another important dimension of teachers' inner world [3, 4]. However, college English teachers are faced with various pressures and challenges, such as curriculum reform, students' diverse needs, professional competition [5]. These emotional ups and downs are not isolated or incidental; rather, they have a profound impact on teachers' attitudes toward their work, their motivation, and ultimately their sense of professional identity. Therefore, understanding and addressing these multifaceted pressures and challenges is critical to fostering positive emotions among university English teachers, which in turn can enhance their professional identity and ultimately improve the quality of English education.

In recent years, the impact of teachers' emotional regulation on teaching effectiveness and professional identity has gained increasing attention, aligning with developments in educational psychology and professional development theory [6, 7]. In the field of foreign language teaching, in particular, teachers' emotions not only affect students' learning motivation and efficiency, but it also affects teachers' own professional satisfactions and professional identity [8]. According to the research [9], current research in this field focuses more on the internal factors affecting foreign language teachers' emotions, such as personal values, self-efficacy and teaching beliefs. By analyzing the 151 literature on teachers' emotion management in China, research found that current research focuses on early childhood teachers and primary and secondary school teachers, with little research on higher education teachers, and that the research themes focus more on the theory, current situation, and relationship studies of teachers' emotion management, and less on in-depth discussions of the root causes of emotions and their intrinsic connection with teachers' professional identity [10].

Over the past few years, research in China has increasingly focused on teachers' emotions, however, there are still many unknown areas and deficiencies. For example, issues such as the specific factors affecting teachers' emotions and how these factors affect teachers' professional identity still need to be further explored [11, 12]. Improperly managed emotions can negatively affect teachers' teaching effectiveness and professional satisfaction. Consequently, an in-depth study of the impact of college English teachers' emotions on their professional identity is warranted [13, 14].

College English teachers in China are increasingly facing a range of emotional and professional challenges in their

day-to-day teaching practice. A major source of stress stems from the significant variation in students' English proficiency and learning attitudes. Teachers must frequently juggle between addressing the needs of low-achieving students who lack basic language skills and responding to the expectations of high-performing students who require more advanced instruction. This dual burden often results in emotional exhaustion and a diminished sense of teaching efficacy.

In addition to instructional challenges, university English teachers also endure intense emotional labor. They are expected to regulate their own emotions and maintain a positive classroom climate, even when facing student disengagement, administrative pressures, or lack of institutional support. Without adequate mechanisms for emotional expression or professional affirmation, many teachers report feelings of frustration, alienation, and burnout.

Furthermore, the evolving higher education landscape in China—characterized by frequent curriculum reforms, increased performance-based evaluations, and a growing emphasis on research output—has further complicated teachers' professional identities. Many English educators find themselves caught between their role as caring instructors and the systemic demands that prioritize measurable outcomes over relational teaching. This identity tension, coupled with emotional strain, may lead to disengagement, reduced motivation, and ultimately a fragmented or weakened sense of professional self.

Building upon these problems and research gaps, the current study aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth exploration of Chinese university English teachers' emotions and their impact on teachers' professional identity. Its first objective is to identify the multiple factors that influence teachers' emotional expression and management. Second, it attempts to understand how these emotional triggers specifically affect teachers' professional identity. Finally, this study looks at how teachers' emotional states profoundly affect their professional identity. Through a systematic approach, this study aims to provide empirical support and theoretical guidance for improving teachers' emotion management ability and promoting professional identity and professional growth.

Three research questions are formulated to understand the influence of Chinese university English teachers' emotions on their professional identity, these are:

RQ1. What are the factors that affect the expression and management of teachers' emotions?

RQ2. How do triggers of emotion influence their professional identity recognition?

RQ3. How do the emotions of Chinese university English teachers influence their professional identity recognition?

Understanding the teaching state of teachers under different emotional states is helpful to provide targeted teaching support and training. As a result, improves the teaching and learning effect of college English teachers. The current study explores the relationship between emotion and professional identity, providing reference for education policy makers, promote the reform of education system and training mechanism, and promote the sustainable development of education. In addition, this study has important implications for the professional development and happiness of college English teachers in China. By exploring the emotional factors that shape their professional identity, it can provide insights into how teachers work on the complex work environments and cope with the emotional challenges they encounter. This understanding can help teachers identify and address their emotional needs, thereby increasing job satisfaction, reducing the impact of negative emotions, and improving teaching practices of English teachers in Chinese universities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Professional Identity (PI)

Identity is a common concept in psychology and sociology, and its exact meaning varies depending on the field and research perspective, but there is a basic consensus that identity is essentially the knowledge of "who or what someone is" knowledge[15]. PI is a self-concept that individuals develop and maintain throughout their careers, which includes attributes such as personal values, beliefs, motivations, and experiences[16]. This concept not only involves an individual's self-concept in his or her professional role, but also covers his or her sense of belonging and identification with the professional group[17, 18].

Research categorizes PI into four types: success identity, early identity, late identity, and confused identity[19]. Successful identity emphasizes an individual's strong commitment to his or her professional goals and values through

positive interaction with the environment and in-depth professional exploration, while early identity focuses on an individual's initial commitment to professional values and goals through internalizing the beliefs and attitudes of significant others as he or she grows up[20, 21]. These classifications not only reveal the PI diversity, but also provide theoretical support for understanding the psychological states of different teachers in the process of professional development.

Moreover, the study of PI has received increasing attention in recent years in the field of education, especially in higher education. In this field, the concept of PI is closely linked to teachers' conceptualization or perception of themselves[22]. Teachers' self-perceptions not only shape the way they teach, but also influence their path to professional growth as teachers and their acceptance of educational change[23]. The more teachers identify with their self-identity, the more likely they are to use positive teaching strategies, continue to seek professional development, and be open to educational reform.

2.2. PI and Teacher Professionalism in Global Contexts

Research on teachers' PI shows that professional self-concept and methods of instruction are significantly correlated in a variety of cultural situations. Through their study on AI adoption among educators in Southern Europe, Lavidas et al. (2024) provided important insights[24]. They discovered that 78% of teacher participants needed strong professional identity alignment to adopt new technologies, and that self-efficacy could explain 62% of adoption variance. Another Lavidas et al.'s (2022) study reported on the analysis of survey participation patterns among Greek educators concerning the connection between PI and professional engagement evident[25]. They discovered that teachers' willingness to complete web surveys was significantly correlated with both role alignment and institutional trust. These results demonstrate that educators' engagement habits are strongly impacted by PI, which is commonly thought of as a crucial element of PI. A study in Netherlands[26], show a stronger focus on the dialogical aspect of teacher identity construction. Indicator of pre-service teachers' developing professional identities. While research from Southern Europe emphasizes structural influences, work from Northern Europe, such as Estonian study, emphasizes the affective dimension and

finds that practicum emotions were the best[27]. A study from Southwest Europe; Portuguese, showed that new teachers face identity conflicts when their personal pedagogical values are at odds with school environments[28].

Moreover, research demonstrates PI changes because of ongoing negotiations between individual teaching philosophies and institutional expectations in Western educational systems, including those in Dutch[29] and Australia[30]. In contrast, studies conducted in Chile[31] and the Middle East[32] show that socioeconomic and cultural factors interact with the development of a professional identity in ways that are different from those found in Western contexts. On the other hand, different viewpoints on PI development are presented by Asian research. Compared to Western models, research discovered that teachers' identities in Japan were firmly anchored in cultural notions of "sensei" (teacher as a moral advisor), resulting in different professional expectations[33]. Similar to this, Korean research showed that high stakes testing situations caused identity conflicts between the systemic pressures and the principles of instructors[34]. Singaporean study, on the opposite hand, showed that structured mentoring programs in national education policy actively change teacher identities[35].

2.3. Studies on PI among Chinese University English Teachers

Research on professional identity (PI) among Chinese university English teachers is expanding, emphasizing the multifaceted ties between institutional, cultural, and contextual elements that influence their teaching practices and attitudes. For example, research analyzed the characteristics and existing problems of college English teacher identity and put forward corresponding suggestions for improvement[35]. Research focused on the current professional life of returnee beginner English teachers and discussed the adaptation and development of this special group from the perspective of professional identity[36].

In the aspect of professional identity construction, researchers explored how college English teachers construct their own professional identity through different ways and means. Research used professional WeChat group chat discourse as corpus to study how college English teachers construct their identities through discourse means in daily life, educational affairs and scientific research[37]. Research fo-

cused on the group of English teachers in engineering colleges and universities, exploring the professional identity crisis they face and their coping strategies[38]. Research followed three young college English teachers with overseas background through a qualitative approach, revealing positive changes in their academic identity[39].

Research uses the constructivist narrative perspective and takes the community of practice as the theoretical framework to explore the construction process of college public English teachers' professional identity[40]. Research also uses narrative research methods to pay attention to the best way for college English teachers to realize the simultaneous development of teaching and scientific research based on classroom teaching research[41]. In addition, research made a comprehensive review of the research on foreign language teachers' professional identity from the perspective of narrative, and put forward suggestions on related concepts, theories and existing problems[42].

Although existing studies have provided valuable insights into the understanding of Chinese college English teachers' professional identity, there are still some limitations in the existing studies. In addition, there is still a lack of research on the influence of English teachers' emotional factors on their professional identity. Therefore, this study takes English teachers in a university in China as an example to explore how affective factors affect their professional identity, in order to fill the gap in this field and promote the in-depth exploration of teacher professional development theory and practice.

2.4. Role of Emotions in Teaching

Emotions refer to an individual's subjective evaluation and inner experience of things in a specific situation[43]. It includes various forms of expression such as pleasure, joy, sadness, anger, etc., and has a profound impact on the individual's cognition, behavior and decision-making process[44]. According to Cheng (2021), emotion is defined as a form of existence constructed within a social framework and integrated into an individual's unique experience[13]. As a "unique individual psychological state", it has been one of the central issues in language learning and teaching[45]. Teachers' emotions not only affect the effectiveness of classroom teaching, students' emotions and learning motivation, and teacher-student relationship, but also are an important

indicator of teachers' psychological state and professional well-being[46].

In recent years, an increasing amount of attention has been paid to the role of emotional factors in language teaching. Research shows that EFL teachers' emotional experiences with their students, colleagues, and work have a significant impact on their teaching effectiveness[47]. These studies highlight the importance of teachers' emotions in the educational process and provide new perspectives for understanding the affective dimensions of language learning. Dewaele (2019) further point outs that emotional factors play a vital role in college English teaching and students' learning[45]. Research focused on the influence of teachers' emotions in language learning activities, arguing that teachers' personal internal factors, including attitudes, teaching motivation, teaching methods, and emotional changes, greatly affect FL teaching activities and teacher-student interaction[48]. These studies show that teachers' emotions not only affect their own teaching practice, but also directly affect students' learning experience and learning outcomes.

Research highlights the importance of beliefs and emotions in foreign language learning[49]. In addition to relying on their own language talent, language learners' emotions also play an important role in the process of learning. Positive emotions can improve learning efficiency and outcomes, while negative emotions may lead to confusion and affect academic performance. Research also further reveals the complexity of teachers' emotions[50]. He argued that teachers' emotions are not monolithic or static but fluctuate and adjust continuously in response to changes in multiple factors such as the teaching environment, students' needs, and personal pressures, so understanding the diversity and dynamics of teachers' emotions is crucial to improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Research points out that teachers' beliefs and PIs are critical to their emotional experiences[51]. Teachers should enhance their understanding and management of their emotions through professional development and self-reflection to better handle teaching challenges and build positive relationships with students. Richards (2022) has done research reviewing emotions in teacher developing, giving suggestions on improve emotional competence and ability to understand management of emotions[8].

From the studies presented, it can be analyzed that emo-

tional factors play a crucial role in language teaching and should not be overlooked. However, few researches have focus on the influence of emotions on the development of PI. Future research should continue to explore how teacher emotions affect teaching and learning, and how teachers' professional development and emotions management can improve the effectiveness of language teaching. At the same time, teachers should also be aware of their own emotional state and actively create a supportive and positive learning environment to promote students' language learning and development. Through these efforts, we can expect to achieve more effective teaching practices and better learning outcomes in the field of language teaching.

2.5. Relationship between Emotions and Professional Identity

The influence of English teachers' emotions on teachers' identity has attracted attention from researchers. Although teachers' knowledge, skills and abilities are the traditional focus of research on professional identity development, teachers' emotions, as a key factor affecting the formation and development of identity, are often ignored. Research has shown that teachers generally experience anxiety, which often stems from irrational analysis of their own goals[52]. It is worth noting that anxious teachers are not always due to lack of foreign language proficiency. In fact, their foreign language proficiency may be as fluent as that of non-anxious teachers[53]. Meanwhile, Research highlights the wide-ranging impact of teacher emotions on educational practices, including teacher behavior, teaching methods, professional identity, personal life, educational changes, and student behavior and learning[54]. These findings highlight the importance of teachers' emotions in shaping teachers' professional identity.

In terms of the methods of carrying research on PI, it was found that mostly researchers use qualitative methods, especially through semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool to deeply understand teachers' emotional experiences[55–57]. However, quantitative research also provides important perspectives for understanding teacher emotions, helping to uncover how emotions play a role in the broader educational environment[58]. The researchers proposed three key dimensions: the teacher's dynamic psychological state, the self-regulation ability of emotions, and the response to

external and internal stimuli. These dimensions constitute the complexity of teachers' emotions and are manifested in interactions with students, parents and colleagues.

From the descriptions of the studies above, it can be synthesised that the intrinsic and hidden nature of teachers' emotions means that they are usually not easy to be directly observed, but through daily communication and interaction, these emotions can be expressed and perceived. The expression of teachers' emotions not only affects teachers' own teaching practice and career development, but also has a profound impact on students' learning and emotional development. Therefore, understanding and paying attention to teachers' emotions is very important for improving the quality of education and teachers' career development.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative approach to provide an in-depth examination of the emotions affecting college English teachers, and their impact on professional identity. The qualitative research method was chosen because, as research asserts, it provides the researcher with a more comprehensive understanding of the problem under study[59]. Specifically, this study will use in-depth interviews as the main research methods. Through this method, we are able to capture more comprehensively the emotional experiences of university English teachers in different teaching scenarios and to explore in depth how these emotions affect the formation and development of their professional identities. The study aims to capture the depth and richness of teachers' emotions while also providing empirical evidence of the impact of these emotions on various aspects of education.

In this research design, we employ a multi approaches that combine reflective diary techniques with in-depth semi-structured interviews, adhering to accepted qualitative research principles[59]. It is stated that the diary component offers longitudinal data on emotional variations, while the interview procedure explores emotional experiences in teaching, research, and institutional contexts. As a result, we use three primary validation techniques due to understanding that qualitative research is interpretive. In particular we conducted: (1) systematic member checking, in which participants examine and confirm preliminary findings; (2) triangulation

by comparing interview transcripts and diary entries; and (3) peer debriefing with qualitative research experts. The next Methodology section describes the precise steps for these methodologies, such as the member check implementation, interview coding system, and diary administration protocol. Even though the subjective nature of emotional data makes total objectivity unattainable, this multi-layered approach guarantees methodological openness and empirical foundation, enabling us to capture the multi relationship between affective experiences and professional self-concept without compromising analytical rigor.

3.2. Research Samples

The participants of the study are teachers from different departments of institution X in China. A total of ten (10) university English teachers were employed to be interviewed in the study. Such number was selected based on the principle of information saturation in qualitative research, where saturation is considered to have been reached when the addition of new interviews no longer significantly enhances theory building and data depth[60]. During the procedure, after interviewing ten (10) participants, it was noticed that was no new significant information that was generated as the content begin to repeat.

In addition, purposive sampling was used to select participants who met the following criteria: (1) full-time university English teachers with a minimum of two (2) years of teaching experience, (2) representation across different academic departments to ensure diversity in perspectives, and (3) willingness to discuss emotional experiences related to their teaching profession. While the sample size is relatively small and drawn from a single institution—which may limit the generalizability of the findings—the study prioritizes depth over breadth, aiming to uncover rich, context-specific understandings of teachers' emotional dynamics and their influence on professional identity. This focused scope is appropriate for exploratory qualitative inquiry and provides a meaningful foundation for future large-scale studies. This study involves human participants and adhere to ethical principles. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. Each participant provided written informed consent, with their anonymity and confidentiality strictly maintained throughout the research process. **Table 1** shows the informa-

tion of the interview participants.

3.3. Research Instrument

This study uses interview protocol as the instrument to elicit detailed responses about respondents' emotional experiences and their influence on PI. The interview questions are designed according to previous literatures[61], research questions to make sure the relevance and depth. The interview protocol comprises nine (9) questions. Mainly, these questions concern teachers' emotional experiences in the workplace, their impact on teaching performance, and strategies for emotional regulation. Participants were asked to describe their recent emotional states, the influence of both positive and negative emotions on their work, and whether they had ever lost control of their emotions while teaching. Additionally, the interview explored the sources of negative emotions, the extent to which teachers conceal them, and their overall job satisfaction. Furthermore, participants were invited to share their perspectives on the role of teachers' emotions in students' development and to provide suggestions for improving emotional management in the teaching profession.

3.4. Trustworthiness and Reliability of Research Instrument

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, we implemented several strategies. First, we conducted interviews on an ongoing basis until information saturation was achieved[62], which means that new data no longer contributed additional insights to the research questions. Second, we engaged in member checking by sharing initial research findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of their understanding[63]. Lastly, we kept a reflective diary throughout the research process to document personal feelings and reflections, which helped identify and minimize the impact of personal biases on the findings[64].

On the other hand, to ensure the reliability of the study, the researcher implemented several strategies. Firstly, a standardized interview process was established using a consistent interview guide, developed according to Patrick (2005), to maintain uniformity in the structure and content of each interview[65]. Secondly, to assess consistency in analysis, interview data were transcribed and imported into Nvivo for

Table 1. Information of Interview participants.

No.	Age	Gender	Faculty	Professional Title	Length of Teaching (Years)
1	27	Female	Department of English Education	Lecturer	2
2	36	Male	Department of English Education	Associate Professor	8
3	40	Female	Department of Applied English	Professor	12
4	38	Male	Department of Applied English	Associate Professor	10
5	29	Male	General English Department of College English	Lecturer	3
6	35	Female	General English Department of College English	Lecturer	7
7	42	Male	College English Academic English Department	Professor	15
8	34	Female	College English Academic English Department	Lecturer	8
9	30	Female	College English Graduate English Department	Lecturer	3
10	36	Male	College English Graduate English Department	Associate Professor	10

thematic analysis. Each sentence was coded individually, and multiple rounds of coding were conducted to refine and validate emerging themes. To improve reliability, we conducted multiple rounds of coding and carefully reviewed any inconsistencies. Discrepancies were discussed and refined through an iterative process to ensure consistency in identifying themes followed by the guidelines of the research[66]. Lastly, each step of the research process, from data collection to analysis, was meticulously documented to create a comprehensive research trajectory, as recommended by the research[67]. By implementing these strategies, the study maintained a rigorous standard in reliability testing and assessment.

3.5. Data Collection Procedures

To ensure deep and significant findings, the study collected data in a methodical and ethical manner. In accordance with the goals of the study, ten university English language instructors were specifically chosen based on their professional background, prior teaching experience, and range of emotional expression[68]. Each instructor was given comprehensive information on the study's goals, parameters, and ethical considerations such as confidentiality and voluntary participation prior to their involvement, which promoted transparency and confidence.

Semi-structured interviews were used to enable in-depth investigation while maintaining adaptability to themes that emerged. Tacit observables were gathered in extensive field notes, and all sessions were audio recorded with participant consent. To facilitate an iterative analytical approach, preliminary coding and reflection were carried out after each inter-

view. The continuous assessment of new codes and topics allowed for the determination of data saturation. When following interviews yielded no more significant differences or new conceptual insights, saturation was attained, showing topic duplication and proving that additional data collection would not advance theoretical progress[62]. In an effort to maintain analytical rigor, the second author, who was not involved in the data gathering process beforehand, independently reviewed the participants' excerpts to determine whether they aligned with the themes that were found. This external evaluation reduced interpretive bias and strengthened the thematic structure's validity. **Figure 1** shows the data collection procedures in that took place in the current study.
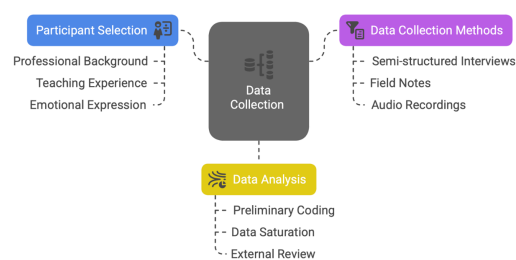

Figure 1. Data collection procedure. (Source: Researchers' generated illustration).

3.6. Data Analysis Methods

This study used a qualitative research methodology with thematic analysis to investigate the relationship between the development of professional identities and the emotions of Chinese college English teachers. The three-phase coding technique was a methodical approach used in the analysis:

Step 1: We started the analysis with open coding, carefully going over verbatim interview transcripts to find and classify important terms and phrases pertaining to

two main areas: the emotional experiences of teachers in their work environments and the expressions of their evolving professional identities. In this first stage of coding, initial codings emerged from the raw qualitative data without the need for pre-determined categories.

Step 2: The analysis then moved on to s coding, building on these initial codes. During this stage, we looked at relationships and patterns across the open codes, methodically putting related or similar concepts into more general theme groupings. Significant links between multiple aspects of teachers' emotional experiences and the development of their professional identities have been identified during this analytical stage.

Step 3: These categorized patterns were combined in the final selective coding phase to identify central themes that fully described the relationship between emotional elements and the formation of a professional identity. By recording all coding decisions in diary and going over transcripts several times to guarantee consistency in interpretation. This is to ensure that we maintained methodological rigor throughout this analytical procedure.

While remaining firmly grounded in the actual experiences and perspectives of the participants, the study was able to progress methodically from discrete observations in the data to integrated theoretical understandings due to this structured approach to thematic analysis. The three stages of the coding procedure offered a transparent and verified approach from raw qualitative data to meaningful thematic conclusions regarding the emotional aspects of professional identity. The Three-Phase Coding Process in the study is shown in **Figure 2**.
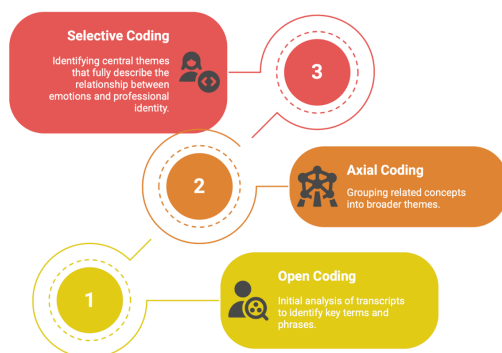

Figure 2. Three-Phase Coding Process in the Study. (Source: Researchers' generated illustration).

4. Results

After conducting the qualitative analysis method, the complex relationship between Chinese university English teachers' emotions and professional identity will be elaborated in the following subsections.

4.1. Factors Affecting the Expression of Teachers' Emotions

Through an in-depth analysis of the results of the semi-structured interviews, we have obtained a wealth of information on Chinese college English teachers' emotional experience and professional identity. Three (3) themes were formulated in relation to the factors influencing the expression of teachers' emotion. These themes are "Personal intrinsic factors", "Occupational and environmental factors", and "External social factors".

Theme 1: Intrinsic Factors.

The first theme concerns intrinsic factors that illustrate the role of personal attributes in teachers' emotional regulation and stress management. Two (2) sub-themes were identified:

Sub-theme 1: Emotional Traits and Intelligence:

Participant 2 highlighted the importance of individual traits in the management of their emotions. He emphasizes the resilience allows him to recover from challenging conditions faster than colleagues. As a result, he was able to remain calm when he encountered issues at works:

I'm naturally quite resilient, which helps me bounce back from stressful situations more quickly than some of my colleagues. I think that trait is crucial in our careers keep an eye on the expression of my emotions at work and manage them effectively. This ability to self-regulate helps me stay calm when I encounter difficulties or challenges. (Respondent 2)

Similarly, Participant 6 emphasized the importance of organization in her work to better perform and manage challenging situations. She highlighted that empathy helps her in building relationships and release stress:

I focus on being organized in my work, which helps me do my job effectively. And this feature helps me relieve the pressure brought by work and helps me organize my work tasks properly. Having empathy for students and colleagues helps me build relationships and relieve stress. (Respondent

6)

Sub-theme 2: Psychological Well-being

Participants felt that being emotionally fit allowed for more effective teaching and learning. Participant 3 shared this experience. He emphasized the connection between mental state and mood regulation:

It's important for me to stay mentally balanced. I've had times when I felt overwhelmed, and it significantly affected my patience and overall mood. (Respondent 3)

Theme 2: Occupational and Environmental Factors.

In discussing Theme 2, which concerns "Occupational and Environmental Factors", respondents argue that work conditions, workload, work pressure, support from colleagues, available resources and opportunities for career development contribute to their emotions.

Sub-theme 1: Working Pressure:

Teachers' working pressure arises from various sources. Respondents shared their perceptions of how these pressures can severely impact educators. Respondent 1 expressed the emotional impact of his workload. She shared:

Sometimes the workload is too much, there are other administrative tasks besides teaching, it is difficult to do everything perfectly. This constant pressure makes me feel depressed and has a big impact on my mood at work. (Respondent 1)

In addition, Respondent 7 also highlighted the stress of other administrative jobs. She remarked:

The constant pressure from the administration is very stressful and can sometimes cause me to not feel the good side of being a teacher. (Respondent 7)

Sub-theme 2: Working Environment and Support:

Teachers' working environments and the support they receive from colleagues are also significant factors influencing their emotional. Respondent 5 emphasized the positive impact of a supportive work environment as she said:

On the one hand, the school's policies give us a lot of support, and on the other hand there are colleagues who are willing to help each other. It makes a huge difference to my mood and helps significantly reduce stress. (Respondent 5)

Respondent 9 emphasized the sense of powerlessness caused by inadequate resources. She expressed:

Adequate resources are critical□When we lack the necessary teaching materials, it becomes particularly disappointing and affects our teaching effectiveness. (Respondent 9)

Sub-theme 3: Career Development Opportunities:

Respondent 4 mentioned the importance of professional development in the emotional impact of teaching:

Working in schools found few opportunities for professional development for teachers. This kind of job with no development prospects made me feel undervalued and affected my motivation to teach. (Respondent 4)

Respondent 9 also touched upon the frustration of limited growth opportunities within the teaching profession:

If there are few opportunities for career development, it will be very frustrating. Feeling that there is no room for advancement will affect my motivation to teach and my professional identity. (Respondent 9)

Theme 3: External Social Factors

The external social environment, including social expectation, community recognition and student feedback has a significant impact on teachers' emotional state and professional identity. Three sub-themes are derived from this theme.

Sub-theme 1: Social Expectations:

Social expectations can put a certain amount of pressure on teachers. Respondent 5 expressed his opinion:

As teachers, society places a lot of expectations on us. For example, everyone expects teachers to produce excellent students who excel not only in academic performance, but also in all-round development of moral character, ability and other aspects. There are times when we have to perform very well and meet these expectations, which is very stressful and sometimes even overwhelming. (Respondent 5)

Respondent 10 highlighted the social expectation of perfect performance from teachers:

The social expectation of perfect performance from teachers can be overwhelming and has affected my emotional state. (Respondent 10)

Sub-theme 2: Social Recognition:

Participant 7 stressed the importance of being recognized by others. The lack of recognition from others can make teachers feel undervalued and unappreciated:

Acceptance from society and peers is very important. When my efforts are recognized, I feel a sense of accomplishment that motivates me to keep improving. When our hard work goes unnoticed and our contributions are not acknowledged, it can lead to feelings of frustration and demotivation. (Respondent 7)

Sub-theme 3: Student Feedback:

Participant 4 said that students' praise of teachers had a positive effect on teachers' mood:

It's an inspiration for me to receive appreciation from students. When students recognize my efforts, it gives me encouragement and makes me feel valued. (Respondent 4)

Participant 10 also noted that positive feedback had a positive effect on teachers' emotions:

The positive feedback from students has been very good. It makes me feel that my hard work has paid off and that my teaching is useful to students. (Respondent 10)

4.2. The Influence of Emotions among CUET That Affects Their PI Recognition

Four (4) themes were formulated in relation to the influence of emotion on professional identity recognition. These themes are "Sense of Accomplishment and Job Satisfaction", "Happiness from Student Interactions and Hopefulness", "Frustration from High Workload and Lack of Support" and "Anxiety from External Pressures and Emotional Distress".

Theme 1: Sense of accomplishment and job satisfaction.

The results of the interviews revealed that a sense of accomplishment and general job satisfaction had a substantial impact on teachers' professional identities. Teachers frequently felt a great feeling of professional fulfillment when their students did well, reinforcing their identity as successful educators. Furthermore, the overall enjoyment gained from teaching, despite its challenges, contributed to a positive professional self-concept.

For example, Respondent 6 shared feeling "happy and fulfilled" when students showed progress, which aligns with their sense of professional identity. She said:

My recent work emotions have been mostly positive, feeling happiness and fulfillment when my students have passed the exams or got certifications. (Respondent 6)

Similarly, Respondent 10 expressed a deep sense of pride and satisfaction in witnessing the growth of their students. She asserted that seeing her students' progress make her felt that he is successful teacher:

My recent work feelings have been generally good; I feel satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment when I see my students grow. (Respondent 10)

Furthermore, Respondent 7 stated that overall job happiness influences their professional identity. He said, "I am generally satisfied with my job but wish for more support and resources." In addition, he shared that overall job satisfaction contributes to the development of PI. "I am satisfied with my teaching job, but I hope for more career development opportunities. This broad satisfaction with their teaching job contributed to a positive identity among colleagues and students."

Theme 2: Happiness from Student Interactions and Hopefulness

Positive interactions with students, as well as optimism about their pupils' progress and potential success, had a major impact on the teacher's professional identities. These feelings generated a sense of belonging, meaning, and dedication to their teaching roles.

Respondent 4 stated that interactions with students frequently resulted in emotions of enjoyment and reinforced their identity as caring and passionate educators:

I feel happy when having discussions with my students. (Respondent 4)

Respondent 3 also expressed the significance of a strong bond with their students, emphasizing the joy derived from seeing their pupils succeed:

This happiness was crucial in shaping my professional self-concept and recognition within the educational community. (Respondent 3)

Furthermore, Respondent 5 described feeling "hopeful" when more resources and assistance were made available, which reinforced their sense of purpose and commitment as educators. This optimistic view contributed to a strong and forward-thinking professional identity, allowing them to remain motivated and involved in their teaching jobs.

Theme 3: Frustration from High Workload and Lack of Support

High workloads and a lack of assistance frequently resulted in frustration, negatively damaging teachers' professional identities. These issues caused teachers to question their competence and perform as educators, resulting in a decreased feeling of professional identity and recognition.

Respondent 1 described feeling "overwhelmed by the workload," which caused them to question their ability and role as teachers:

This constant pressure makes me feel frustrated and

affects my mood negatively. (Respondent 1)

Similarly, Respondent 9 expressed annoyance with a lack of proper resources. These difficulties could lead to a decreased professional identity as instructors suffered with the demands of their roles:

When we don't have the necessary materials, it makes the job so much harder and adds to the stress. (Respondent 9)

Theme 4: Anxiety from External Pressures and Emotional Distress

The pressure from the leadership and parents increased teachers' anxiety, damaging their professional identity by developing feelings of inadequacy and stress. Furthermore, emotions from difficult situations, such as disagreements with students or parents, produced emotional pain and harmed teachers' professional identities by raising emotional barriers to their jobs.

Respondent 2 stated that the "lack of support from the administration" was a significant source of concern, affecting their confidence and professional identity:

This anxiety often led to feelings of being disrespected and misunderstood in my professional role. (Respondent 2)

Respondent 8 stated experiencing "significant emotional distress" after a parent's complaint, which had an influence on their sense of competence and professional identity:

This grief could lead to a weakened professional identity as teachers faced emotional challenges in their roles. (Respondent 8)

Through an in-depth analysis of the interview results, we further understand the role of emotions in the professional life of Chinese college English teachers, and how they interact with teachers' professional identity. This provides valuable enlightenment for the follow-up research and teaching practice.

5. Discussion

This study explores the factors that affect teachers' emotional expression and management. Findings revealed that personal factors, occupational and environmental factors, and external social factors affect their emotional expressions and management in their career well-being. More specifically, the results show that personal traits and emotional

intelligence play an important role in teachers' emotional management. For instance, teachers with higher emotional intelligence are more adept at recognizing and regulating their frustration, particularly when faced with mismatches between institutional demands and their personal teaching beliefs. Similarly, anxiety, often triggered by students' silence or disengagement in class, was more effectively managed by teachers who demonstrated strong resilience and self-regulation.

For language teachers, research showed that incorporating web-based learning platforms, gadgets, and digital board games into language classrooms[60–62] can act as an environmental factor that enhances support for teachers in their careers. These tools not only enrich pedagogical strategies but also serve to increase teachers' confidence when students show engagement and positive feedback, thereby reinforcing a sense of teaching efficacy and satisfaction. Equally important is factors like resilience, organizational skills, and good physical health that enable teachers better cope with job stress and maintain a positive mood[69–71].

Besides, the accumulation of teaching experience can enable senior teachers to be more confident in facing challenges and formulate effective coping strategies in time. In terms of occupational and environmental factors, high workload and administrative pressure often lead to teachers' negative emotions, such as frustration and burnout, which may weaken their commitment and diminish their sense of professional purpose. In contrast, a supportive work environment and sufficient teaching resources can help relieve stress and promote positive emotions, including satisfaction and pride, which contribute to a stronger professional identity[72]. Research emphasized the importance of a supportive work environment on teachers' emotions when they found that when teachers' beliefs and values are not aligned with the institutional norms of the school, foreign language teachers are prone to burnout and reduced teacher motivation[73].

The current research found that lack of professional development opportunities can weaken teachers' motivation and professional identity, while support and collaboration among colleagues can improve teachers' career satisfaction and job well-being. Research argues that teacher well-being and psychological resilience can regulate teacher emotions and stimulate pleasurable emotions in foreign language teaching in the current study, it shows that external social factors

such as social expectations and social recognition also have a significant impact on teachers' emotions[74]. This result aligns with earlier study, which suggest that promoting teachers' visibility through video resumes can enhance their recognition and morale[75].

On a different note, society's expectations for high teacher performance bring tremendous pressure, but positive feedback and recognition from students and the community can significantly enhance teachers' morale, confidence and sense of professional fulfillment. Consistent with the research[76] view that foreign language teachers' constructed identities during emotional interactions with their students not only change teachers' usual teaching strategies but also lead to positive emotional rewards such as pride and optimism. This study also shows that English language teachers' positive emotional experiences are mainly derived from interactions with their students in the classroom. On the other hand, students' silences are often associated with teachers' anxiety and self-doubt, which can negatively influence their professional identity.

The study also analyzes the impact of teachers' emotions on their professional identity and finds several key points. Firstly, a sense of accomplishment and job satisfaction, especially when students excel, significantly enhance teachers' identity as successful educators. Secondly, positive interactions with students and hopes for their progress are crucial, fostering a sense of belonging, mission, and teaching engagement, which shapes their professional self-concept. However, high workloads, lack of support, and external pressure from leaders and parents often lead to frustration, anxiety, and a negative impact on their professional identity.

This study contributes to the literature on teacher emotions and professional identity by integrating key psychological and educational theories, specifically[77] Emotional Labor Theory, Social Identity Theory[78], and Control-Value Theory[79]. The findings support[77] Emotional Labor Theory, demonstrating that teachers actively regulate their emotions to meet professional expectations. This emotional labor not only affects teachers' immediate emotional experiences but also plays a crucial role in shaping their long-term professional identity, as their emotional efforts are perceived as integral to their self-concept as educators. For instance, many teachers reported experiencing frustration and anxiety when their emotional expressions did not align with their internal feelings, a key point of emotional labor as proposed by[77]. This suggests that the pressure to conform to emotional norms in the classroom can create cognitive dissonance, which, over time, affects their job satisfaction and professional identity. Additionally, the results align with Social Identity Theory[78], reinforcing the notion that teachers' emotional well-being is strongly linked to their sense of belonging within the educational community. Teachers who felt supported by their peers and had a strong identification with their institution expressed more positive emotions, which contributed to a stronger professional identity. Conversely, teachers who felt isolated or undervalued reported more negative emotions and a weaker sense of professional identity. This supports the argument that a teacher's sense of social belonging and group identity is critical in shaping their emotional responses and professional development, particularly in high-pressure environments. Furthermore, the study extends[79] Control-Value Theory by showing that teachers' emotions are shaped by their perceived control over their work environment and the value they place on their role as educators. Teachers who felt they had more autonomy in the classroom, such as the ability to adapt teaching methods to student needs, reported more positive emotions and a stronger professional identity. On the other hand, teachers who perceived less control, due to factors like rigid curriculum structures or lack of resources, experienced more negative emotions such as frustration and burnout. This demonstrates that the emotional responses of teachers are not just reactions to immediate classroom events but are also shaped by their broader perceptions of control and value within their professional roles. These theoretical insights provide a foundation for future research and practical interventions aimed at enhancing teachers' emotional resilience and professional satisfaction.

In conclusion, teachers' emotional management and expression are influenced by various factors. Improving these factors can not only promote teachers' emotional health, but also enhance teachers' professional identity. Hofstadler et al. (2020) call for positive psychological interventions to trigger the positive regulatory effects of positive emotions on teachers and to help them make the shift from floundering to flourishing[80]. Moreover, it was found that foreign language teachers can regulate present emotions by recalling past L2-self learning experiences for cross-temporal class-

room emotion comparisons and self-comparisons of the effectiveness of different L2 teaching methods[81]. Therefore, educational administrators and policymakers should actively seek strategies to improve teachers' emotions and enhance their overall well-being and professional satisfaction.

6. Conclusions

This study investigates the factors which influence teachers' emotional responses to different triggers and how they express and control their emotions. Additionally, it explores into how these emotional triggers influence teachers' perceptions of their professional identities. The study further looks at the ways in which Chinese university English instructors' emotions support and strengthen their professional identities in their academic and corporate environments. Through this study, we conclude that emotions play a crucial role in the professional identity of Chinese college English teachers. A sense of accomplishment, job satisfaction, positive interactions with students, and hope for student progress can enhance a teacher's professional identity; while high workload, lack of support, and external pressure can lead to negative emotions and weaken a teacher's professional identity.

The research results show that improving teachers' working environment, increasing social recognition and providing more support are of great significance to improving teachers' professional happiness and professional identity. These findings provide valuable reference for educational administrators and policymakers, helping to develop more effective teacher support strategies, thereby improving the quality of education and teachers' professional satisfaction. To enhance the practical significance of the study, several implications for teacher development and institutional support can be drawn. Based on the findings, it suggests that teacher education programs integrate training on emotional awareness and identity development, especially for pre-service and early-career teachers. Institutions are also encouraged to provide support systems—such as peer mentoring and counseling—to help teachers cope with emotional demands and sustain their professional identity.

The limitations of this study primarily concern sample size and research methodology. First of all, the sample size is relatively small, comprising only ten English teachers from a single university in China. Due to constraints in time and resources, the scope of the sample could not be expanded further. While the qualitative data gathered provides valuable insights into participants' emotional experiences and professional identity, the limited sample size and context inevitably restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or different institutional settings. In the future, as the research conditions improve, we will strive to expand the sample size to improve the accuracy and reliability of the study. Secondly, the limitations of research methods are also worthy of attention. This study primarily employed semi-structured interviews for data collection. While this approach allows for in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences, it is also susceptible to researcher bias and subjectivity in both data interpretation and analysis. The reliance on self-reported data may further influence the objectivity of the findings. In order to overcome these limitations, we will adopt more diversified research methods in future research, such as questionnaires, etc., to improve the scientific nature and credibility of the research Future researches can focus more on teachers from different geographic locations, school types, and topic areas, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between emotions and teachers' professional identity among university teachers. Additionally, more diversified research methods can be used, such as mixed methods research, combining with questionnaires, interviews, observations and other methods to obtain richer and more accurate data. In short, future research can deeply explore the relationship between emotions and teacher professional identity from multiple perspectives, and provide more comprehensive and scientific guidance for teacher training and development.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, D.Y. and Z.A.; methodology, D.Y.; validation, D.Y. and Z.A.; formal analysis, D.Y.; investigation, D.Y.; resources, Z.A.; data curation, D.Y.; writing—original draft preparation, D.Y.; writing—review and editing, M.M.A.A.; visualization, D.Y.; supervision, Z.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants were fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the research and gave their written informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions. The data consist of interview transcripts containing identifiable and sensitive information about individual participants. Sharing such data would compromise participant confidentiality.

Acknowledgments

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study.

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