

## Correlations among Teachers' Perceptions of Their Social Status, Professional Identity, and Professional Development in Taiwan

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### Abstract

This study identified the correlations among teachers' perceptions of their social status, professional identity, and professional development. The participants were 482 teachers from elementary and junior high schools in 3 counties in Central Taiwan. We investigated (a) the factor structure of teachers' perceptions of their social status, professional identity, and professional development; (b) the effects of background variables on teachers' perceptions of their social status, professional identity, and professional development; and (c) a proposed overall model for representing the 3 variables. A structural equation model showed an acceptable fit to the data. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

**Keywords:** Teachers' Social status; Professional identity; Professional development; Taiwan

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### 1. Introduction

Chinese society has been considerably influenced by Confucianism. Teachers in Asian countries enjoy a higher social status and more respect than those in Western countries (Fwu & Wang, 2002; Gao, 2008; Schoenhals, 1993). Generally, teachers' social status reflects society's perceptions of teachers' behavior and performance as well as their acceptance of and satisfaction with the rewards of the teaching profession (Hoyle, 2001; Verhoeven et al., 2006). However, recent reform in many countries has exerted a considerable impact on the educational system and changed people's perceptions of a teacher's role and generated multidimensional pressures on teachers (van den Berg, 2002). Therefore, the status of a teacher as a professional authority has also decreased in the public mind (Gordon, 2005; Sachs, 2001; Yang, 2004). Teachers in Taiwan have seen their social status decline substantially over the last decade and have identified a lack of respect from the public for their profession (Huang & Weng, 2009; Kao, 2014). In recent years, scholars have begun to explore in depth the inner world of teachers (Ritchie & Wilson, 2000), believing that excellent teaching quality and respect for the profession not only involve an improvement of teaching methods and techniques but also depend on teachers' identification with the profession and themselves (Palmer, 1998).

The challenges faced by teachers today, in addition to the aforementioned local challenges, are posed by hybrid forms of culture resulting from globalization and have a considerable impact on Chinese teacher training and teachers' social relationships (Stromquist, 2002). Teachers' professional identity (PI), during such a variety of rapid changes, experiences a dynamic transformation and is reconstructed because of teachers' lower social status and teachers' changing understandings and interpretations of the profession (Gao, 2008). The psychological dimension of teachers' PI relates to such factors as teachers' beliefs about their profession, their teaching philosophy, their caring attitude, and their values (Beijaard et al., 2000). The sociological dimension of teachers' PI develops when teachers interact with the external environment (Burns & Bell, 2011; Crigger & Godfrey, 2014). Teachers' PI can also be conceptualized as the identity resulting from the interactions between teachers' personal experience and society, culture, and organizations (van den Berg, 2002).

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A study on elementary school teachers in the central region of Taiwan discovered that teachers perceived that their social status was low and the public did not recognize their contributions to student achievement. Additionally, the more positive a teacher's perceptions of their social status is, the stronger their professional identity (Huang & Weng, 2009).

Teachers' positive views of the teaching profession include emphases on vocationalism, continuous learning, and cooperative culture and their views of curriculum integration. Teachers' negative views of the teaching profession include contradictions and conflicts at work, increasing bureaucracy, a culture of loneliness, and insufficient understanding and ownership of reform processes (Day et al., 2007). Beijaard et al. (2000) argued that teachers' PI affects performance, PD, and acceptance of reforms and found that teachers' perception of their PI in teaching apparently changes early and late in their teaching careers. The change of teachers' social status may affect teachers' professional identity and thus affect the professional development of teachers. Teachers' contradictory feelings are also manifested in their confusion about role identity and PD regarding contradictory policies, which expect teachers to both generate new knowledge and comply with established curriculum frameworks (Gray & Whitty, 2010). A study on teachers' professional identity and professional development indicated that, in response to the changing requirements of society regarding the role of teachers, continual participation in dialogue and challenging of external performance evaluations through various discourses can promote professional development among teachers (Cohen, 2008). Therefore, instead of understanding teachers' PD according to the rational system prevalent in educational reform in Taiwan (Scott & Davis, 2007), teachers' personal identity and thinking as well as how they adapt to and interpret changes around them at the personal level must be understood.

The present study drew on qualitative research conducted by one of the researchers and extant empirical research, and aimed to build up a model describing the correlations among teachers' perceptions of their social status (PSS), professional identity, and perceptions of professional development. The findings of the study contribute to the teacher training literature in several ways. First, it identified which factors are associated with how teachers perceive their perceptions of their social status. Second, public valuation of the teaching profession was discovered to affect how teachers understand and interpret the meanings of their work and further affects the participation of teachers in professional development. Finally, through the mediating effect of professional identity, the correlation between perceptions of social status and professional development can be significantly strengthened.

In the measurement of PSS in the present study, items relating to school context and daily interactions with other school members and the public were included in the questionnaire so that teachers' evaluation of the prestige of their profession in terms of people's attitudes toward their performance and responses to them as teachers could be understood.

To measure PI, Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) classified teachers' PI as having three aspects: subject matter expertise (subject matter knowledge and skill), didactical expertise (the planning, execution, and evaluation of teaching and learning processes), and pedagogical expertise (support of students' social, emotional, and moral development). The present study adopted their framework and included a psychological dimension with focus on teachers' self-efficacy, commitment to teaching, and personal beliefs concerning the teaching profession.

Insights into teachers' emotions and identity would facilitate the maintenance of their motivation for growth, self-esteem, and self-efficacy and their own expectations of teaching rather than let them passively comply with external requirements and standards that may conflict with their personal ideals. Thus, the present study proposes that teachers' PSS and PI affect their PD, and that teachers' PSS affects their PI.

### **3. Research Methods and Procedures**

#### *3.1 Participants*

In this study, a random sample was selected from a population of 11,800 teachers at elementary and junior high schools in three counties in Central Taiwan. A questionnaire constructed by the researchers specifically for this study was administered to the teachers in two stages. First, a pretest was conducted to evaluate the validity and reliability of the instrument and identify any problems with the instrument. The formal questionnaire was then administered to 482 teachers who were randomly selected from the elementary and junior high schools in Central Taiwan. In this study, the data set consisted of 31.54% male and 68.46% female.

Chi-square test results revealed a statistically no significant difference in gender distribution between the data set and the total population ( $p > .05$ ), as shown in Table 1. This finding means that the gender distribution in the sample is not different from that in the population.

**Table 1** Teachers' background variables

		Sampling population		Population		$\chi^2$
Variable	Classification	Number	%	Number	%	
Gender	Male	152	31.54	4,117	34.89	2.388
	Female	330	68.46	7,683	65.11	
School	Junior high school	128	26.56	1,114	9.44	165.151***
	Elementary school	354	73.44	10,686	90.56	
Total		482		11,800		

### 3.2 Research instrument

The questionnaire was constructed based on the qualitative research conducted by one of the authors and literature review, which contained a section for collecting background information and three subscales with 14 items pertaining to teachers' PSS, 21 items regarding teachers' PI, and 18 items concerning teachers' PD (Kao, 2014). Participants' responses to the questionnaire items were measured using 5-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The higher the score is, the higher the participant's agreement with the item.

The three subscales were then subjected to reliability and exploratory factor analyses. First, a reliability analysis of teachers' PSS yielded a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient of .806, indicating that the subscale had reliability. The exploratory factor analysis showed a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin(KMO) value of .756, which is within the "acceptable" range of .70–.80. The  $\chi^2$  value of the Bartlett test of sphericity was 760.886. The *df* value was 136, and  $p = .000$ , indicating that the subscale was suitable for factor analysis. After the maximum-likelihood method was used to extract the commonalities of each item, the values ranged from .253 to .999. Varimax was adopted for rotation and a total of four factors were extracted. The total variance explained was 59.222%. After the rotated factor matrix analysis, the factors were named "Self-perception of Profession," "Support of Parents," "Students' Obedience," and "Interactions with Parents."

In the reliability analysis of the teachers' PI subscale, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was .890, indicating that the subscale had reliability. The exploratory factor analysis showed a KMO value of .794, which is within the "acceptable" range of .70–.80. The  $\chi^2$  value of the Bartlett test of sphericity was 1357.646. The *df* value was 378, and  $p = .000$ , indicating that the subscale was suitable for factor analysis. After the maximum-likelihood method was used to extract the commonalities of each item, the values ranged from .267 to .999. Varimax was adopted for rotation and a total of five factors were extracted. The total variance explained was 57.562%. After the rotated factor matrix analysis, the factors were named "Self-Expectation," "Pedagogy," "Teaching Skills and Knowledge," "Teacher Duties," and "Teachers' Citizenship Behavior."

Finally, in the reliability analysis of the teachers' PD subscale, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was .868, indicating that the subscale had reliability. The exploratory factor analysis showed a KMO value of .769, which is within the "acceptable" range of .70–.80. The  $\chi^2$  value of the Bartlett test of sphericity was 958.950. The *df* value was 190, and  $p = .000$ , indicating that the subscale was suitable for factor analysis. After the maximum-likelihood method was used to extract the commonalities of each item, the values ranged from .242 to .999. Varimax was adopted for rotation and a total of four factors were extracted. The total variance explained was 57.813%. After the rotated factor matrix analysis, the factors were named "Effects of Professional Development," "Willingness to Engage in Professional Development," "Influential Factors," and "Professional Evaluation."

### 3.3 Data analysis

SPSS statistical software was used to analyze the descriptive statistics and conduct *t* tests as well as one-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA). The descriptive statistics were employed to understand the sample distribution and how research participants responded to the questionnaires. The *t* test and ANOVA were employed to understand variations in the responses of participants with different backgrounds. In addition, LISREL Version 8.80 statistical software was used in performing structural equation modeling to test the associations among variables.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1 Teachers' perceptions of their social status, professional identity, and professional development in Central Taiwan

For teachers' PSS, the values ranged from 3.212 to 4.108. The highest was Students' Obedience. The lowest was Self-perception of Profession. Regarding PI, the values ranged from 3.795 to 4.276. The highest was Pedagogy. The lowest was Self-Expectation. Regarding PD, the values ranged from 2.935 to 4.035. The highest was Willingness to Engage in Professional Development. The lowest was Professional Evaluation (Table 2). The absolute values of Skewness were less than 3, and the absolute values of Kurtosis were less than 20. That are described as the variables as not extremely skewed and kurtosis (Kline, 2011). Overall, participants were aware of their social status, PI, and PD.

**Table 2** Participants' perceptions of their social status, professional identity, and professional development

Latent Concept		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Teachers' Perceptions of Social Status	Self-Perception	1.143	5.000	3.212	0.584	-0.351	0.045
	Support of Parents	1.000	5.000	4.004	0.540	-0.433	2.276
	Students' obedience	1.000	5.000	4.108	0.570	-0.498	2.041
	Interactions with parents	1.000	5.000	3.963	0.597	-0.739	2.163
Teachers' Professional Identity	Self-expectation	2.167	5.000	3.795	0.495	-0.155	0.086
	Pedagogy	2.800	5.000	4.276	0.453	-0.069	-0.339
	Teaching Skills and Knowledge	2.400	5.000	4.030	0.455	-0.089	0.533
	Teacher Duties	2.000	5.000	4.100	0.535	-0.289	1.005
	Teachers' Citizenship Behavior	1.500	5.000	4.111	0.580	-0.432	1.345
Teachers' Professional Development	Effects of Professional Development	1.667	5.000	3.640	0.547	-0.259	0.557
	Willingness to Engage in Professional Development	2.000	5.000	4.035	0.522	0.037	0.348
	Influential Factors	1.833	5.000	3.663	0.491	-0.085	0.718
	Professional Evaluation	1.000	5.000	2.935	0.920	-0.282	-0.131

##### 4.3 Correlation analysis of teachers' perceptions of their social status, professional identity, and professional development

To verify the correlations among teachers' PSS, PI, and perception of PD, LISREL Version 8.80 statistical software was used to conduct path analysis with latent variables. Analytical models include measurement models of PSS, PI, and PD as well as structural models of PSS, PI, and PD. According to a literature review, teachers' PSS and PI affect their PD and teachers' PSS affects their PI.

According to the results of an analysis of the overall model,  $\chi^2 = 311.78$  ( $df = 62, p < .000$ ), the null hypothesis should be rejected because a level of significance of .05 was reached. A difference between the proposed model and the data was evident. However, a Chi-square can easily reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, other indices were investigated to ensure the fit of the proposed model. Additional analyses of the model's overall fit indicated a reasonable fit to the data: root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .092; goodness-of-fit index = .91; adjusted goodness-of-fit index = .87; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .074; and expected cross-validation index (ECVI) = .77.

Any model with a fit index above .90 was considered acceptable: normed fit index (NFI) = .93; nonnormed fit index (NNFI) = .92; comparative fit index (CFI) = .94; incremental fit index (IFI) = .94; and relative fit index (RFI) = .92. In addition, the parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) = .74; parsimonious goodness-of-fit index (PGFI) = .62; and Akaike information criterion (AIC) = .182.00, which was lower than independence AIC 3992.34. These indices indicated that the proposed overall model of PSS, PI, and PD was acceptable.

The model developed in this study contains three latent variables: PSS, as an independent variable; PI, as an intervening variable; and PD, as a dependent variable. In the measurement model with PSS as a latent variable, the *t* value of the factor loadings of the four observed variables—Self-perception (PSSF1), Support of Parents (PSSF2), Students' Obedience (PSSF3), and Interactions with Parents (PSSF4)—was higher than 1.96, indicating that the factor loadings were significant. In other words, Self-perception (PSSF1), Support of Parents (PSSF2), Students' Obedience (PSSF3), and Interactions with Parents (PSSF4) could respond to the latent variable PSS. Standardized coefficients of the four observed variables revealed that the factor loading of Support of Parents was the highest for the latent variable PSS, followed successively by Interaction with Parents, Students' Obedience, and Self-perception.

In the measurement model with PI as a latent variable, the *t* value of the factor loadings of the five observed variables—Self-Expectation (PIF1), Pedagogy (PIF2), Teaching Skills and Knowledge (PIF3), Teacher Duty (PIF4), and Teachers' Citizenship Behavior (PIF5)—was higher than 1.96, indicating its level of significance. In other words, Self-Expectation (PIF1), Pedagogy (PIF2), Teaching Skills and Knowledge (PIF3), Teacher Duty (PIF4), and Teachers' Citizenship Behavior (PIF5) could respond to the latent variable PI. Standardized coefficients of the five observed variables revealed that the factor loading of Pedagogy was the highest for the latent variable PI, followed successively by Self-Expectation, Teaching Skills and Knowledge, Teacher Duty, and Teachers' Citizenship Behavior.

In the measurement model with PD as a latent variable, the *t* value of the factor loadings of the four observed variables—Effects of Professional Development (PDF1), Willingness to Engage in Professional Development (PDF2), Influential Factors (PDF3), and Professional Evaluation (PDF4)—was higher than 1.96, indicating its level of significance. In other words, Effects of Professional Development (PDF1), Willingness to Engage in Professional Development (PDF2), Influential Factors (PDF3), and Professional Evaluation (PDF4) could respond to the latent variable PD. Standardized coefficients of the four observed variables revealed that the factor loading of Effects of Professional Development was the highest for the latent variable PD, followed successively by Professional Evaluation (PDF4), Willingness to Engage in Professional Development (PDF2), and Influential Factors (PDF3).

According to the analysis of the structural equation model for correlations among PSS, PS, and PD, PSS had direct effects on PI and PD of 0.65 and 0.19, respectively. The effect of PSS on PI was higher than the direct effect of PSS on PD. In addition, PI had a direct effect on PD of 0.37. Thus, PSS had an indirect effect on PD through PI of 0.24 ( $0.65 \times 0.37 = 0.24$ ). Therefore, the total effect of PSS on PD was 0.43 ( $0.19 + 0.24 = 0.43$ ). In conclusion, the results showed that the higher the PSS was, the higher the teachers' PI and PD. The indirect effect of PSS on PD through PI was higher than the direct effect of PSS on PD (Figure 1).

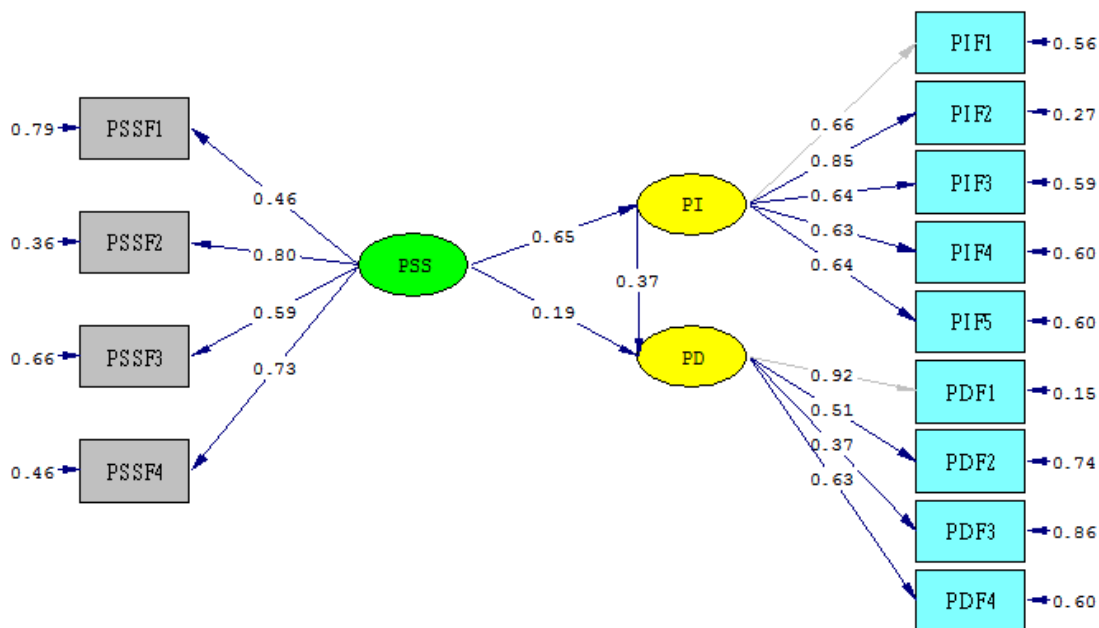


Figure 1. Correlations among perceptions of social status, professional identity and professional development

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the descriptive analysis indicated that the study participants from Central Taiwan were aware of their social status, professional identify, and PD. Regarding PD, the latent concept of Professional Evaluation had the lowest mean of 2.942, implying that teachers do not believe that it enhances their social status and professional skills. Teacher evaluation often receives criticism for its performativity because objectively and accurately developing indicators for teacher performance is difficult.

In Taiwan, teacher evaluation became mandatory only recently in higher education. The amount of research on its effects is limited. At elementary and junior high schools, the participation of individual teachers in evaluation was voluntary. Although the government in Taiwan had planned to legalize teacher evaluation, it has transformed into a professional support system for teachers due to many doubts about its benefits on teaching quality.

The correlation analysis showed that the proposed overall model of PSS, PI, and PD was acceptable. In the measurement model with PSS as a latent variable, the factor loading of Support of Parents was the highest, followed successively by Interaction with Parents, Students’ Obedience, and Self-perception. Teachers perceive their social status mainly on the basis of the perceptions of parents and students toward their job. When parents and students exhibit more respect and support for teachers’ work, teachers perceive themselves to have a higher social status. In the measurement model with PI as a latent variable, the factor loading of Pedagogy was the highest followed successively by Self-Expectation, Teaching Skills and Knowledge, Teacher Duty, and Teachers’ Citizenship Behavior. Because the increasing democratization of Taiwanese society has prompted an emphasis on human rights, the government-amended disciplinary policy for students restrains teachers’ authority regarding corporal punishment, which was asserted by some nonprofit student rights organizations. Teachers and students have conflicted over standards of acceptable behavior in classrooms. Without authority to discipline students effectively, teachers feel powerless in managing their classrooms. Therefore, Pedagogy had the highest factor loading.

Finally, the analysis of the structural equation model showed that the higher the PSS was, the higher teachers’ PI and PD were. The indirect effect of PSS on PD through PI was higher than the direct effect of PSS on PD. Both PSS and PI are based on teachers’ own initiatives. Thus, the primary reason for teachers’ participation in PD is their identification with the profession. However, the current policy in Taiwan reinforces the rationale for promoting teachers’ PD through mandatory policy and preemptory norms. Improving teachers’ social status through respect for and support of their work and enhancing the identity of teachers by regranting teachers authority in classroom management may be more effective approaches for teacher development (Lai & Lo, 2007; Storey, 2009).

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