



## **Using Two-Factor Theory to Examine Female Teachers' Identity in Higher Education Institutions in China**

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### **Abstract**

The number of female teachers in higher education institutions in China has exceeded half of the total number of teachers. However, their work and quality of life are far from reaching the ideal level, with many facing an identity dilemma. Based on the two-factor theory, using purposive sampling, 125 female teachers in higher education institutions were given a questionnaire. Independent t-test and correlation analysis was used to examine the factors affecting the female teachers' identity in China's higher education institutions. This study suggests solutions to improve female teachers' identity dilemmas and their quality of life.

**Keywords:** Female Teachers' Identity; Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); SDG; Quality of Life

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Teacher identity refers to the teacher's understanding of their teaching profession in their environment and the continuous pursuit of their identity process (Zembylas, 2003). It is one of the core concepts in teacher education, which impacts teaching decisions, teaching content, and teacher-student relationships (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Teacher identity plays a vital role in their work and life. It is not only a core position in the personal development of teachers but also an essential theoretical framework for teacher research (Tsui, 2007), which has important implications for the teachers, students and HEI.

In the field of teacher education research in China, the study of teacher identity began in the 1990s. It was initially limited to discussing whether teachers are national cadres or civil servants. After 2004, western identity terms were gradually introduced into China, and the issue of teacher status attracted more and more attention from scholars (Pei & Li, 2017). However, the dialogue between the Chinese teacher identity study and the international academic discourse system remains strong (Shi & Cheng, 2020).

According to the China Education Statistical Yearbook (2020) the number of full-time female teachers in colleges and universities rose from 107,100 in 1987 to 813,800 in 2017, and the sex ratio rose rapidly from 28 per cent in 1987 to 50 per cent in 2017 and to 51 per cent in 2020. This is different from Malaysia where female workers have lower participation at work (Subramaniam et al., 2015).

### 1.1 Problem of Study

Although the number of full-time female teachers in China's higher education institutions (HELs) has exceeded half of the total number of teachers and continues to rise, their quality of work and life is far from ideal (Dan et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2022). The identity dilemma is particularly evident among female teachers, who face confusion about gender identity, social identity and professional identity (Yang & Shao, 2022). The dilemma of female teachers can lead to many critical consequences; firstly, it affects the quality of life and career development of female teachers; secondly, it affects the teaching quality, teaching stability, human resource management, and sustainable development of colleges and universities, and finally the future growth and physical and mental health of students.

### 1.2 Objectives of Study

This study aims to examine the relationship between job satisfaction, work environment, demographic characteristics, and female teachers' identity in higher education institutions in China. This is to seek solutions conducive to female teachers' well-being to help them improve their identity dilemmas and hence their quality of life. Three objectives guide this research:

Objective 1-To examine the relationship between demographic factors and female teachers' identity in higher education institutions in China.

Objective 2-To examine whether job satisfaction and work environment affect female teachers' identity in higher education institutions in China.

Objective 3 -To determine female teachers' identity level in higher education institutions in China.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Two-factor theory

The motivation-hygiene theory is also known as Herzberg's or Herzberg's two-factor theory (1959). The central concept of the theory is the distinction between motivational and sanitary factors. These two factors that impact job satisfaction are divided into two categories. Hygiene factors are less important to job satisfaction than motivational factors. Hygienic factors are associated with the "need to avoid unpleasantness." Motivational factors lead to job satisfaction because of "an individual's need for self-growth and self-actualization." This theory is one of the most used in the study of job satisfaction; this theory identifies and explains the phenomenon of job satisfaction. However, some reflections on this theory suggest that hygiene factors are less significant for job satisfaction, and motivation factors are the most important (Alshmemri et al., 2017).

### 2.2 Teacher identity

Teacher identity is a continuous and dynamic social process of explaining and reinterpreting who they think they are and who they want to be (Beijaard et al., 2004). According to the literature, there are two common understandings of teacher identity: firstly, teacher identity is not a static, constant, or single structure (Varghese, et.,2005; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004) because it is based on one's core beliefs about teaching and being a teacher. These beliefs are constantly changing and reforming in experience. Secondly, teacher status is a highly contextual, socially defined phenomenon (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004). It "expresses personal practical knowledge gained from experience, learned in context, and expressed in practice" (Xu & Connelly, 2009).

### 2.3 Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction is most defined as the degree to which employees like the components of their work (Spector, 1997). Over time, other definitions of the structure were also adopted in different paradigms. For example, Locke's (1969) opinion on the evaluation of a person's work or work experience focuses on their emotional orientation towards work; Milkovic and Budero (1997) define job satisfaction as a pleasant response to the content of work; and Schultz (1982) suggests that job satisfaction is only an employee's psychological orientation towards work. Despite changes in these widely available definitions, most believe job satisfaction is workplace emotion and positive work-related responses (Montes & Irving, 2008). The survey found that job satisfaction positively influences teacher recognition (Gao, 2021). Besides, Canrinus et al. (2012) found that job satisfaction as an essential indicator of teachers' professional identity.

### 2.4 Work environment

The working environment includes the physical, psychological, and social aspects, marking the working conditions (Mehbood & Bhutto, 2012). While Jain and Kaur (2014) found that work environment covers all aspects of behaviour and responding to employees' body and mind; Abdul and Raheela (2015) noted that the work environment includes two broader dimensions, i.e. work and context. Work includes all the different characteristics of the work, such as how it is performed and completed, including task activities, training, control of their work-related activities, the sense of accomplishment in the work, the diversity of tasks, and the intrinsic value of the task. Numerous studies have shown that teachers' identity is influenced by factors in the work environment (Rosdi et al., 2020; Shi, 2023).

Based on the literature, the conceptual framework designed is shown in Figure 1. The two independent variables are job satisfaction and work environment, while the dependent variable is female teachers' identity.

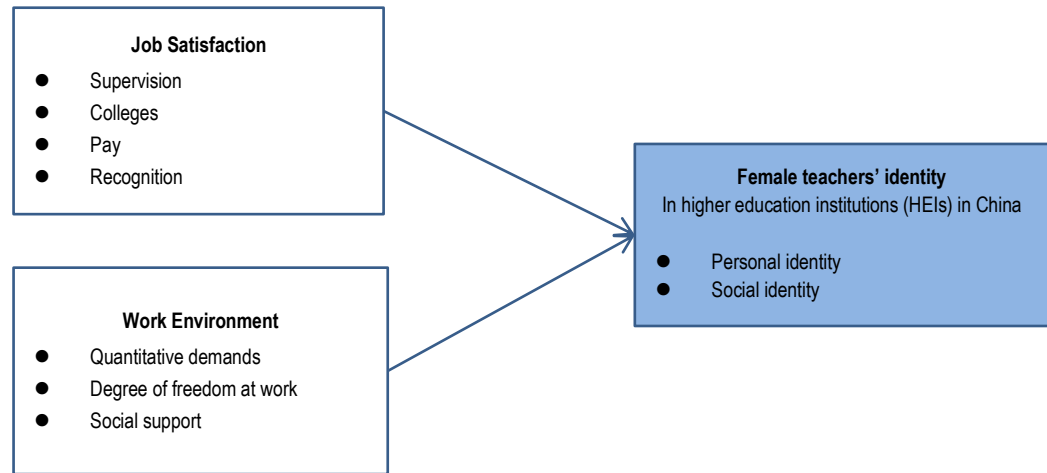


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

### 3.0 Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

This study is a pilot study using a quantitative method. First, using convenience sampling, schoolteachers in Jiangxi Province were given the questionnaire via email. Filter questions were posed to ensure that the teachers were females and teaching in HEIs only. This method involved 125 female teachers in higher education institutions and as it was a pilot study, only HEIs in Jiangxi Province, China, were identified to fill the questionnaire. However, only 108 questionnaires were usable.

#### 3.2 Instruments

Data was collected using a survey questionnaire in this study. A questionnaire is a tool to quantify the flow, behaviour, or opinion of the population by examining a sample of the study population (Creswell, 2003). The questionnaire consists of four parts, each of which measures the demographic variables of the female college teachers, such as their age, education level, relevant degree, years of teaching experience and position. The independent variables were teacher job satisfaction and work environment, while the dependent variable was female teacher identity. Three questionnaires were integrated in this study, namely, the Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (TJSQ), the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ), and the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV). In addition, the demographic profile of the respondents was also recorded. Table 1 shows the details of the constructs.

Table 1: Constructs and reliability (N=108)

Constructs	Sub-constructs	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Job Satisfaction	Pay	4	.867
	Colleagues Relationship	4	.812
	Recognition	4	.873
	Supervision	4	.773
Work Environment	Quantitative demands	4	.796
	Degree of freedom at work	4	.835
	Social support	4	.932
Female Teachers' Identity	Personal Identity	4	.967
	Social Identity	4	.885

##### 3.2.1 Demographic Profile

This section presents the demographic variables of the respondents, which was needed for the first objective. This was useful to investigate whether the degree of identity dilemma of female teachers in HEIs in China varies due to the respondents' education level, professional title, work experience, marriage status, birth status, and other factors.

##### 3.2.2 Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (TJSQ)

The Teacher Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (TJSQ) developed by Lester (1982) contains 66 items with nine subscales. These subscales are supervision, colleagues, working conditions, pay, responsibility, work itself, promotion, safety, and recognition. These items were scored using a 5-point Likert scale format, with 1 for "strong disagreement" and 5 for "strong agreement". Maslow's theory (1954) and Herzberg's theory (1972) were used as the basis for the development of this questionnaire. The concepts presented in these theories apply to define the educational environment.

##### 3.3.3 Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ)

The first edition of the Copenhagen Sociopathology Questionnaire (COPSOQ I) was developed by the Danish National Centre for Work

Environment Research in 1997, a standardized questionnaire covering a wide range of psychosocial factors. It includes three different lengths: the long questionnaire with 24 dimensions (92 items), another questionnaire with 20 dimensions (69 items), and a short questionnaire with 14 dimensions (28 items). All scales showed acceptable reliability and consistency across versions.

### 3.3.4 Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV)

The female teachers' identity of the participants was measured using the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV) (Cheek & Briggs, 2013) with 45 items assessing an individual's identity orientation style. The identity style includes individual, relationship, social, and collective orientation. The AIQ-IV consists of a 5-point Likert scale of self-awareness and awareness of others.

### 3.3 Data collection and procedure

An email survey with a questionnaire link was sent to the participants, and they clicked on the link and completed the questionnaire. The identity of the respondents was protected because they were directed to the designated website to complete the questionnaire. They were not required to provide their personal contact information. To increase response rates and mitigate ethical issues, I used my university's institutional email address to distinguish my invitation from the spam in their mailbox. The brief information about the researcher and details about the study, including informed consent, were included to gain the participants' trust, provide any further clarification or explanation needed, and a follow-up email was sent to thank those who completed the survey. To improve the reliability of the collected data, the participants could only answer once.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The study used SPSS 26 to analyze data on female teachers in higher education institutions in China. Descriptive statistics were first used to describe respondents' demographic data, and then the variability between demographic variables and female teacher identity was analyzed using the t-test and one-way ANOVA tests. To find the relationship between job environment and the identity of female college teachers. Pearson's correlation analysis was also conducted. Finally, the mean (average score) analysis is used, which can see the change in the identity score of female teachers, to determine the degree of identity of female teachers.

## 4.0 Findings

In this section, the demographic profile of the respondents is shown. Then, the results of the data analysis were interpreted according to the three study objectives.

### 4.1 Respondents' demographic profile

The demographic information of the respondents in this study included eight sections, as shown in Table 2. Among the six age groups, more than 75% of the respondents were aged between 30 to 44 years. The majority (81%) were married, with 85% having children, and female teachers with one child represented a significant majority of 74% of the sample. At the occupational level, lecturers represented 74% of the respondents, while only 7% of the sample were professors. Regarding teaching experience, 44% of the respondents taught for 11-15 years, 20% for 6-10 years. 50%, and the income ranged from RMB 7,001 to 9,000

Table 2: Respondents' Demographic Profile (N=108)

No	Demographic factors	Category	Frequency(n)	Percentage (%)
1	Age	24-29	10	9
		30-34	19	18
		35-39	37	34
		40-44	25	23
		45-50	9	8
		51-60	8	7
2	Marital status	Single	21	19
		Married	87	81
3	Children	Have	92	85
		Don't have	16	15
4	No. of children	0	16	15
		1	80	74
		2	11	10
		3	1	1
5	Highest Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	8	7
		Master's Degree	84	78
		Doctor's Degree	16	15
6	Academic ranking	Assistant lecturer	9	8
		Lecturer	80	74
		Associate professor	11	10
		Professor	8	7
7	Teaching experience	Less than 1 year	2	2
		1-5 years	9	8
		6-10 years	22	20
		11-15 years	47	44
		16-20 years	17	16

8	Income	Above 20 years	11	10
		RMB 3001- RMB 5000	11	10
		RMB 5001- RMB 7000	24	22
		RMB 7001- RMB 9000	54	50
		RMB 9001- RMB 11000	11	10
		RMB 11001 and above	8	7

#### 4.2 Demographic factors and female teachers' identity

The first research objective was to examine the relationship between different demographic factors and female teachers' identity in HEIs in China. An independent sample t-test and a one-way ANOVA test were used, and the results are shown in the tables below.

Table 3. Female Teachers' Identity by Demographic Factors(N=108)

Demographic factors	Female Teachers' Identity	
	Personal Identity	Social Identity
Age	.316	.952
Marital status	.379	.937
Children	.096	.001**
No. of children	.007	.002**
Highest Educational Level	.819	.748
Academic ranking	.238	.200
Teaching experience	.626	.860
Income	.507	.908

\*\*Correlation is considered significant when sig. below 0.05

The results of this test showed that the degree of female teachers' identity was significantly different in terms of having children and the number of children.

#### 4.3 Job satisfaction, working environment, and female teachers' identity

Guided by the second research objective, this section analyses the relationship between job satisfaction, job environment, and female teachers' identity in HEIs in China. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Relationship between Job Satisfaction, Work Environment, and Female Teachers' Identity(N=108)

Female Teachers' Identity	Personal Identity		Social Identity	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig.(2-tailed)	Pearson Correlation	Sig.(2-tailed)
Job Satisfaction	.280**	.003	.512**	.000
Work Environment	.097	.317	.296**	.002

The results show that job satisfaction and female teachers' personal identity are positively correlated, and the correlation is significant with a p value of 0.03. In terms of the relationship between job satisfaction and social identity, the correlation is moderate to high (0.512), and the relationship is statistically significant (0.00). However, the results show that there is a weak correlation between the work environment and female teachers' personal identity, which is not significant. However, the correlation between work environment and social identity, even though low, is statistically significant (0.02).

#### 4.4 Female teachers' identity in higher education institutions

The final research objective is to determine the level of female teachers' identity. The results of the average value of female teachers' identity in higher education institutions in China are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of Female Teachers' Identity (N=108)

	Female Teachers' Identity		
	N	Mean	SD
Personal identity	108	2.97	1.009
Social identity	108	3.03	1.183

The results of the mean score can be divided into three types, namely low (1.00-2.33), moderate (2.34-3.67), and high (3.68-5.00) (ThahiraBibi TKM Thangal, 2023). The results of this study show that most of the respondents have a moderate identity level, with an average personal identity score of 2.97 and an average social identity score of 3.03, which belongs to the moderate level.

## 5.0 Discussion

This section will discuss the main findings of this study. First, we examine the differential relationship between different demographic factors and female teachers' identity in HEIs in China. Then, we examine the relationship between job satisfaction and job environment and female teachers' identity in HEIs in China, and finally, we illustrate the level of identity of female teachers and the differences between different demographic factors in colleges and universities.

### 5.1 Demographic factors

Studies have shown that the identity of teachers is related to some individual factors, including gender, the length of teaching experience, and teaching subjects (Xiong, 2023). The identity of teachers may be influenced by factors such as age, gender, and language development (Rahmani & Khatoony, 2021). In this study, all respondents were female teachers from higher education institutions in Jiangxi Province, China. More than half of the respondents were between 35 years to 44 years. This suggests that most respondents are young and middle-aged teachers, which echoes previous studies that found that young teachers are the main force of teachers (Huang, 2019). 43.5% of the respondents had 11 to 15 years of teaching experience. 80% of the female teachers were married with children, and 74 % had at least one child. Unlike previous studies, female teachers' identity was not significantly different in the number of years of teaching experience of female teachers in this study, but the results showed that female teachers' identity was significantly different in terms of children and number of children of female teachers. The reason for this phenomenon may be that under the background of Chinese culture, female teachers play the dual roles of socialised people and life-oriented women. Besides, female teachers cannot manage work and family at the same time and meet the dual role (Chen, 2018).

### 5.2 Job satisfaction and female teachers' identity

This study demonstrates a positive correlation between job satisfaction and the degree of social identity of female teachers. This means that the higher the level of job satisfaction of female teachers, the higher their degree of social identity. Consistent with the findings of previous studies, job satisfaction is a factor which positively affects teacher identity (Canrinus et al., 2012; Gao, 2021). This means that the identity of female college teachers is a concern, which may be related to their job satisfaction. Therefore, improving the job satisfaction of female teachers is an effective measure to improve the identity of female teachers.

### 5.3 Working environment and female teachers' identity

Previous studies showed that a positive work environment significantly impacts teacher identity (Cao et al., 2022; Othman & Fahd Aljuhaishi, 2021). In this study, the work environment significantly affects social identity but does not have a significant effect on personal identity. This could be possibly due to the small sample size and the characteristics of the female teachers in the sample.

### 5.4 Female teachers' identity in higher education institutions

The results show that the identity of female teachers in universities is at the moderate level, which is consistent with the research results on the identity dilemma of female teachers. Relevant studies have shown that the workplace tasks of female teachers can hinder the fulfilment of family roles, and family responsibilities can also hinder the completion of their tasks at work (Hussain et al., 2021). Individuals experience deep role conflicts and stereotypes of traditional society, making it difficult for them to achieve self-identity in their professional development (Li et al., 2023).

## 6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The findings showed very interesting results. Firstly, female teachers' identity in HEIs in China does not have a high sense of identity; Secondly, based on an independent t-test, only two demographic factors significantly impact the identity of female teachers in colleges and universities, i.e., having children and the number of children. Finally, job satisfaction significantly impacts the social identity of female teachers in HEIs.

The relationship between job satisfaction and female teachers' identity is consistent with past studies.. However, the relationship between work environment and female teachers' identity might have been different compared to previous studies due to the different contexts. In this research, the authors focus was on female teachers in HEIs in China. According to statistics, more than 51% of full-time teachers are women in China.

The findings also show that the teacher identity hasn't reached the ideal level, which needs immediate attention because the degree of their identity will not only affect the quality of teaching but also affect the stability of the development of educational institutions. Measures should be taken to improve female teachers' identity by enhancing job satisfaction and improving family-work conflicts. Besides, understanding the different ways female teachers negotiate their evolving teacher identity in the light of changing structural and cultural contexts is very important.

## 7.0 Limitation and Future Research

Two major limitations of this study are observed. Firstly, this study used a small sample size as it's a micro-level study done in Jiangxi Province, China. Secondly, it only focuses on one province. Future studies are suggested to include female teachers in other provinces, and a comparison also should be made between teachers in the rural and urban HEI to generalize the results of this study.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study re-establishes the use of two-factor theory to examine female teachers' identity in Chinese higher education institutions. This study also helps policymakers at HEI to understand further the dilemma faced by female teachers who constitute a major part of the teaching fraternity. Policies can be designed to seek solutions that benefit the well-being of female teachers and help them improve their quality of life which is aligned with SDG 3.

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