

Unravel the Interplay of Self-Efficacy, Emotions, and Identity in Beijing's Pre-Service Music Teachers

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Received: 13 February 2026 | Accepted: 30 March 2026 | Published: 20 April 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ajress.2026.8.3.34>

Abstract: *Aligned with the global mandate of SDG4 (Quality Education), this study contributes to the sustainability of the music education workforce by looking at the psychological transition of conservatory-educated undergraduate students to the teaching profession. As far as technical quality is concerned, Beijing's conservatory students are good, but they remain vulnerable to "theory-practice disjuncture" in teaching over the longer term. This study examines the predictive power of teaching self-efficacy and occupational emotions for professional identity and, in turn, how professional identity predicts career intention. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, this paper combines quantitative data from 250 final-year music education majors with qualitative data from the narratives of 20 semi-structured interviews. The quantitative results show that self-efficacy ($\beta = .508$), and emotions account for professional identity which fully mediated emotional experience and career intention ($\beta = .351$). Qualitative findings highlight systemic factors such as "mentorship validation" and "theory-practice disjuncture" that affect this sustainability pipeline. It is important to foster a strong professional identity to provide a resilient teaching force in Society 5.0. Recommendations for curriculum reengineering and emotional scaffolding are offered to take music talent into account, to have a sustained social impact and educational sustainability.*

Keywords: Professional Identity; Music Education; Teacher Self-Efficacy; Occupational Emotion; SDG 4

1. Introduction

1.1 The Imperative for Sustainable Education

The discussion of sustainability on a global scale has moved beyond the environmental realm to address sustainability of the human capital and societies. Under UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), especially the recruitment, training and retention of good teachers are recognized as powerful drivers for social progress. Yet, China's music education suffers a "sustainability crisis" with high attrition rates of new music teachers. Leaving aside pedagogical skills, it is critical to zoom in on the internal psychological forces, namely, Self-Efficacy and Professional Identity, that collectively underpin a teacher's career over time (Bandura, 1997; Beijaard et al., 2004).

This study's key theme goes hand in hand with SDG 4's target for achieving inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all; music education offers the means for developing creativity, awareness and cultural outlook and whole

human potential: the three pillars of SDG 4's human-centred vision. In particular, SDG 4c makes for more supply of qualified teachers, such as through effective teacher training and effective retention policies, which are straight echoes of this research's motivation to resolve the music education labour market crisis in China. By seeking to unpack how teaching self-efficacy, occupational emotions and professional identity contribute to career intentions of pre-service music teachers, our study responses to SDG 4 call to develop sustainable teacher education systems. It is acknowledged that sustainability of the music education workforce is not a matter just of numbers, but also about developing psychologically resilient and robust teachers who can endure their work over time, which is the essence of quality music education is still available to students and is supportive to the overall aim of SDG 4 in creating and expanding an inclusive system of life-long learning.

1.2 Research Background

With the rapid pace of technology, education is no longer simply about knowledge transmission but building human-centric values and creativity. Beijing's conservatories, the premier training grounds, are in the forefront of this transformation. Yet, pre-service teachers usually experience a "theory–practice disjuncture" as they move from being a performer to being a teacher (Latukefu & Pollard, 2022). There is an especially strong disjunctive mismatch between intensive musical training and the complex emotional demands of the classroom, thereby presenting a particularly strong threat to teachers' professional career paths (Hall & Silvey, 2025).

1.3 Problem Statement

Although the technical skills of music students in Beijing were high, very little research has been done about their psychological readiness for long-term teaching (Mateos-Moreno, 2022). Yet if the occupational emotions and professional identity of these students are not recognised in the educational system during their childhood years, the educational system runs a continuous drain of talents (Snell & Burton, 2024). What is most significant about this study is that it offers empirical evidence as to how to build a sustainable professional identity. By learning the predictive power of teaching self-efficacy, we can put the next generation of music teachers in a strong position to weather social pressures of a new landscape (Ramsey et al., 2024).

For this reason, two problems are related and demand to be investigated: the first is that there is no systematic data available about what professional identity is at the current level and shape of conservatory music-education majors in Beijing; the second is that we have no explanatory evidence from studies on how teacher self-efficacy and occupational emotions interact to reinforce or attenuate that identity, and impact students' intentions to go into or avoid school teaching. Combining large-scale survey analysis with in-depth interviews, our study seeks to make clearer these psychological and emotional pathways, giving evidence to both tailor curricula, practicum, structures and national teacher-education policy, the purpose of which was to enhance their professional identity and diminish attrition in early career among future music teachers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theories, social cognitive theory and self-efficacy, have a theoretical foundation of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), which suggests that people's belief in their own capability is what drives them and influences professional persistence. For sustainable education,

Teaching Self-Efficacy (TSE) is a prerequisite to lifelong career resilience. Like Bandura (1995), one understands perceived self-efficacy to mean beliefs about one's capability to organize and execute courses of action in such a way as to obtain specific attainments. For pre-service music teachers, this type of confidence concerns transition from stage to classroom which is often complicated by their hybrid identity as both performer and teacher (Long, 2023).

2.2 Occupational Emotions and Career

Commitment Sustainability in teaching is closely attached to the emotional condition of teachers. Emotions are important in terms of teachers' emotional understanding of their roles as demonstrated by Snell and Burton (2024) and Zembylas (2003). Positive emotions are psychological capital that supports professional identity; persistent negative emotions, or emotional labour, also results in early attrition (Hargreaves, 2000), robbing continuity of the teaching workforce (SDG 4).

2.3 Professional Identity as a Sustainable Construct

Professional identity is interpreted as “the ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpreting of experiences” (Beijaard et al., 2004). For music education, the professional identity of students is particularly intricate as students must deal with the “musician-teacher tension” (Lewis, 2024). Similarly, with the Sustain Impact 2026 theme, a powerful sense of professional identity is seen as a “sustainable output” of higher education. Using an identity lens (Gee, 2000), how pre-service teachers shift from from the periphery to full participation in their community of practice can be understood (Wenger, 1998).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design: A Convergent Mixed-Methods Approach

These explorations can ensure the social impact and practical relevance of findings: hence, the study utilized a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). So this design is particularly well suited to complex educational issues as it offers both statistical trends and lived experiences.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Quantitative Phase: for the quantitative phase, the targeted population was senior undergraduate students of music education in two key conservatories in Beijing. The size of calculated sample is consistent with a formula from Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for good representation. At the scheduled class, 280 questionnaires were distributed in person and 250 were effective responses (usable response rate: 89.3%).

Questionnaire: the questionnaire used in the study was structured and filled in by 250 senior undergraduate students in music education at two conservatories in Beijing (Conservatory A and B). It quantitatively measured four core constructs—professional identity, teacher self-efficacy, teacher occupation-related emotion, and teacher career intention. Survey data were also tested using hierarchical regression and mediation models and confirmed significant predictive relationships and the mediating effect of professional identity between psychological factors and future career intentions.

Qualitative Phase: for the next qualitative phase, 20 respondents were purposively selected from the respondent pool for quantitative respondents. The selection aimed to obtain maximum variation across each of the main dimensions from the survey data, such as aspects of professional identity (high, medium, low), career intentions, teacher self-efficacy, musical

specializations (for example, singing, piano, Western/Chinese instruments) and so on. Sampling strategy in the qualitative phase was geared towards the range of experiences and point of view, sampling continued until saturation of theory and credibility.

3.3 Data Analysis and Rigor

Quantitative data were analyzed using regression and mediation models (Hayes, 2018) to test the hypothesized relationships between variables. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify patterns related to the sustainability of professional identity. This integrated approach ensures that the "Real-World Impact" of the research is grounded in both breadth and depth of evidence. This study strictly observed the ethical principles for social science research. Quantitative and qualitative participants were sent details of an informed consent form before signing up that explained what the study was about, how data were collected, possible risks (nonexistent in this study) and rights. Students gave themselves the right to voluntarily withdraw at any stage without penalty.

For quantitative data, questionnaires were distributed anonymously and no personal information (e.g. name, student ID) was gathered to ensure anonymity. In qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were only recorded (with audio recording) with verbal and written consent of the participants and all participant quotes were kept anonymous using pseudonyms (for example, P09, V14) to protect their identity. Raw data (questionnaire data, interview recordings and transcripts) were stored in a password-protected digital store; only the research team members had access to them. After the data analysis, all of the original data will be kept for 5 years according to the guidelines of the institutions, and then be destroyed properly. On the other hand, this ethical framework enabled us to ensure that the dignity, freedom, and privacy of our study participants were protected while the integrity and reputation of our research process were also safeguarded.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Quantitative Results: Predictive Mechanisms of Professional Identity

Quantitative Mechanisms Inferential analysis reveals Teaching Self-Efficacy (TSE) as a primary predictor of Professional Identity ($\beta = .508$, $p < .001$), supporting the socio-cognitive view that task-specific confidence is foundational to identity formation (Bandura, 1997). Further, the model validates that professional identity fully mediates the relationship between occupational emotion and career intention ($\beta = .351$). This emphasizes the point that emotional well-being supports the workforce only when embodied in a formal professional self-concept, consistent with the "psychological capital" requirements for the educational sector (SDG 4).

4.2 Qualitative Insights: The Narrative of Professional Sustainability

Thematic analysis highlighted Mentorship and Practicum Validation as the two legs of professional development. Participants emphasised the explicit validation from their mentor makes their abstract confidence into a concrete musician-teacher identity. Conversely, the reported theory-practice disjuncture where performance-oriented training had poor classroom relevance was the systemic roadblock. Bracketing this gap is essential for social impact; successful practicum experiences served as catalysts for a sense of social responsibility, reinforcing the commitment to stay in the profession.

4.3 Predictor of Professional Identity

The convergence of data suggests that professional identity is a "socially accomplished identity" developed through scaffolded experience. To achieve SDG 4 goals, the "leaks" in the teacher sustainability pipeline must be addressed by aligning conservatory curricula with the human-centric demands of Society 5.0.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to further analyze the prediction effect of teacher self-efficacy and occupational emotion on professional identity, professional identity as the dependent variable and teacher self-efficacy and occupational emotion as independent variables. The focus of this analysis was to confirm H1 (teacher self-efficacy positively predicts professional identity) and H2 (occupational emotion positively predicts professional identity). The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of Predictors of Professional Identity (N=250)

Predictors	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	Standardized Coefficient (β)	t Value	p Value	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)
Constant	0.528	0.186	-	2.843	.005	-
Teacher Self-Efficacy	0.412	0.045	0.508	9.156	<.001	1.32
Occupational Emotion	0.265	0.048	0.329	5.521	<.001	1.28

Note: Categorical control variables (e.g. gender, conservatory affiliations), musical specializations) have been dummy-coded with the following reference groups: (i) female for gender, (ii) Conservatory A for conservatory affiliation, (iii) vocal music for musical specialization. These control variables were also included in Step 1 of the hierarchical regression but were removed in the final model because they are nonsignificant (gender p = .421; affiliation p-values range .103–.285; specialization p-values range .210–.680).

Some assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, and no problem of multicollinearity were checked before running the regression: scatter plots of predictors and outcome verified the linearity of the predictors; residual analysis demonstrated homogeneity of the variance (Breusch-Pagan test, p = .123); and the variance inflation factors (VIFs) for both predictors were low (< 2.0), indicating no multicollinearity.

4.4 Results for RQ1: Present State of Professional Identity

RQ1: "What is the current state of professional identity of pre-service music teachers in Beijing conservatories?" Descriptive statistics for core variables related to professional identity and categorical distribution of career intention are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Core Variables

Core Variables	Number of Items	Scale Type	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Key Item Examples (M±SD)
Professional Identity	6	1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree	4.02	0.58	"Career Clarity" (4.31±0.62); "Self-Doubt" (2.18±0.89, reverse-coded)
Teacher Self-Efficacy	8	1=No Confidence at All to 5=Extremely Confident	3.78	0.64	"Clear Music Theorist" (3.92±0.68); "Classroom Management " (3.55±0.72)
Occupational Emotion	5	1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree	3.95	0.61	"Confident Future Teacher " (4.12±0.63); "Teaching Anxieties" (2.33±0.91, reverse-coded)
Career Intention (Likert Index)	3	1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree	3.86	0.71	-

Table 3: Distribution of Intended Career (N=250)

Intended career categories	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Intended to be a school music teacher (definitely)	120	48.0
Intended to be a school music teacher (probably)	67	26.8
Undecided	32	12.8
Do not intend to be a school music teacher	31	12.4

As shown in Table 2, the mean of the scores of pre-service music teachers' professional identities is 4.02 (SD=0.58), higher than 3.0, the midpoint of the 5-point scale; mean scores of teachers' self-efficacy (3.78±0.64), teachers' occupational emotion (3.95±0.61), teachers' career intention (3.86±0.71) are all above the midpoint. Table 3 shows that 74.8% of participants wanted to become a school music teacher (48.0% definitely; 26.8% probably), 12.8% were undecided and 12.4% were unwilling to be school music teachers.

4.5 Results for RQ2 and Hypotheses H1, H2: Associations of Self-efficacy, Emotions and Identity

RQ2: "To what extent is teacher self-efficacy and occupational emotions related to the strength of professional identity?" and tests Hypotheses H1 (teacher self-efficacy positively predicts professional identity) and H2 (occupational emotion positively predicts professional identity). Additionally, hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted using professional identity as the dependent variable, teacher self-efficacy and occupational emotion as independent variables. The overall model was significant ($R^2 = .452$, Adjusted $R^2 = .446$, $F = 90.210$, $p < .001$). As shown in Table 1, H1 and H2 are supported. Teacher self-efficacy ($\beta = .508$, $p < .001$) and occupational emotion ($\beta = .329$, $p < .001$) significantly predicted professional identity.

4.6 Results for RQ3 and Hypotheses H3, H4, H5: Professional Identity as a Mediator

RQ3: "Does professional identity mediate between teacher self-efficacy, occupational emotion, and career intentions?" and verifies Hypotheses H3 (professional identity positively predicts career intention), H4 (professional identity partially mediates the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and career intention), and H5 (professional identity fully mediates the relationship between occupational emotion and career intention). Hayes' (2018) PROCESS macro (Model 4) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples was used for mediation effect testing, with gender and musical specialization as control variables. The results of the mediated effects are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis Results for Hypotheses H4 and H5 (N=250)

Mediation Model	Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p Value	Indirect Effect (β)	95% Confidence Interval (CI)	Mediation Type
	Total Effect (Self-Efficacy → Career Intention)	0.428	<.001	-	-	-
Model 1: Teacher Self-Efficacy → Professional Identity → Career Intention (H4)	Path a (Self-Efficacy → Professional Identity)	0.508	<.001	-	-	-
	Path b (Professional Identity → Career Intention) (H3)	0.364	<.001	-	-	-
Model 2: Occupational Emotion → Professional Identity → Career Intention (H5)	Direct Effect (Self-Efficacy → Career Intention)	0.243	.001	0.185	[0.108, 0.274]	Partial Mediation
	Indirect Effect	-	-	0.185	[0.108, 0.274]	-

	Total Effect (Occupational Emotion → Career Intention)	0.491	<.001	-	-	-
Model 2: Occupational Emotion → Professional Identity → Career Intention (H5)	Path a (Occupational Emotion → Professional Identity)	0.329	<.001	-	-	-
	Path b (Professional Identity → Career Intention) (H3)	0.364	<.001	-	-	-
	Direct Effect (Occupational Emotion → Career Intention)	0.138	.089	0.351	[0.246, 0.464]	Full Mediation
	Indirect Effect	-	-	0.351	[0.246, 0.464]	-

Follow-up studies on mediation answer the mediation study’s questions about the critical bridging role of professional identity and also support H4 (partial mediation) and H5 (full mediation) in that respect.

First, validation of H3: effect of professional identity. Professional identity had a direct and significant positive predictive effect on the teaching career intention ($\beta = .364, p <.001$). Descriptively, 75% of the students who scored high on professional identity (≥ 4.2) had a clear/probable intention to be a teacher.

Second, validation of H4 (partial mediation): the total effect of teacher self-efficacy on career intention was significant ($\beta = .428, p <.001$). When the mediator of professional identity was included, both the direct effect ($\beta = .243, p <.01$) and the indirect effect ($\beta = .185, 95\% \text{ CI } [.108, .274]$) were significant. And this finding also suggested that self-efficacy predicted career intention directly, but also indirectly via boosting occupational identity: it showed partial mediation and supported H4.

Third, validation H5 (full mediation): the total effect of occupational emotion on career intention was significant ($\beta = .491, p <.001$). After accounting for professional identity, the effect of occupational emotion became non-significant (direct effect: $\beta = .138, p = .089$), and the indirect effect was significant ($\beta = .351, 95\% \text{ CI } [.246, .464]$). Additionally, this implied positive occupational emotion for teaching intention completely through the effect on identity, and further supported a completely mediated effect and confirmed H5. Comparing indirect effects of size of mediated part also showed that the effect of occupational emotion on career intention does not heavily depend on the route of identity formation.

4.7 Results for RQ4: Core Themes and Typical Narratives

The following qualitative themes revealed three main factors affecting students’ acquisition of professional identity: 1) practicum experiences, 2) coursework relevance, and 3) quality of mentorship. Building on this, specific, targeted recommendations for program improvement are offered.

4.7.1 Theme 1: Practicum as a Turning Point for Identity Development

Practicum experiences were mentioned the most frequently and were the most influential to form pre-service music teachers' professional identity. All of the 20 interviewees described their school placement as a pivotal moment in which they went from seeing themselves as "music student" to "early teacher"; this article outlined two main and contrasting processes by which practicum helped them to form a new identity.

a) Pathway 1: Validation Moments

Some validation moments were events or experiences that strengthened individual participants' sense of competence and belonging with regard to the role of a teacher. Three broad sub-themes arose. First, independent teaching autonomy: having full autonomy to design and teach lessons was indicative of teacher autonomy. Second, targeted positive feedback: reading positive feedback from a mentor, or even from a school employee, validated the changing expertise of participants. Third, student engagement and progress: seeing their students' progress was hugely motivational to the teachers' job satisfaction.

b) Pathway 2: Theory-Practice Disjuncture

Participants experienced a significant discrepancy between theoretical expectations and classroom realities when previously pre-conceived understandings of teaching were shattered by previously unforeseen crises in the classroom—often related to lack of pre-service experience in theoretical training. Other common ingredients were curriculum mismatch and classroom management frustration. The expectation-reality divide was cured by mentoring. Without support, it created doubts; with support, it created learning.

c) Structures of the Practica of Identity Building

Successful practica experiences with affirmation also shared three structures. First, success graduated autonomy: mentors gradually increased participating student's teaching autonomy. Second, aligned mentorship: cooperating teachers, who were peers in the participant's musical specialisation, could provide more relevant instrument-specific support. Third, structured reflection: there was structured reflection also in the post-lesson talk about practice and theory.

But practica without such resources created confusion over who one was, who one could be. There were harmful features. First, passive observation: only administrative duties without teaching practice. Second, unclear expectations: being unclear about the role of the participant. Third, less potent connections: mentors who failed to keep up their mentoring or were absent.

4.7.2 Theme 2: Coursework Is Fundamental, but Hollow

Assembling themes that emerge from this study, all interviewees experienced with respect to value ascribed to ideas of pedagogy and education through music courses came to experiences some kind of disjunction with classroom practice as one of their top themes, one way or another experienced by 17 of 20. Their stories were pretty much unanimous in explaining how, even though courses do indeed provide useful theoretical grounding, this often does not translate to classroom skills.

a) Perceived Value: Theoretical Scaffold and Perspective as Working Professionals

Interviewees also mentioned that coursework was very important to shape professional identity and to build up an understanding framework. First, theoretical framing: course content informed participants' understanding of real-world situations. Second, professional belonging: coursework reminded students of music education as a separate field.

b) The Central Gap: The Curriculum Disconnection

Despite this being a value, for most participants, the coursework was not concerned with the immediate problems of teaching in the real world. There were major gaps. First, skills taught in the inappropriately focused classroom management module: course didn't teach students how to deal with real world human behaviours. Second, too little preparation for teaching lessons that change: courses were made toward 'ideal' students, not other types of students.

Third, passive learning formats: the gap between theory and practice widened with the structure of training (lecture model of training).

That theory–practice gap was even pronounced among students learning traditional Chinese instruments (e.g. Guzheng, Erhu). As many of the interviewees commented, pedagogy textbooks and curricular examples mostly focused on Western classical music—piano, violin, orchestras, but rarely on the different pedagogical needs, repertoire, or cultural contexts of Chinese traditional music. So, for Chinese instrument majors, the disconnect was not merely between theory and practice, but between a Western-centred teaching paradigm and the ways of teaching Chinese music in Beijing schools—a gap that was probably being amplified by their sense of occupational uncertainty and identity strain. These gaps were glaring, particularly in terms of students of traditional Chinese instruments.

c) Student Feedback

Proposals for improvement Interviews describe particular curricular change proposals towards greater practical relevance based on their identified gaps. First, embedded practical assignments: some students suggested a practical exercise such as practical assignments or, for example, peer review or microteaching, rather than doing theory. But to put theory to use, the problems turning up in a classroom were brought to the classroom. Second, creating coursework-practicum loops: students asked for more opportunities for deepening school linkage experiences and thus more cyclebacking loops of practicum and coursework.

4.7.3 Theme 3: Mentorship Shapes Confidence and Identity

For 18 of the 20 interviews, quality of the mentor’s teaching was something central to the interview for the interviewees that related to teaching self-efficacy and teacher teaching self identity. The interviewees therefore generally reported that the mentorship influence their teacher self in different, but related, ways.

a) Granting or Withholding Legitimacy: “Being Treated as a Real Teacher”

The most cited factor was about the extent to which mentors treated participants as real members of the teaching team (contributor). first, granting or denying legitimacy: “being treated as a real teacher.” Second, legitimising: about to get important work to do, feeling that your voice is valued role adjustment. Third, denial of legitimacy: on the other side, mentors limiting participation and devaluing inputs stood on “outsider” ground.

b) Influence of Feedback Style on Self-Efficacy

Participants' notions of their ability to teach were very sensitive to their mentors' input. First, constructive, strength-acknowledging feedback: confidence was boosted by success-acknowledging feedback that also imparted concrete and achievable growth feedback. Second, either criticism or no feedback: self-efficacy was uprooted by feedback that neither gave suggestions about an improvement nor any feedback at all.

c) Role Modelling: Bridging the “Musician” and “Teacher” Identities

Mentors were important role models in helping participants to resolve any potential role conflict between performer and teacher selves. First, integrative models: the mentor was successful at resolving the identity conflict to help pianists know how to apply their musical knowledge to direct their instructional choices. Second, divisive models: mentors who shone a spotlight either consciously or unconsciously on performance instead of on instruction toughened the belief that there was a choice of identities to be made.

d) Institutional Narratives and Peer Context

Meanwhile, for the institutional culture and the values conveyed by the mentors, they enacted an environment that ingested or rejected the teacher identity. First, “performer first” versus “teacher first” stories: participants felt a lot happier when their mentors valued teaching as a job the way they regarded performing. Second, peer comparison and institutional culture. The communal approach of Conservatory A generated community cohesion.

e) Career Intention Outcomes

These various experiences of mentorship with the participant career outcomes partially speak to this question. On the one hand, supportive mentorship and firm intention: participants who had a firm, clear intention to teach felt supported by their mentors and believed in by them. On the other hand, short mental recesses and doubted intention: participants experienced uncertainty with doubted mentorship.

4.7.4 Theme 4: Recommendations for Program Improvement

Of the 20 interviewees for whom relevant suggestions had been made by the interviewees themselves in their comment on their training experience, 19 gave such relevant comments. They then summarized their suggestions into the following four categories:

a) Earlier, Scaffolded, and More Frequent Practical Exposure

What they often agreed with in response was that the real teaching context could be offered to them earlier, and step by step. As the following scaffolded progression was one of the team's specific recommendations. First year: observational immersion in partner school, that is, observing current music teachers, for a week. Second year: the micro-teaching modules were focused on short lesson in small group, peers or children, including video recording, and video recordings and giving feedback. Third year: collaborative teaching with field experience, that is, students co-plan and co-teach lessons with cooperating teachers; students then take over complete responsibility.

b) Formalized Mentor Training and Support Systems

Students came up with systematic support and accountability forms. First, required mentor training: mentor university student tutors and cooperating teachers in schools receive training in best practices on giving strength-based feedback and graduated autonomy in the practice. Second, specialized matching: the matching of students with mentors who have matched level musical specialization-specific instrument. Third, regular check-ins by mentors and their students: regular reflection diaries, student end-of-practicum evaluations of the effectiveness of their mentors. These are examples of structured accountability and reflection.

c) Emotional Preparation Incorporated in the Course

Students particularly pointed out that emotional preparation has to be formally embodied and they are as important as learning a particular skill set. First, pre-practicum workshops: in these workshops participants learnt about stress management and dealing with student conduct, as well as conflict with their “musician/teacher” identity. Faculty-led peer support groups are the outlet for talking about any emotional concerns and working together on finding answers. Second, embedding emotional reflection in mentorship: helping students to reinterpret their teaching dis-satisfaction as an opportunity rather than seeing it as their failure.

d) Specialized and Clarifying Career Guidance to Address the "Musician-Teacher" Tension Participants called for “more direct, explicit career guidance that is separate from performance guidance” as treatment for career indecision. First, full workshops: for music majors interested in teaching music, these workshops are dedicated to topics such as valuing of a music education career, career issues (lead teacher, curriculum developer, etc.), K-12 certification. Second, different role model panels: teachers with different experiences, for example, performing musicians who teach or experts in traditional instruments, etc., demonstrate that one can ‘cross-dress’ and succeed. Third, offering different kinds of internship experience: in cities and outlying rural schools, in community music centres, or somewhere else to help students to see possible employment options that they may not have known existed.

With response to RQ4, a very clear set of two factors and an associated solution appeared. First, that there is, in fact, an importance and value built in to high-quality core experiences in which there is recognition and appropriate levels of challenge in practicum, and that mentoring is recognition and/or confidence boosting. Second, there clearly needs to be a greater alignment between the theory component and the practice component and, unless this is the case, there is a substantial barrier. Hence, there is a dominant message conveyed by participants’ recommendations concerning the need for more holistic and supportive learning environments with practices introduced from an early stage, more formalised mentoring, recognition of one’s emotional readiness and one’s career direction.

5. Conclusion

Towards a sustainable teaching force, this study empirically confirms that professional identity is the cornerstone of a sustainable music education workforce in Society 5.0. Integrating quantitative trends with qualitative narratives, these findings show that professional identity reflects not only the way that pre-service teachers see themselves but also how they literally draw on their psychological resources and training experiences towards making lifelong career intention. Quantitatively, professional identity was the strongest mediator and predictor. This sets professional identity not only as an outcome but also as a potent psychological engine converting confidence and emotion to career intention. Qualitatively, this engine is energised by experiential and relational processes. The recurrent theme in how mentorship legitimates the teacher role also suggests how identity is socially co-constructed—identity is strengthened when others view the pre-service teacher as a real teacher. Together, these lines of evidence make clear that professional identity is at the heart of the transition from conservatory training to teaching in the classroom. Also, it blends internal psychological assets (efficacy, emotion) with external training experience (practicum, mentoring, coursework) into a stable, enduring professional self. In Society 5.0—that they need adaptable, resilient, and human teachers—supporting a healthy professional identity is not optional, but necessary for enabling music teachers who will thrive through change and contributing to good and fair education.

Aligned with SDG 4 (Quality Education), this work provides a road map for lower dropout rates of students from arts education courses. With evidence for the full mediation effect of professional identity, this study thus indicated that “emotional labor” must become “professional pride” so as to ensure a stable source of qualified music teachers. However, this transition is important for the long-term cultural and social sustainability of any urban community in the world and providing long-term impact of musical talent to society.

These actions to connect theory for training to class and assessment needs are reform suggestions. First, curriculum and technology: conservatories must reengineer curricula to re-

bridge the “theory-practice disjuncture” and integrate technologies to increase students’ self-efficacy in new landscapes (Meng & Goopy, 2023). Second, mentorship and scaffolding: mentorship also must include emotional scaffolding to develop a musician-teacher identity, important to strengthening social-emotional skills (Jugović et al., 2025). Third, resilience modules: Programs would also benefit from psychological training of resilience, to moderate how identity crises typically contribute to professional burnout (Jiang & Zhu, 2024).

Future research will need to move beyond Beijing, however, and take into account diverse regional samples, in order to bring a holistic picture of educational sustainability and digital self-efficacy in China. Further longitudinal studies are needed to track the development of these constructs during the transition into full-time employment.

Acknowledgement

Acknowledgment: The author would like to express their heartfelt thanks and gratitude to UNITAR International University for their invaluable support. We extend our gratitude to all pre-service teachers and academic staff who participated in this study.

Conflict of Interest

We declare no conflict of interest.

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