

Research on the Reform of Mental Health Education and Teaching to Enhance the Professional Identity of Teacher Training Students in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: The professional identity of pre-service teachers plays a pivotal role in shaping their career commitment, motivation, and long-term retention in the teaching profession. Concurrently, psychological well-being is increasingly recognized as a critical factor influencing identity formation, emotional resilience, and adaptive coping during teacher education. This review synthesizes current research on the interplay between professional identity and mental health among pre-service teachers, identifying key individual, educational, and social factors that impact identity development. The discussion highlights common psychological challenges, including stress, anxiety, cognitive overload, and emotional labor, and explores protective resources such as self-efficacy, social support, mindfulness, and positive psychology interventions. Reform strategies are examined, emphasizing curriculum integration of mental health education, pedagogical innovations such as reflective and experiential learning, and supportive practicum structures. The review further outlines implications for higher education institutions, including the creation of holistic psychological support ecosystems, identity-focused teacher training, and context-specific interventions. Finally, future directions emphasize longitudinal studies, digital and AI-supported reflective platforms, and culturally tailored models to optimize professional identity formation. Overall, the review underscores the necessity of linking mental health education with teacher preparation to foster resilient, committed, and competent educators.

Keywords: professional identity; pre-service teachers; psychological well-being; teacher education; mental health education; pedagogical reform

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Research Context

In many regions of the world, the shortage of qualified teachers has become a persistent structural challenge for education systems. This issue extends beyond numerical deficits and reflects a deeper decline in the willingness of young adults to view teaching as a sustainable and fulfilling long-term career. A growing number of university students, including pre-service teachers, report concerns about heavy workloads, emotional pressures, limited career mobility, and increasing public expectations placed upon educators. These concerns coincide with rising psychological stress among higher education students more broadly, including anxiety, academic burnout, emotional fatigue, and uncertainty about future employment prospects. In teacher education programs, these pressures are particularly acute, as pre-service teachers must navigate both academic demands and the psychological transition from student identity to future educator identity. Consequently, the cultivation of a strong and resilient professional identity has emerged as a critical priority in teacher preparation.

1.2. Importance of Professional Identity and Psychological Well-Being

Professional identity is widely recognized as a foundational construct in teacher development, shaping how pre-service teachers understand, internalize, and commit to their future professional roles. It encompasses role cognition, value alignment, emotional engagement, and the perceived meaningfulness of teaching. A coherent and positive professional identity not only strengthens intrinsic motivation but also enhances persistence, instructional confidence, and resilience during teaching practicum. Pre-service teachers who possess a well-developed identity are more capable of coping with classroom stress, maintaining enthusiasm, and adapting to complex school environments. In contrast, fragmented identity development is associated with diminished commitment, reduced self-efficacy, and higher risks of career withdrawal [1].

At the same time, psychological health plays a decisive role in identity formation. The emotional demands of practicum, the cognitive load of coursework, and the challenge of assuming professional responsibilities can create substantial psychological strain. When such strain is not effectively managed, it disrupts the consolidation of professional identity by undermining confidence, weakening motivation, and producing negative beliefs about one's suitability for the teaching profession. As a result, psychological health education has gained prominence as a necessary component of teacher preparation. Beyond offering emotional support, it provides the skills needed for stress regulation, reflective self-understanding, interpersonal communication, and resilience—all of which directly facilitate the development of a stable and positive professional identity.

1.3. Purpose, Scope, and Structure of the Review

Given the interdependence between psychological health and identity formation, this review aims to synthesize current knowledge on how psychological factors, educational environments, and social contexts jointly shape pre-service teachers' professional identity. The goal is to offer a comprehensive and integrative understanding of the mechanisms through which psychological well-being influences career attitudes, commitment, and self-concept in teacher education [2]. Specifically, the review examines four central questions: how professional identity is conceptualized within teacher education research; which individual and institutional factors most strongly influence its development; how psychological challenges such as stress, anxiety, and emotional labor affect the identity trajectory of pre-service teachers; and what types of pedagogical and institutional reforms are most effective in fostering identity development through psychological health education.

To address these questions, the review is organized into several cohesive sections. Section 2 discusses the theoretical foundations of professional identity and psychological health education, establishing a conceptual framework for understanding their interrelationship. Section 3 identifies the primary factors influencing identity formation, including personal dispositions, pedagogical training experiences, cultural expectations, and institutional support. Section 4 explores the psychological risks and challenges commonly encountered in teacher education, analyzing how these factors shape or hinder identity development. Section 5 evaluates major reform strategies that integrate mental health education into curriculum design, pedagogy, and practicum support systems. Finally, Section 6 summarizes the key insights, outlines practical implications for teacher education programs, and offers directions for future research [3].

Through this structure, the introduction highlights the necessity of linking mental health education with the formation of professional identity among pre-service teachers. It argues that strengthening identity development requires not only pedagogical innovation but also a holistic psychological support framework that enables future teachers to navigate the emotional, cognitive, and practical demands of the profession with confidence and long-term commitment.

2. Conceptual Framework: Professional Identity and Psychological Well-Being

2.1. Understanding Professional Identity in Teacher Education

Professional identity within teacher education is widely understood as a multidimensional construct that integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements. At its core, the concept encompasses how pre-service teachers perceive the role of a teacher, the extent to which they internalize the profession's values, and the emotional meaning they attach to teaching as a vocation. Role cognition constitutes the foundational layer, referring to the individual's understanding of professional expectations, responsibilities, and ethical standards. This cognitive dimension shapes how pre-service teachers interpret the nature of teaching and influences their capacity to engage meaningfully with pedagogical tasks [4]. Value identification represents a deeper level of identity development, as it involves alignment between personal beliefs and the normative values of the teaching profession, such as care, equity, and social responsibility. Emotional engagement further enriches this structure by reflecting the affective commitment to teaching, the desire to contribute to students' growth, and the sense of belonging within the educational community. These elements collectively influence the behavioral intention to teach, which reflects the individual's willingness to enter and persist in the profession [5].

Importantly, professional identity formation is not a static acquisition but a dynamic and developmental process shaped over time through coursework, practicum experiences, and continuous self-reflection. During formal coursework, pre-service teachers encounter pedagogical theories, subject knowledge, and professional standards that provide the cognitive foundation for identity construction [6]. Practicum placements serve as critical experiential contexts where theoretical understanding is tested, challenged, and adapted in real classroom environments. These experiences expose pre-service teachers to authentic instructional demands, enabling them to internalize the complexities of teaching and evaluate their personal suitability for the role. Self-reflection, often facilitated through reflective journals, mentoring conversations, or peer discussions, allows individuals to make sense of these experiences by integrating emotional responses, self-perceptions, and evolving professional aspirations. Through this cycle of learning, practice, and reflection, identity becomes a fluid and accumulating process, continually shaped by psychological states, interpersonal interactions, and institutional environments [7].

2.2. Psychological Health Education in Higher Education

Psychological health education in higher education aims to promote emotional well-being, adaptive coping, and reflective self-awareness among university students. Its core principles emphasize preventive mental health, early identification of psychological difficulties, and the cultivation of emotional competencies necessary for personal and professional success [8]. Pre-service teachers, due to the dual demands of academic study and professional preparation, often face distinct psychological pressures that require targeted support. Stress is one of the most prevalent issues, arising from academic workload, teaching practicum challenges, and the anxiety associated with evaluating one's competence in real school contexts. Anxiety manifests through worries about performance, classroom management, student behavior, and evaluation by mentor teachers. Emotional exhaustion may emerge when pre-service teachers feel overwhelmed by the emotional demands of teaching or when they perceive a mismatch between their expectations of the profession and the realities of classroom life. Fluctuations in self-efficacy are also common, as individuals oscillate between confidence and doubt depending on feedback, task difficulty, and interpersonal experiences in practicum settings [9].

These psychological issues are not isolated phenomena; they exert a direct and measurable influence on the formation and consolidation of professional identity. Several mechanisms explain this connection. First, psychological well-being affects cognitive

processing: individuals experiencing high stress or anxiety may interpret practicum challenges more negatively, leading to weakened role cognition and reduced internalization of professional values. Second, emotional states shape motivation and engagement; positive emotions such as enthusiasm and satisfaction enhance emotional investment in teaching, while negative emotions can lead to withdrawal and decreased commitment. Third, psychological resources—such as resilience, emotional regulation, and coping strategies—play a mediating role in transforming teaching experiences into positive identity development. When pre-service teachers possess strong psychological resources, they are more likely to view difficulties as opportunities for growth, maintain confidence, and form a more coherent and stable professional identity. Conversely, inadequate coping resources contribute to fragmented identity development and increased likelihood of career detachment. These mechanisms highlight why psychological health education is a crucial component of teacher preparation, as it strengthens the very foundations upon which professional identity is built [10].

Because the development of professional identity and psychological well-being are so deeply intertwined, it is helpful to summarize their key points of interaction. The major components of professional identity—role cognition, value identification, emotional engagement, and behavioral intention—each have corresponding psychological correlates that influence their development [11]. These correspondences can be illustrated clearly in Table 1, which outlines the principal dimensions of identity and the psychological attributes that support or hinder their formation [12].

Table 1. Core Components of Professional Identity and Their Psychological Correlates.

Professional Identity Component	Description	Key Psychological Correlates
Role Cognition	Understanding of responsibilities, expectations, and professional standards	Cognitive clarity, stress tolerance, self-efficacy
Value Identification	Alignment of personal beliefs with teaching values and social mission	Emotional stability, personal meaning, motivation
Emotional Engagement	Affective commitment to teaching and sense of belonging to the profession	Positive affect, resilience, emotional regulation
Behavioral Intention to Teach	Willingness to enter and persist in the teaching profession	Career motivation, confidence, psychological well-being

3. Influencing Factors Affecting Pre-service Teachers' Professional Identity

Understanding the development of professional identity among pre-service teachers requires recognizing the multiple layers of influence that shape how future educators see themselves, evaluate their career prospects, and internalize the meaning of becoming a teacher. These influences operate simultaneously at the individual, institutional, and sociocultural levels, forming a complex ecological system in which psychological well-being plays a mediating and sometimes moderating role. To illustrate the key dimensions involved, Table 2 summarizes the major influencing factors and their expected impacts on the professional identity of pre-service teachers. Building on this overview, the following subsections provide a more detailed conceptual discussion of how each category of factors shapes identity formation and interacts with mental-health-related processes.

Table 2. Key Influencing Factors and Their Expected Impact on Pre-service Teachers' Professional Identity.

Category	Specific Factors	Expected Impact on Professional Identity
Individual Factors	Motivation to teach	Strong intrinsic motivation enhances role commitment and long-term identity stability; extrinsic motivation may lead to weaker identity coherence.
	Personality traits	Emotional stability, conscientiousness, and openness support positive identity development; high neuroticism may weaken self-efficacy and role clarity.
	Emotional regulation	Adaptive strategies (e.g., cognitive reappraisal) strengthen confidence and reduce stress; maladaptive strategies undermine identity formation.
	Resilience and optimism	Promote persistence, positive expectations, and constructive responses to challenges, reinforcing identity growth.
	Mental health literacy	Enhances coping ability, self-awareness, and psychological adjustment, contributing to a more integrated professional identity.
Educational & Institutional Factors	Quality of pedagogical training	Well-designed, practice-oriented coursework strengthens self-efficacy and alignment with the teacher role.
	Learning climate	Supportive academic environments foster belonging and professional affirmation; negative climates increase anxiety and role confusion.
	Teacher–student relationships	Positive interactions enhance engagement, confidence, and identification with professional norms.
	Mentoring quality	Effective mentors provide guidance, feedback, and emotional support, promoting stable identity development.
Social & Environmental Factors	Practicum design	Authentic, well-structured teaching experiences enhance role understanding; poorly managed practicum increases stress and uncertainty.
	Public respect for teaching	High social prestige strengthens pride and career commitment; low prestige weakens identity.
	Employment prospects	Stable career opportunities enhance motivation and future-oriented identity integration; uncertain prospects reduce commitment.
	Policy environment	Supportive policies increase perceived professional value and reinforce identity.
	Cultural and family expectations	Encouraging families reinforce confidence and motivation; excessive pressure may create identity conflict and psychological stress.

3.1. Individual Factors

At the individual level, internal psychological characteristics and personal motivations form the foundation of identity development. One of the most fundamental components is the motivation to teach, which varies widely among pre-service teachers. Those driven by intrinsic motives—such as a desire to support young learners, contribute to society, or pursue personal fulfillment—tend to develop stronger and more stable

professional identities. In contrast, students who enter teacher-education programs due to external incentives, limited career options, or parental expectations may show weaker identification and more fragile professional commitment.

Personality traits also influence identity formation. Individuals with higher levels of emotional stability, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness generally adapt more positively to the demands of teacher-education programs. These traits enhance interpersonal sensitivity, classroom communication, and reflective thinking, which collectively strengthen identity coherence. Conversely, traits such as neuroticism may amplify stress responses, hinder self-efficacy, and undermine the internalization of a positive teacher role.

Central to psychological functioning is the ability to manage emotions constructively. Emotional regulation strategies, such as cognitive reappraisal and problem-focused coping, allow pre-service teachers to process academic pressures, practicum challenges, and interpersonal conflicts more effectively. These adaptive strategies are closely tied to a stable sense of competence and role clarity. In contrast, maladaptive strategies—avoidance, rumination, or emotional suppression—may lead to escalating stress, reduced teaching enthusiasm, and diminished professional affirmation.

Resilience and optimism represent additional protective factors. Resilient pre-service teachers can recover from setbacks, maintain effort under pressure, and reinterpret negative experiences as opportunities for growth. Optimism contributes to positive expectations about one's future teaching career, enhancing both career commitment and psychological well-being. Furthermore, mental health literacy—the ability to understand psychological problems, seek appropriate support, and apply preventive strategies—helps pre-service teachers cope with emotional challenges during training. Higher mental health literacy correlates with healthier self-perception and a more integrated professional identity. Altogether, these individual characteristics contribute substantially to the identity trajectory described in Table 2.

3.2. Educational and Institutional Factors

While personal attributes are important, the structure and quality of the educational environment strongly shape how pre-service teachers interpret their experiences and envision their future roles. A central institutional factor is the quality of pedagogical training. Programs that integrate theory with practice, encourage active engagement, and emphasize reflective learning tend to produce stronger identity alignment. Courses that feel outdated, overly theoretical, or disconnected from classroom realities may weaken students' confidence and enthusiasm for the profession.

The learning climate plays an equally pivotal role. Supportive academic environments—characterized by open communication, collaborative learning, and constructive feedback—help students develop a sense of belonging to the teaching community. In contrast, competitive or impersonal environments may generate anxiety, alienation, and reduced professional identification. Supportive teacher–student relationships can further promote psychological safety, authentic engagement, and positive self-evaluation. When faculty members demonstrate care, competence, and professional passion, they serve as identity models who shape students' expectations and aspirations.

A particularly powerful institutional factor is the quality of mentoring and practicum design. Effective mentoring provides pre-service teachers with professional guidance, emotional support, and opportunities for gradual responsibility-taking. When mentors demonstrate effective teaching behaviors, communicate realistic expectations, and encourage reflective practice, mentees develop stronger self-efficacy and confidence. Additionally, well-designed practicum placements allow students to experience authentic classroom dynamics, build relationships with pupils, and test their teaching skills in a structured way. Poorly organized practica—characterized by mismatched placements,

insufficient mentor support, or excessive workload—can create stress, uncertainty, and professional doubt, thereby undermining identity development. These educational influences, summarized in Table 2, interact closely with mental-health outcomes.

3.3. Social and Environmental Factors

Beyond the university context, broader social and environmental forces also shape pre-service teachers' professional identity. Public respect for teaching remains a decisive factor. In societies where teachers are highly valued, future educators often feel a sense of pride and social significance, which reinforces identity and career commitment. Conversely, when teaching is perceived as low-status or low-income work, pre-service teachers may experience identity conflict or ambivalence.

Employment prospects also contribute to identity formation. Stable career pathways, clear promotion systems, and competitive salaries increase the attractiveness of teaching and strengthen long-term commitment. In contrast, concerns about job scarcity, heavy workloads, or limited advancement opportunities may weaken motivation and create psychological stress. Policy support—such as investment in teacher education, incentives for high-quality teaching, or reforms that enhance professional autonomy—can further improve the overall identity climate.

Cultural expectations and family influence represent another layer of environmental impact. In collectivist contexts, families may hold strong beliefs about appropriate career pathways, exerting either positive encouragement or pressure. Supportive families can foster confidence and a sense of purpose, whereas overly controlling expectations may heighten stress and disrupt authentic identity formation.

Through the interaction of these individual, institutional, and sociocultural factors—summarized in Table 2—the professional identity of pre-service teachers emerges as a dynamic construct shaped by both psychological mechanisms and environmental conditions.

4. Mental Health Challenges and Their Impact on Identity Formation

The psychological landscape of pre-service teachers plays a decisive role in shaping how they construct, refine, and internalize their professional identity during teacher training. Compared with students in many other disciplines, pre-service teachers face unique emotional demands and performance expectations that intensify throughout coursework and practicum exposure. These mental health challenges not only influence short-term well-being but also have long-term implications for how individuals evaluate their suitability, confidence, and commitment to the teaching profession. To illustrate the nature of these challenges and their consequences, Table 3 summarizes the major psychological risks encountered by pre-service teachers and their typical impacts on professional identity development. Building on this overview, the following subsections examine these dynamics in greater depth.

Table 3. Common Psychological Challenges and Identity-related Consequences.

Psychological Challenge	Description	Identity-related Consequences
Practicum stress	Pressure arising from real classroom tasks, mentor expectations, and performance evaluation.	Reduced confidence, increased self-doubt, weaker identity consolidation.
Performance anxiety	Fear of failure, judgment, or negative evaluation during teaching demonstrations or assessments.	Lower career commitment and unstable identity development.

Emotional labor	Requirement to manage emotions and display positivity in teaching contexts.	Emotional fatigue that weakens enthusiasm and role engagement.
Role conflict	Tension among roles as student, trainee, and emerging teacher.	Confusion about professional self-concept and reduced identity clarity.
Cognitive overload	Excessive academic demands and difficulty integrating theory with practice.	Sense of incompetence and disrupted identity growth.
Burnout tendencies	Exhaustion, reduced motivation, and depersonalization.	Declining career intention and weakened professional identification.

4.1. Psychological Risks in Teacher Training

Teacher-education programs often expose pre-service teachers to a range of psychological stressors that emerge from academic pressures, practical teaching tasks, and interpersonal demands. One major source of strain is practicum stress, which arises when students first encounter real classrooms and must navigate instructional planning, student behavior, and evaluation from mentors or supervisors. Because practicum experiences serve as a pivotal moment for identity confirmation, any negative feedback, unexpected difficulties, or heavy responsibilities can intensify anxiety and self-doubt.

Another recurring challenge is performance anxiety, commonly triggered by teaching demonstrations, microteaching sessions, and high-stakes assessments that evaluate pedagogical ability. Pre-service teachers frequently report fear of failing, being judged by peers or mentors, and not meeting perceived professional standards. These feelings may accumulate over time, especially in highly evaluative training environments.

The emotional nature of teaching introduces additional psychological burdens. Emotional labor—the requirement to display patience, enthusiasm, and emotional stability regardless of personal feelings—can be mentally exhausting, particularly for individuals lacking adaptive coping skills or prior classroom experience. This emotional labor often coexists with role conflict, as pre-service teachers struggle to reconcile their identities as learners, student teachers, and emerging professionals simultaneously.

Beyond interpersonal and emotional demands, many pre-service teachers experience cognitive overload, resulting from complex coursework, heavy assignment loads, and the need to integrate diverse pedagogical theories with real-world practice. When combined with limited time and insufficient mentoring support, these conditions may lead to burnout tendencies, characterized by exhaustion, reduced motivation, and depersonalization. As summarized in Table 3, these psychological risks not only affect well-being but also shape the trajectory of identity development during training.

4.2. Consequences for Professional Identity

Unaddressed psychological distress can profoundly influence how pre-service teachers perceive their future roles. One of the most immediate consequences is a weakening of career commitment. When teacher candidates frequently experience stress, anxiety, or emotional exhaustion, they may begin to question whether teaching aligns with their abilities, values, or long-term aspirations. This uncertainty reduces their willingness to invest in professional growth and can lead to disengagement from coursework and practicum activities.

Moreover, psychological strain often diminishes the sense of belonging within the teacher community. Students under chronic stress may feel isolated, misunderstood, or disconnected from peers and educators, weakening the relational foundation that supports identity formation. This erosion of belonging disrupts the socialization process through which pre-service teachers internalize professional norms and values.

Self-confidence is another critical dimension influenced by psychological distress. Persistent negative emotions—such as fear, frustration, and self-doubt—can undermine confidence in becoming a competent teacher, particularly when practicum challenges exceed perceived coping capacity. Reduced confidence impairs self-efficacy, a central determinant of professional identity strength.

Importantly, psychological distress disrupts the identity consolidation process. Identity consolidation involves integrating personal values, professional expectations, teaching philosophies, and role models into a coherent self-concept as a future educator. Stress, anxiety, and burnout interfere with reflection, positive interpretation of feedback, and engagement in formative experiences. As highlighted in Table 3, these disruptions can hinder the transition from tentative identity exploration to stable identity commitment.

4.3. Protective Psychological Resources

Despite the presence of multiple psychological risks, certain protective factors can buffer stress and support healthy identity development. One of the most influential is self-efficacy, or one's belief in their ability to teach effectively. High self-efficacy promotes motivation, persistence, and positive interpretation of challenges, strengthening the overall identity structure. Training programs that cultivate mastery experiences, provide constructive feedback, and encourage reflective practice contribute significantly to building this resource.

Perceived social support is another essential buffer. Supportive interactions with mentors, peers, and instructors help pre-service teachers feel valued, capable, and connected to the professional community. Peer networks, in particular, provide emotional comfort, shared experiences, and opportunities for collaborative problem solving, all of which reinforce identity affirmation.

Mindfulness represents an emerging resource with demonstrable benefits. Mindfulness practices help pre-service teachers regulate emotions, reduce anxiety, and maintain attention during stressful teaching activities. These practices enhance emotional awareness and resilience, thereby protecting identity development from the destabilizing effects of stress.

Finally, interventions grounded in positive psychology—such as strengths-based reflection, gratitude exercises, and hope-building strategies—can help pre-service teachers cultivate optimism and a constructive orientation toward challenges. These resources support not only psychological well-being but also the stability and growth of professional identity during training. As noted in Table 3, integrating these protective mechanisms into teacher-education programs can mitigate risks and promote healthier identity trajectories.

5. Reform Strategies: Integrating Psychological Health Education into Teacher Training

Strengthening the professional identity of pre-service teachers requires more than improving pedagogical knowledge or providing additional teaching practice. It demands a deliberate emphasis on psychological well-being as a core component of teacher professionalism. As contemporary teacher-education programs increasingly recognize that mental resilience, emotional competence, and healthy self-concept are essential to sustainable teaching careers, integrating psychological health education into institutional reform becomes both necessary and urgent. This chapter illustrates reform strategies across three domains—curriculum design, pedagogical innovation, and practicum support systems—aimed at fostering supportive learning environments and enhancing identity formation among future teachers.

5.1. Curriculum Reform

Effective reform begins with curriculum transformation that positions psychological health education as an integral part of professional training rather than an optional or peripheral component. One important strategy involves embedding mental health education modules directly into teacher-education programs. These modules typically focus on stress management, emotional regulation, time management, and coping strategies. By teaching pre-service teachers how to recognize psychological symptoms, manage anxiety, or adjust expectations during challenging teaching situations, such modules equip them with concrete tools that support both well-being and professional identity development.

Another key curriculum direction includes the integration of resilience training, enabling students to cultivate adaptive responses to setbacks, criticism, and unexpected classroom challenges. These skills strengthen persistence and positive self-appraisal, which are essential for developing stable professional identities. Additionally, resilience-building content encourages students to reinterpret difficulties as growth opportunities, thereby reinforcing identity alignment with the demands of teaching.

Curriculum reform should also incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) principles. Integrating SEL with teacher education content allows future teachers to understand emotional processes, interpersonal dynamics, and student behavior more deeply. SEL-based modules foster empathy, self-awareness, and relationship skills, which not only support mental health but also strengthen role understanding and professional values. When SEL is woven into subject pedagogy, classroom management, and educational psychology courses, pre-service teachers develop a more holistic sense of what it means to be an educator who nurtures both academic and emotional development. This curricular approach creates conditions where professional identity is shaped not only by knowledge acquisition but also by personal insight and emotional growth.

5.2. Pedagogical Innovation

Curriculum changes alone cannot fully support identity development without corresponding innovations in teaching approaches. A key pedagogical reform involves the use of reflective learning, which encourages pre-service teachers to critically examine their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in relation to their emerging professional roles. Journaling, reflective essays, and guided reflection sessions help students articulate their teaching philosophies, process practicum experiences, and evaluate their emotional responses to challenges. Such practices deepen self-understanding and strengthen identity coherence.

Another promising strategy is the adoption of experiential learning approaches. Simulations, role-playing activities, collaborative teaching tasks, and case-based learning provide authentic exposure to teaching demands in controlled but realistic environments. These methods bridge the gap between theoretical learning and real practice, reducing anxiety and enhancing competence, which in turn supports identity formation. By allowing students to rehearse professional roles, experiential approaches foster confidence and reinforce the perception of themselves as capable educators.

Enhancing peer interactions is also crucial. Establishing peer-support learning communities—such as cohort groups, mentorship circles, or peer coaching teams—creates a network of shared experience and emotional support. These communities become safe spaces for discussing stress, exchanging strategies, and affirming professional goals. When students perceive strong peer support, they are more likely to feel belonging and internalize the social dimensions of teaching identity.

Teacher-education programs may further incorporate mindfulness-based interventions, which have been shown to reduce anxiety, improve focus, and enhance emotional awareness. Practices such as guided meditation, breathing exercises, and mindful reflection can be integrated into seminars or workshops to help students regulate

their emotions during demanding training periods. Similarly, institutions can offer counseling workshops led by mental health professionals to help pre-service teachers gain insight into stress responses, develop interpersonal skills, and strengthen psychological resilience.

Taken together, these pedagogical innovations empower pre-service teachers not only to cope with stress and develop emotional competence but also to refine their professional identities through reflective and experiential growth.

5.3. Practicum and Support System Reform

The practicum experience represents one of the most critical identity-shaping periods in teacher education. Reform efforts should therefore aim to create structures that reduce unnecessary stress and promote constructive identity development. A central strategy involves establishing supportive mentoring environments. Effective mentors do more than assess performance; they provide emotional encouragement, constructive feedback, and realistic guidance tailored to individual needs. Training mentors to recognize signs of distress, model emotional resilience, and engage in strengths-based coaching can significantly improve pre-service teachers' psychological experiences during practicum.

Another key reform strategy is developing strong university-school partnerships. When institutions collaborate closely with placement schools, expectations become clearer, support systems more consistent, and practicum challenges more manageable. Joint planning, co-supervision models, and regular communication channels help ensure that student-teachers are placed in supportive environments where workloads are reasonable and mentoring quality is reliable. These partnerships reduce the ambiguity and pressure that often cause practicum-related stress, thereby protecting identity formation.

Finally, institutions should implement early-warning systems and tailored psychological support services to proactively address mental health risks. Early-warning systems may include regular psychological screenings, check-ins with advisors, or monitoring of students' academic performance and practicum feedback to identify signs of burnout or emotional distress. When issues are detected early, targeted interventions—such as one-on-one counseling, stress-management workshops, peer-support groups, or referrals to professional services—can be delivered promptly. Tailored support ensures that pre-service teachers feel valued and understood, which reinforces their sense of belonging and strengthens their emerging professional identity.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. Synthesis of Main Findings

This review highlights that the professional identity of pre-service teachers is a complex, multifaceted construct shaped by the interplay of individual characteristics, educational experiences, and broader social and cultural contexts. Personal traits such as motivation, emotional regulation, resilience, and self-efficacy significantly contribute to identity formation by influencing how individuals perceive their suitability for the teaching profession and cope with the inherent challenges of training programs. At the institutional level, the quality of pedagogical training, the learning climate, mentoring practices, and practicum design all play essential roles in supporting or hindering identity development. Additionally, social and environmental factors, including public respect for teaching, employment prospects, policy support, and cultural or family expectations, provide the broader context that reinforces or undermines pre-service teachers' sense of professional purpose.

Psychological well-being emerges as a central mechanism that links these diverse factors to identity outcomes. Mental health challenges—such as stress, anxiety, cognitive overload, and emotional labor—can disrupt the consolidation of professional identity, weaken career commitment, and reduce confidence in one's teaching abilities. Conversely, protective psychological resources, including self-efficacy, social support, peer networks,

mindfulness, and interventions grounded in positive psychology, promote resilience, adaptive coping, and coherent identity development. Reform strategies that integrate mental health considerations into teacher education—through curriculum design, pedagogical innovation, and supportive practicum structures—have been shown to foster both well-being and identity growth, demonstrating that professional identity is not only a cognitive or motivational construct but also deeply intertwined with emotional and psychological processes.

6.2. Implications for Higher Education Institutions

The findings of this review suggest several practical implications for higher education institutions engaged in teacher preparation. First, institutions should adopt a holistic psychological support ecosystem that integrates preventive, promotive, and responsive elements. Preventive measures include embedding stress management, emotional regulation, and resilience training directly into the curriculum. Promotive measures emphasize opportunities for reflective learning, social-emotional skill development, and experiential learning activities that enhance professional identity. Responsive measures involve early-warning systems, counseling services, and peer-support networks to address emerging mental health issues promptly.

Second, teacher education should be explicitly reconceptualized as a process of identity formation and emotional development, rather than solely a transmission of pedagogical knowledge. This approach requires recognizing the developmental trajectory of professional identity, creating opportunities for reflection, experiential learning, and guided practice, and fostering emotional literacy alongside technical teaching skills. By aligning institutional policies, faculty mentorship practices, and curriculum content with identity and well-being objectives, universities can better prepare pre-service teachers to navigate the complexities of the teaching profession with confidence, resilience, and commitment.

Third, these findings underscore the importance of integrated, multi-level reform. Enhancing identity formation cannot be achieved through isolated interventions targeting individual traits, classroom practices, or mental health programs alone. Instead, a coordinated approach is necessary, where curriculum design, pedagogical methods, practicum organization, and social support systems reinforce each other to create a coherent and supportive environment for identity development. Such integration ensures that psychological health considerations are embedded at every stage of teacher preparation, rather than treated as add-on modules or secondary concerns.

6.3. Future Directions

Despite the progress achieved in linking psychological health with professional identity, several areas warrant further research and innovation. First, there is a pressing need for longitudinal tracking of identity development throughout teacher education and into early career stages. Longitudinal studies can clarify the trajectories of professional identity, identify critical periods of vulnerability, and evaluate the long-term effectiveness of mental health and pedagogical interventions.

Second, digital mental health tools and AI-supported reflective platforms offer promising avenues to enhance pre-service teachers' emotional awareness, coping skills, and reflective practice. Online modules, adaptive feedback systems, and AI-driven self-assessment platforms can provide personalized support, track progress over time, and deliver interventions that are scalable and context-sensitive. The integration of technology into teacher training may complement traditional mentoring and classroom-based interventions, particularly in large programs or geographically dispersed cohorts.

Third, there is a need for context-specific models that account for cultural differences, policy environments, and educational system characteristics. Professional identity formation and psychological well-being are shaped by socio-cultural norms, public

perceptions of teaching, and systemic structures. Models that are sensitive to local contexts can more effectively guide curriculum development, mentoring practices, and policy design, ensuring that interventions are culturally relevant, institutionally feasible, and aligned with societal expectations.

6.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of pre-service teachers' professional identity is a dynamic and multi-dimensional process intricately linked with psychological well-being. A strong, coherent identity enhances motivation, resilience, and long-term career commitment, whereas mental health challenges can disrupt identity formation and undermine future teaching performance. This review underscores the critical importance of integrating psychological health education with teacher preparation programs, highlighting the need for comprehensive reforms at curricular, pedagogical, and institutional levels.

By embedding mental health considerations into every aspect of teacher education, universities can create supportive environments that nurture both professional competence and emotional resilience. Such reforms not only benefit pre-service teachers individually but also contribute to the broader goal of sustaining a committed, capable, and psychologically healthy teaching workforce. Ultimately, linking mental health education with professional identity development represents a vital strategy for improving teacher preparation and ensuring the long-term stability and quality of the education profession.

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