

The Impact of The Double Reduction Policy on The Construction of The Professional Identity of Tutoring Class Teachers

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Abstract. The double reduction policy launched by our country on July 24, 2021 aims to reduce the number of teachers in private teaching auxiliary institutions for basic education, achieve a fair distribution of educational resources, and reduce the academic burden of students and the pressure of extracurricular tutoring. However, the research on the self-identity construction of cram school teachers after the "double reduction policy" is still a blank field. This paper focuses on the status quo of the professional status of teachers in private tutoring institutions after the "double reduction policy". The authors' data are based on fixed structured interviews with 6 teachers from private tutoring institutions in different regions of China. The results show that after the double reduction policy, the professional identity of teachers in private teaching auxiliary institutions is based on their professional beliefs and has not been significantly affected. The discussion in this article prompts each teacher to reflect on his own identity factors, and at the same time complements the construction of the professional identity framework of teachers in private teaching auxiliary institutions.

Keywords: Private tutoring; Teacher accountability; Teacher professional identity; The Double Reduction policy; China.

1. Introduction

The "double reduction" policy introduced on July 24, 2021, requires public schools to reduce student homework and prohibits schools from offering courses on public holidays, etc. [1]. More importantly, this policy formulated management guidelines for different types of private tutoring institutions, mainly manifested in the banning of private educational institutions, which had a rapid and huge impact on industry restructuring [2].

Although the original intention of the Chinese government to regulate the extracurricular tutoring industry is to achieve the goal of common prosperity and equal distribution of educational resources by prohibiting the capitalization of education [3]. Some researchers also pointed out that this national policy has led to the crisis of millions of experienced teachers facing unemployment and millions of graduates unable to find jobs [2,4]. The author found that many researchers have studied and analyzed this policy from the perspective of education policy. However, its research literature generally lacks follow-up research on the population affected by the "double reduction policy", such as teachers in private educational institutions who were unemployed or stigmatized due to the policy.

Day and Kington believe that occupational identity is both stable and dynamic, it depends on the current socio-cultural discourse resources, and is constructed and influenced by the ideal self and the discourse of others [5]. Researchers generally agree that there is no universally accepted definition of a teacher's professional identity, as it is a dynamic, intersubjective process of continuous creation, construction, and reconstruction through the choices, practices, and language of others [5,6]. Therefore, teachers' identities are derived from the teachers' ongoing discourses, experiences and emotions in the work environment, which are transformed into their sense of self, and at the same time embodied as the stories people tell about themselves and others [6].

The experiences of these teachers as "controversial educational practitioners" in post-2021 China led to discussions about the agency and resilience of private tutoring institutions (PTI) teachers to this reality, and the narrative resources that shape the construction of their professional identities. The author explores the professional identity characteristics of individual teachers in PTI in China through

an interpretative approach, aiming to gain insight into how PTI teachers view their professional identity after the double reduction policy.

This study focuses on elementary education tutoring, which is one of the most common teaching methods in PTI and the one most affected by the "double reduction policy". This study mainly explores the identity of PTI teachers' professional identity and the supporting factors of this identity. The author explores the professional identity of individual teachers in PTI in China through an interpretative approach, aiming to gain insight into how PTI teachers view their professional identity after the double reduction policy.

2. Theoretical Framework

Building on Day's theory, this study draws on the framework of elements of PTI teacher identity developed by Liu and Sammons [7, 8]. Based on this, the authors added the concept of professional self-understanding described by Kelchtermans to complement Day's inclusive teacher identity framework, thereby providing a detailed description of the professional self of PTI teachers [8-10].

The concepts presented by Kelchtermans' Professional Identity Framework are the basis for the authors' description of a theoretical framework for PTI teacher professional identity and development. In other words, teachers develop professional self-understandings throughout their careers about how their previous experiences and current circumstances affect them. A teacher's professional self-concept is a key requirement for meeting the needs of and building relationships with others in society [11,12].

Kelchtermans believes that teachers' professional self-understanding is described in five dimensions: 1) How teachers descriptively view their own self-image after being influenced by others' evaluations; 2) Teachers' evaluation of their actual work performance; 3) Teachers' motivations for choosing to join, retain, and leave their professions; 4) Teachers' perceptions and expectations of their own professional future; and 5) Teachers' ethical understanding of their professional work program and their responsibility for how to implement it successfully [9-12].

Therefore, in this paper, the professional identity of PTI teachers is described according to these five intertwined dimensions, the dynamic nature and corresponding situation of teachers' self-awareness. That is, PTI teachers' understanding of their behavior and professional identity is based on self-interpretation of their experiences in private tutoring settings. Macro-policies and their interactions in work and social environments, their understanding of occupation and their social status under the macro-policy discourse will interfere with their self-narratives to explain their behavior [13].

In addition, the author also uses Mockler's definition of the three key dimensions of teachers' professional identity as one of the basic contents of the theoretical framework of this study, who argues that teachers' professional identities are continuously formed and re-formed over the course of their careers and mediated through the complex interplay of personal, professional, and political dimensions of a teacher's life [14]. Therefore, the work and professional practice of PTI teachers is composed of three key areas: Teachers' personal experiences deal primarily with those aspects of their personal lives, as well as their social roles outside of teaching. Teachers' professional background is expressed in their experience in educational settings. The external political environment is the external world that exists around education through the discourse, attitude and understanding of the grand narrative of policy [14].

The theoretical framework of this study is an extension of Liu and Sammons' framework of PTI teacher identity elements shown in Figure 1 [7]. Combining the above two theoretical models with Day's teacher identity framework to explore the changes in PTI teachers' professional identity factors after the double reduction policy. As shown in Figure 1, the framework of this study consists of three overlapping and interacting components: teachers' personal experience, external political environment, and teachers' professional background. On this basis, the framework of this study observes and analyzes the elements of teacher identity formed by the intersection of these three fields

through four main theoretical lenses: teacher self-knowledge, teacher emotion, teacher reflective practice and teacher professional learning.

This will support the author to examine the factors that produce or change the professional identity of PTI teachers after 2023. To further understand the professional makeup of teachers and support PTI teachers to develop unique, relevant and meaningful identities in order to realize their ideal self-professional identity.

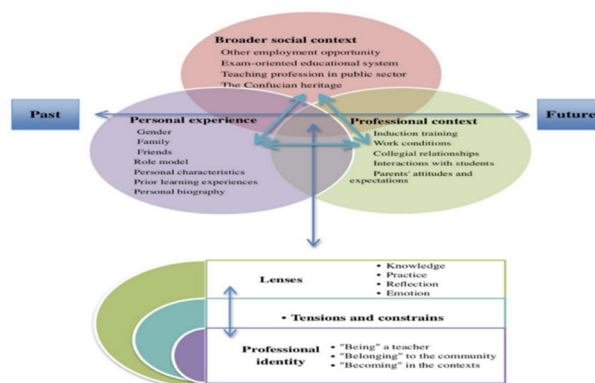


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of teacher professional identity in PTI. [7]

3. Research Design and Methods

3.1. Research Questions

The problem of this qualitative research is to explore the construction or change of the professional identity of teachers in private tutoring institutions after the double reduction policy in 2023. The author proposes the following research questions:

1. What is the understanding of PTI teachers' professional roles at present and before the double reduction policy?
2. What are the common features of the professional identity of PTI teachers after the double reduction policy?
3. What factors did PTI teachers use to build or maintain their professional identity after the "double reduction policy"?

3.2. Research Methods

Phenomenology is a powerful research strategy that aims to examine in detail the lived experience of phenomena through the personal experiences of participants and their personal perceptions of objects and events, in which the researcher plays an active role in the interpretation process [15].

As a qualitative research design based on phenomenology, this research is dedicated to exploring the professional identity changes of PTI teachers in private teaching auxiliary institutions in China after 2023, two years after being affected by the double reduction policy. The authors employ a constructivist epistemological stance and an exploratory research format to examine and explore the self-narratives of the study subjects. These self-narrators' stories are constructed through the narrative texts produced by individuals participating in the world, especially since PTI teachers have rarely received full empirical research on professional identity at present [16]. Guided by interpretivism, the authors transformed participants' subjective narratives of their own stories into a series of key event-based narratives to describe each teacher's own professional identity. In order to learn more about the factors that support or hinder the formation of PTI teachers' professional identity.

For this investigation, non-probability sampling was performed. To find and get in touch with faculty members that fit certain research requirements, used Purposive sampling. These requirements comprise the following: 1) Teachers must be PTI teachers who have been affected by the "double reduction policy"; 2) Teachers must be or have been full-time PTI teachers.

3.3. Participants

Participants participated in this study primarily through structured interviews. Table 1 summarizes the 6 participants who participated in this study, all using pseudonyms. These participants generally have core subject teaching experience and have a basic understanding of the content of the double reduction policy. They all work in PTI in mainland China and have more than 5 years of teaching experience. Although participants varied in education, gender, and age, it was not the purpose of this study to incorporate these characteristics into their teacher identity development.

The author contacted them via e-mail, providing the purpose of the study, research methodology, participant criteria, and a fixed-structure word document containing the interviews. Participants confirm by signing an official informed consent form that their real names will be kept confidential through a pseudonym and that their answers to interview questions and reflection questions will not affect their final assessment and scores.

Table 1. Participant overview.

Pseudonym	Teaching experience	Practitioners	Responsible subjects and grades	Professional Training
MS. Q	13	New Channel English Group Company EF English First Global English Language Training Company	High school English College English English training abroad and overseas entrance examination interview training	Master's degree in educational psychology
MS. W	5	Xinghuo Education Branch, Zhongshan City, Guangdong Province, China Zhongshan Meiwen Education Co., Ltd Small teaching auxiliary institution studio independently run by itself. Excellence in Education	The reading and grammar part of junior high school English College English CET-4 and CET-6	Not a student majoring in education at the undergraduate level but began to teach students as a private teacher at the undergraduate level.
MS. Y	over 10 years	Master Education in Guangzhou, China	Junior high school mathematics	Affiliated institutions provide relevant training.
Mr.D	12	New Wenda Wendu New Channel	Primary English Junior English Senior English	Served as an English teacher in the Tianjin Yaohua Middle School
MS.X	5	Zhangmen one-on-one	Elementary Chinese Junior Chinese	Affiliated institutions provide relevant training.
MS. Z	10	Chengdu Shutong English	Primary School English Junior High School English	Holds a BA in English Language and Literature. Received relevant training from an affiliated institution

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

The authors conducted two weeks of data collection to obtain qualitative data from structured interviews (20 questions in total) for each respondent. The authors encourage respondents to write freely within the framework of structured interviews. In addition, the author conducted a series of informal conversations and e-mails during these 2 weeks, supplemented and clarified the relevant details in the interview materials, and incorporated them into the interview text materials.

In addition, under the premise that some of the invited participants agreed and the interview transcripts were verified by the interviewees, the author invited them to tell their personal special experiences through oral narratives and integrated them into the records of the interview materials. In addition, under the premise that some of the invited participants agreed and the interview transcripts were verified by the interviewees, the author invited them to tell their special experiences orally and integrate them into the records of the interview materials. As private narratives, these small stories often exist in the shadow of the dominant narrative, so they can be used to analyze and confront the grand policy narrative in education. These PTI teacher stories help the author model the specific interviewees to summarize and outline the content of interview texts from all participants, thereby illuminating the factors that maintain or change each teacher's professional identity.

3.5. Data Analysis

All interviews were conducted in Chinese with subsequent translation. This process is performed in six analysis phases proposed by Wellington [17]. The author conducts descriptive analysis combined with the critical incident method and conducts content analysis from the qualitative data obtained from the interviews to reveal themes. The author summarizes the interview content of each participant through the current and past practice fragments of the interviewees, excavates the experience of the participants, broadens and retells it, and explains how the double reduction policy affects the construction of each PTI teacher's professional identity. Throughout, the authors also cross-referenced informal data sources (informal interview transcripts, emails, and conversations) to provide credibility for qualitative data interpretation.

4. Discovery and Discussion

This study's purpose is to analyze how the professional identity of the six participants changed after the double reduction policy and what caused the change. Findings are based on an analysis of key themes in qualitative interview data, set according to Day's conceptual model of identity description as the theoretical dimension of the analysis. It includes: 1) professional identity; 2) self-identity construction expected by PTI teachers; 3) sub-identities that support teachers' professional identity [8,12]. The author also combines Tripp's framework of narrative inquiry with these three dimensions [18]. Focuses on key events in the interview material that can be identified as "recalling, recording, and interpreting past events to clarify, understand, and control current professional practices and habits" [18]. These tiny plot clues from the practical experience of the participants are connected by the author to the grand narrative of the "double reduction policy". By adopting this approach, the author searched for possibilities to tell and recreate the tense situations experienced by the 6 research participants in this study.

4.1. Professional Identity

Although participants generally cite relatively higher income than regular schoolteachers, enjoying working with students and having more free time, what made them become a PTI teacher. With some participants describing their career choice as "happening by chance," PTI teachers did not appear to have been their first career choice. MS.X sums up for the author why she became a PTI teacher, noting that this is a feeling she and her colleagues share:

When I entered the industry, I discovered this job by chance and thought about giving it a try. After participating in the company's training and passing the assessment, you will officially start

working. I found that this job ① income is much higher than schoolteachers; ② only need to do teaching-related things, other things do not need me to do; ③ free time, can save commuting time; ④ interpersonal relationship is relatively simple. (MS.X)

After the implementation of this policy in 2021, a large part of the respondents lost their previous jobs in private educational institutions. But all the interviewees have never wavered their professional identity as teachers, and they believe that their self-confidence comes from their professional beliefs. This can be interpreted as a professional mastery of expertise that includes beliefs about teaching and learning in related disciplines [19]. Expanding on this, Mr. D's answer clearly outlines this conclusion, arguing that:

When the double reduction started, my organization went bankrupt, my hard-earned money was wasted, and I lost my job. However, my professional identity as a teacher in private educational institutions stems from my confidence in my professional knowledge of the English subject, which has not changed before and after the double reduction policy. Because whether I am a tutoring teacher or not, I consider myself a professional teacher. Regardless of before and after the double reduction, I am proud of myself as an English major teacher, because I survive by my ability. (MR. D)

Professional beliefs refer to how teachers' past experiences and current circumstances affect teachers' perception of themselves as professionals and are developed in a non-linear process [20]. The intervention of this policy in the careers of PTI teachers means that teachers are going through a process of identity development based on exploration and re-adaptation. After experiencing unemployment, changing unemployment, and re-exploring this, the participants in this study generally believe that the professional identity of teachers constructed by professional knowledge is stable. And it won't change significantly with the current strong policy narrative in the sociocultural and educational spheres. Almost all participants gave an answer similar to "The professional identity of teachers in private educational institutions comes from their professional knowledge of English subjects, and there is no change before and after the double reduction policy." MS. Q reports told the author as follows:

The double reduction policy made me not change much about my teacher's professional identity. Because I have been continuing my teaching, being responsible to the students, and allowing students to make great progress through my teaching, I am worthy of being called a teacher. (MS. Q)

However, participants expressed dismay at the social discourse narrative of the new policy's impact, while continuing to choose a PTI teaching career based on professional knowledge-based professional identity. Among them, MS. Z, as a PTI teacher, is also the manager and shareholder of her private educational institution. After the double reduction policy, she lost her job, position and most of her investment. Although she and her colleagues indicated that they would pursue a PTI teaching career, this career will only be a possible choice for her and her colleagues in the future, because the words brought by the policy make them feel painful:

Due to the double reduction and the new crown epidemic, the capital chain of the headquarters of my institution was broken and went bankrupt (...) Most of the remaining teachers stayed and continued to teach because of their sense of responsibility to the students (...), I was deeply confused about the future development (...) But even that doesn't take away from my love of teaching. I will continue to choose private teaching as my career, but I will add my other side hustles. For example, teachers of Chinese as a foreign language, self-media entrepreneurship, etc. (MS. Z)

4.2. Self-identity Construction Expected by PTI Teachers

When faced with professional setbacks, teachers will construct "possible selves", that is, the desired self that individuals want to be, in order to resume interrupted activities [21]. When all participants in this study described the ideal professional self of PTI teachers, they generally used keywords related to independence, responsibility, comprehensive ability, freedom, high-quality teaching results, and score improvement. MS. Q describes the desired self-identities of PTI teachers as:

As a PTI teacher, what you need to remember at all times is to constantly reflect on yourself, keep learning, innovate, and provide each child with their own exclusive teacher. So how to change different roles in front of different students is the biggest challenge of being a popular PTI teacher (MS. Q) .

As pragmatists, MS. W and MS. Y mentioned that the ideal identity of a PTI teacher is the high professional ability to help students improve their grades more quickly, as well as the evaluation and appreciation of high-quality work performance by others. It is worth noting that most respondents emphasized their professional identity when describing their expectations for PTI teacher status and believed that personal professional identity comes from this rather than other factors. The changes from social and personal factors encountered by the interviewees in the PTI teaching experience before and after the double reduction policy did not change their expectations of the teaching profession and their self-expectations of this construction. Because their dedication and sense of moral responsibility come from personal learning and life experience rather than being constructed by other institutions or social and public discourse. Taking MR. D, the only interviewee who has teaching experience in public schools, as an example, believes:

Under the premise of China's domestic exam-oriented education, whether it is in school or out of school, students' grades can be said to be an important or even the only criterion for judging a teacher. Therefore, under the premise of ensuring the improvement of scores, children can learn more knowledge. I think this is what makes an excellent teacher different from other teachers (MS. D).

4.3. Sub-identities Supporting Teachers' Professional Identity

Teachers' professional identities and the sub-identities they constitute mean that the way teachers approach these identities depends on how much they value personal background and characteristics, thereby constituting universal identities based on uniqueness [22]. Regarding the changes in the social identity of PTI teachers in the interview content, some interviewees generally used three key words: Anxiety, Uncertainty, and Anger to describe the changes and crises of their professional identity and social situation. While MS. X and MS. Z emphasized their strong sense of responsibility to students and their love for teachers, they also pointed out that after the double reduction policy, they also suffered pressure from public opinion, especially news:

Now those who can persevere and continue to engage in training are basically teachers who love the training industry. I saw news about unannounced visits to training courses and news that some surviving training institutions were closed. The epidemic is already difficult, but the double drop policy will wipe out an industry and cause a large number of people to lose their jobs, which will make things worse. (MS. Z)

Especially after the double reduction, some news reports and self-media news made me and my colleagues feel slandered, although we impart knowledge with the heart of teaching and educating people, no different from our counterparts in public schools. (MS. X)

This means that when PTI teachers discuss the impact of social situational factors they face on their professional identities, they show a common sub-identity at the level of social discourse, that is, stigmatized victims in the grand narrative of education policy.

The environment around a teacher, what other people expect of her, and what the person allows to influence him or her can all greatly affect who she or she is as a teacher [6]. A majority of participants felt that the PTI teacher-parent relationship and their expectations became the key to maintaining the professional identity of the PTI teacher, while the tutoring provided by the PTI teacher remained in high demand from parents and students. MS. Q believes that:

Parental expectations never change. If the problem of education output is not solved, it will be the college entrance examination. The double reduction only reduces the school's learning tasks, not the standards for further education. As a result, many parents still seek tutoring privately from teachers, and the situation is more active than before. Although cram schools are gone, the standards are still there, just in a different way. As far as I know, there are more teachers in the remedial class than

before, because they no longer need to be exploited by institutions, but start 1-on-1 private teaching. (MS. Q)

Therefore, although PTI teachers are stigmatized in public opinion, the relationship between the respondents and their parents and students has not deteriorated after 2021, their mutual needs and dependence have become stronger. MS. Z and MS. W told the author that they still maintain a good relationship with the students and parents they knew in the previous institution and continued the previous private tutoring with the former students. Other participants also reported a similar situation: Compared with before the double reduction policy, the relationship between PTI teachers, parents and students is closer and more friendly. It is shown that parents and students support the PTI teacher's professional belief recognition by "continuing to participate in the teacher's extracurricular tutoring".

Arguably, parental endorsement creates a new PTI teacher sub-identity: the personal teacher friend. The author describes it as PTI teachers maintaining a respectful and friendly attitude and frequent communication while meeting the needs of parents and students for high levels of achievement.

4.4. Discussion

This study found that the educational changes brought about by the double reduction policy did not significantly shake the professional beliefs of PTI teachers and the professional identity based on them. The PTI teachers who participated in this study still maintained their professional identity as teachers despite the stigmatization of PTI teachers in news reports and the impact of policy implementation on their affiliated institutions. They generally pointed out that this identity comes from their professional belief in the subjects they teach and generally expressed their possibility and desire to continue to be PTI teachers in the future.

Sfard and Prusak considered actual identity and assigned identity to be specific and important identity narrative factors [22]. Among them, the actual identity is composed of statements about the actual state of affairs as factual assertions, usually told in the present tense [22]. Participants in this study generally exhibited this identity narrative. Their expressions of their current and expected status and professional beliefs are often based on declarative descriptions of the status quo, such as "*My career choice has not changed much and I will continue to choose teaching as my career (MS. Z)*", "*It comes from the accumulation of my later teaching experience and the learning of new knowledge (MS. Y)*".

Designated identity, as the future designated by those binding, authoritative and powerful people or institutions, largely guides and influences a person's understanding of self-identity and corresponding behavior [22]. Among the participants in this study, the independent tendency brought about by the "professional identity rooted in their own professional beliefs" is the core element for them to construct their own identity stories. None of the participants mentioned that their professional identity and corresponding dedication and professionalism were the product of institutions or other people's discourse discipline.

It can be said that their "sense of identity" has not been shaken by the double reduction policy and the subsequent public opinion's stigmatization of the "designated status" guided by PTI teachers. They still retain the ability to tell their professional identity stories in a direct and assertive manner. And consider yourself worthy of recognition. This study further points out that PTI teachers' insistence on their professional identity is a narrative activity jointly constructed and reconstructed by people in the group. After the double reduction policy, PTI teachers have two sub-identities, the stigmatized person constructed by the macro education policy narrative, and the teacher friend who meets the needs of parents and students for high grades. These sub-identities that make up a teacher's identity can both conflict and reconcile, and the more important the sub-identity, the higher the cost of changing or losing that identity [22]. The description that MS. Z showed the author of the content of communication between himself, parents and students is an interesting case. She believes that the main support for her own professional beliefs after this policy is the expectation of parents and students that she can meet the needs, so she and her colleagues are still "responsible to students" and

"teachers who love the training industry ". These two conflicting sub-identities are reconciled by this narrative: PTI teachers who meet the needs of parents and students are teachers who have a sense of responsibility and enthusiasm for the education industry. They use this identity to fight against the stigmatized identity brought about by the grand narrative of policy.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that PTI teachers after the double reduction policy maintain their professional identity through beliefs about their identity as experienced teachers and professional beliefs brought about by a deep understanding of the subjects they teach. The more important function of professional identity is to maintain the sense of professional accomplishment and identity of PTI teachers, so as to counter the disappointment or social stigma brought about by the grand narrative of the double deduction policy.

This study also has some limitations, because most of the interviewees are teachers in private teaching auxiliary institutions with more than 5 years of teaching experience. Therefore, individual self-evaluation is relatively single, and there is a lack of qualitative data sample collection of a wider range of PTI teachers covering the whole of China. In the follow-up research, the author needs to expand the interview scale to more than 10 people and invite PTI teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience. In this way, a more complete analysis of the professional identity of PTI teachers is completed after the double reduction policy is completed.

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