

# The Status Quo and Analysis of English Teacher Identity in Rural Primary Schools

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**Abstract:** The identity of a rural teacher refers to the individual teacher's perception and recognition of their teaching role in different contexts. This study focuses on English teachers in rural elementary schools, using a questionnaire to explore the current status quo of their identity from four aspects: environmental, professional, social and personal identity. Also, the study uncovers identity crisis and propose solutions. The results show that the level of identity among rural English teachers is relatively low. Specifically, they lack a sense of belonging to the rural environment, a large education gap that negatively affects their professional identity, and a personal identity crisis primarily manifested in the mismatch between work input and teaching satisfaction. Additionally, the level of their social identity is also low. This study recommends adjustments from three respects: society, school, and teachers, in order to enhance the identity of rural English teachers and promote the construction of a high-quality rural teaching team.

**Keywords:** English teacher in rural elementary schools, Identity, Identity crisis.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, rural teacher education has experienced a tremendous changes in both research and practices. Alongside that, currently, the rural teaching force has been significantly upgraded in terms of professional level, remuneration mechanisms, title evaluation, survival environment and the like. Yet, such remarkable progress partly is due to relevant policy and plans, such as Outline of National Medium and Long-Term Program for Education (2010-2020) and Support Plan for Rural Teachers (2015-2020). It mirrors that the professional development of rural teachers plays a big role in rural education, which cannot go unnoticed. Namely, the construction of rural teachers is linked with the fairness and quality of basic education, and rural teachers' identity directly affects whether rural teachers choose to devote themselves to the countryside.

Teacher identity is seen as a critical component in the sociocultural and sociopolitical landscape of the classroom and in teachers' professional development (Varghese et al, 2005). Many recent studies on teacher education highlighted the importance of identity in teacher development (Peura, K et al. 2022; Becsford, L, 2022; Hathcock et al. 2020; Samsudin et al. 2021). And many studies have shown that the development of teacher identity could promote a teacher's educational philosophy (Mockler 2011), decision-making (Beijaard et al, 2004) and teaching effectiveness (Sammons et al. 2007). As one of the sub-categories of teacher identity research, rural primary English teacher identity, too, merits attention and may partly benefit the whole groups of rural teachers. And that is one of the reasons why rural primary English teacher identity needs to be explored.

However, within the existing domestic literature related to teacher identity, the majority of research has focused on pre-service teachers, novice teachers and university teachers. By contrast, there are relatively few studies on English teachers' identity, particularly on rural primary English teachers. Thus, theoretically, it is hoped that this study will help deepen the understanding of rural elementary teachers' identity and enrich the research results on English teachers' identity to a

certain extent. Practically, this study aims to stimulate the awareness of self-development and self-construction among rural primary English teachers, with the intent to improve their teaching practice, educational management and job satisfaction. Additionally, to some extent, this study may also provide reference for schools and teacher education colleges to enhance their teacher training, thereby promoting positive construction of elementary English teachers' identity.

## 2. Research Background

### 2.1. Theoretical Frame of Identity

Identity refers to an individual's subjective perception of their objective identity (XunYang 2014), which encompasses their sense of belonging to a particular group and the degree to which they feel recognized by that group (Lu Licheng and Wu Zhuang 2018). Teacher identity, in particular, is commonly understood as comprising two components: the uniformity of teachers' social identity and the distinctiveness of their individual identity, which includes both social recognition and self-awareness (Hu Yan, 2015; Rong Zhongkui, 2009). For rural teachers, their identity is shaped by their active affiliation with the unique rural teacher culture and the acceptance and recognition they receive from society as a whole (Zhu Shenghui, 2020). A positive sense of identity can contribute to rural teachers' self-development and self-construction consciousness, ultimately promoting the cultivation of high-quality rural teacher identities.

In essence, identity is a multifaceted and dynamic process that comprises personal and social perspectives. The structure of teacher identity encompasses various constitutive elements that have been subject to varying dimensions and perspectives among academic circles. Early scholars such as Jenkins proposed a two-dimensional structure of personal identification and collective identification, whereas Ricoeur introduced the notion of personal and collective identity recognition (Danielewicz, J. 2001). Subsequent researchers, such as Brickon, S. (2000), refined this structure by incorporating the social context and identifying personal, interpersonal, and collective identity. Ball further expanded

the concept of teacher identity by identifying professional, situational, and personal aspects. In the context of rural teacher identity, Xie Xiaorong (2020) classified identity based on time stability, form of identity existence, and degree of constraint, while Zhao Kangyan (2019) divided rural teacher identity into self-identification, heteropathic identification, and environmental identification.

Based on previous research, a consensus has yet to be reached regarding the dimensions of teacher identity. Consequently, there has been limited investigation on this topic within the field of teacher identity research. Nonetheless, there are some shared characteristics among the divisions of identity dimensions. Firstly, the focus of identity research primarily centers on the self, role, and environment. Secondly, the three fundamental psychological components of identity are cognition, emotion, and behavior. In light of previous research and the necessities of the current study, identity dimensions have been divided into four categories: environmental identity, occupational identity, social identity, and individual identity. Environmental identity concerns teachers' attitudes towards their work environment, such as rural or school settings. Occupational identity refers to the professional emotions, motivations, and sense of belonging of teachers. Social identity reflects how teachers are evaluated and recognized by their social group. Finally, individual identity encompasses self-evaluation, cognition, and reflection by the teacher group regarding their teacher identity.

## 2.2. Review

There is a scarcity of literature abroad that focuses on rural teachers as research subjects, whereas in China, research on the identity of rural teachers has yielded fruitful results in terms of research content, research methods, and theoretical orientation. Firstly, research on the identity of rural teachers highlights the significance of local culture. In terms of research content, it aims to explore how rural teachers can break free from the challenges posed by the urban-rural dichotomy and meet the expectations of individuals, the rural teaching environment, and society. Secondly, there is a clear trend in research on the identity of rural teachers, which mainly focuses on the difficulties, causes, and countermeasures faced by rural teachers. Moreover, most scholars gather data through easily operational methods such as interviews, questionnaire surveys, and observations, and conduct case studies and narrative research on rural teachers. In terms of the participants investigated in the studies of English teacher identity, the studies on college teachers (Zhang Hua et al. 2017; Xu Wenjing et al. 2021), pre-service teachers (Meng Qianyun 2022; Cai Chengsi 2021) and novice teachers (He Qing 2021; Ji Zhangtin 2020) account for the vast majority. In other words, more attention has been paid to the identity construction of university teachers and pre-service teachers, while the related studies on primary teachers, not least rural primary teachers have been ignored. Wen Jing (2020) used both SPSS 22.0 for quantitative analysis and Nvivo11 for qualitative analysis to dig into the questionnaire data from 83 rural primary school English teachers in Ordos, Inner Mongolia, as well as data from 6 in-depth interviews. The aim was to identify the deeper factors that impact the identity formation of rural primary school English teachers. Meanwhile, Fang Yinghui (2022) conducted a narrative inquiry on a young rural primary school teacher who teaches English, exploring the teacher's identity across four dimensions: professional, vocational, personal and situational,

and synthesizing the various factors that shape this identity.

Since there are few studies about rural primary English teachers' identity, there is still much room for researchers to investigate the identity of rural primary English teachers in China. The aforementioned studies have offered valuable insights into the identity of rural primary school English teachers. However, there is a dearth of empirical research on this topic. Therefore, this study employs a quantitative research method to investigate the current status of rural primary school English teachers, analyze their identity crises, and propose corresponding solutions.

## 3. Research Methods

### 3.1. Research Questions

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the current status of English teacher identity in rural elementary schools, as well as to explore the various challenges that these teachers encounter in forming their identities, along with the strategies they employ to overcome them. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

(1) What is the current status quo of English teachers identity in rural elementary schools?

(2) What dilemma they face amid the formation of their identity and how to deal with it?

To collect data, an online questionnaire was distributed among English teachers working in rural elementary schools. The data was analyzed using SPSS27.0, a widely-used statistical analysis tool. The findings of this study will yield valuable insights into the factors that shape English teacher identity in rural elementary schools, as well as the methods they use to address the challenges they face.

### 3.2. Data Collection Tool

The questionnaire used in this study is self-compiled, which is based on the actual situation of rural teachers and modifies the "English Teacher Identity Questionnaire Survey" compiled by Xunyang et al. (2014), aiming to investigate the identity of rural English teachers in primary school. The first part of the questionnaire is about the basic information, including teaching experience, professional title, and weekly lessons, etc. The second part is an identity scale, focusing on environment, occupational, social and personal identity to explore related issues of rural teachers' identity. The questions in the questionnaire are divided into five levels from "very inconsistent" to "very consistent" and corresponding scores are recorded 1-5 points. Also, higher score indicates that the teacher has a stronger identity.

In order to verify the dimension of this scale, exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the questionnaire results. The results showed that KMO value for sampling appropriateness was 0.889 ( $>0.6$ ),  $p < 0.01$  Bartlett's sphericity test  $\text{sig} = 0.01$ , indicating that the hypothesis of independence among items under the same factor was not established. Namely, this sample was suitable for exploratory factor analysis. Principal component analysis was used to extract factors and maximum variance rotation factors were adopted. According to statistical item deletion principle, with 11 and 34 items deleted, finally 22 items that meet requirements were retained divided into 4 factors with cumulative variance explanation rate of 65.421% (see Table 1). Factor 1 reflects the rural teachers' attitude towards their social and school environment, named "environmental identity"; factor 2 reflects the rural teachers' emotions and motives towards this

profession; factor 3 reflects social groups' evaluation and identity of their social status; factor 4 reflects teachers' self-evaluation of their teacher identity named "personal identification".

Moreover, reliability and validity analysis of the sample data showed that the internal consistency  $\alpha$  value of the

questionnaire was 0.850 ( $>0.8$ ), and the split-half reliability was 0.898, indicating that the questionnaire had a high reliability. Briefly, according to the factor analysis results, the reliability and validity indicators of this questionnaire mirrors that this questionnaire is suitable as a measurement tool for identity of rural primary English teachers

**Table 1.** Factor loading matrix of questionnaire items

	Environmental identity	Professional identity	Social identity	Personal identity	Sum
Number of items in the factor	7	7	5	3	22
Factor loading range	0.535-0.713	0.526-0.799	0.477-0.778	0.462-0.889	-
Explanation rate (%)	20.016	19.742	18.406	7.252	65.421

### 3.3. Participants

During the formal investigation, this study identified 64 English teachers who were teaching in rural primary school as the research objects. A total of 80 questionnaires were

distributed and 64 effective questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in an effective response rate of 80%. The basic information of the participants is presented in the table below:

**Table 2.** Profile of the participants

Category	Number of participants	
	N	Proportion (%)
Gender	Male	26 40.63
	Female	38 59.38
Age	Under 25	8 12.5
	26-35	34 53.13
	36-45	19 29.69
	Above 46	3 4.69
	Under 3	17 26.56
Years of teaching	3-5	30 46.88
	6-10	15 23.44
	11-20	0 0
	21-30	1 1.56
Record of formal schooling	Above 30	1 1.56
	Diploma or below	26 40.63
	Undergraduate course	36 56.25
	Master or above	2 3.13
Professional title	Unrated	30 46.88
	Level 3	16 25
	Level 2	13 20.31
	Level 1	3 4.69
	Associate professors	2 3.13
Position	General teachers	40 62.5
	Grade leader	12 18.75
	Guidance directors	9 14.06
	Subject department head	3 4.69
	Principal or vice principal	0 0

## 4. Data Analysis and Finding

### 4.1. The status quo of English Teacher Identity in Rural Primary Schools

**Table 3.** Identity of rural primary English teachers

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Environmental identity	64	-2.36824	7.25700	.1337580	1.33820456
Professional identity	64	-2.23120	3.11349	.0000000	1.0000000
Social identity	64	-2.64729	2.12767	.0000000	1.0000000
Personal identity	64	-1.94625	2.32694	.0000000	1.0000000
Overall identity	64	-1.16	1.54	.0409	.54179

The results of survey (see Table 3) reveal that the overall identity statistics of English teachers in rural primary schools reaches 0.049, indicating a low level of identity. This implies that there are issues with the identity of English teachers in rural primary schools, which could potentially lead to an identity crisis. Based on the data, the environmental identity scored the highest at 0.13, while occupational, social and personal identity all scored zero, respectively. In general, environmental identity is the most prominent factor among the four dimensions.

## 4.2. Demographic Variables of English Teacher Identity in Rural Primary Schools

This section compares how gender, education, and age affect the identity identification of rural primary school English teachers. Using empirical data, the analysis aims to understand differences among teacher groups and offer recommendations to improve identity identification.

### 4.2.1. Gender Differences of English teachers in Rural Primary Schools

**Table 4.** Gender differences of of rural primary English teachers

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	F	T	Sig.
Environmental identity	Male	26	.0294635	.97242863	.19070894	.263	-.513	.610
	Female	38	.2051174	1.54834796	.25117521			
Professional identity	Male	26	-.2082327	.92144069	.18070939	1.927	-1.388	.170
	Female	38	.1424750	1.03812366	.16840590			
Social identity	Male	26	.0684412	.60332576	.11832192	.203	.505	.654
	Female	38	-.0468282	1.20466247	.19542206			
Personal identity	Male	26	.1329715	.87372625	.17135182	.771	.878	.383
	Female	38	-.0909805	1.07979979	.17516666			
Overall identity	Male	26	-.0198	.62067	.12172	.546	-.739	.463
	Female	38	.0825	.48491	.07866			

The present study employed an independent sample t-test to examine whether there were significant differences in identity levels among English teachers of varying genders in rural primary schools. The results, as presented in Table 4, indicate that there is no statistical evidence to suggest a significant difference in gender-based identity levels ( $T = -706, p = 0.484 > 0.05$ ). Nonetheless, the mean identity score for female teachers was observed to be higher than that of

their male counterparts, which is to say, female teachers possess a relatively higher level of identity. Further analysis revealed no significant differences in four dimensions of gender identity: environmental identity, occupational identity, social identity and personal identity ( $\text{sig} > 0.05$ ).

### 4.2.2. Age Differences of English teachers in Rural Primary Schools

**Table 5.** Age differences of rural primary English teachers

	Age	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	F	Sig.
Environmental identity	Under 25	.4825388	1.21058397	8	.225	.878
	26-35	.0998488	1.62946316	34		
	36-45	.0295848	.81276449	19		
	Above 46	.2477442	.94691984	3		
	Total	.1337580	1.33820456	64		
Professional identity	Under 25	.3685016	1.29002133	8	.716	.546
	26-35	-.0395694	.97016632	34		
	36-45	.0085041	.99722766	19		
	Above 46	-.5880772	.32540046	3		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
Social identity	Under 25	-.8866028	1.24350452	8	4.035	.011
	26-35	-.0709761	.87065578	34		
	36-45	.4239238	.80471086	19		
	Above 46	.4838192	1.56969438	3		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
Personal identity	Under 25	-.4309169	1.13927459	8	1.449	.238
	26-35	.1211119	1.01389232	34		
	36-45	.0966086	.90469777	19		
	Above 46	-.8353441	.70835955	3		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
Overall identity	Under 25	-.0384	.43901	8	.331	.803
	26-35	.0121	.58456	34		
	36-45	.1416	.52302	19		
	Above 46	-.0582	.56678	3		
	Total	.0409	.54179	64		

The present study utilized one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to examine the identity of rural primary school

English teachers of varying ages across several dimensions, including, environmental identity, professional identity, personal identity, and social identity. Results indicate no significant difference in overall identity based on age ( $F=0.331$ ,  $P=0.803>0.05$ ), environmental identity, professional identity, and personal identity ( $\text{sig}>0.05$ ). However, a significant difference in social identity is observed ( $\text{sig}=0.011>0.05$ ). Post-hoc comparisons show that teachers under 25 years old have significantly lower levels of

social identity than their counterparts aged 25 and above. The positive correlation between age and social identity suggests that with age, rural teachers develop stronger social networks in their field, garner more respect and trust, thereby improving their social status and reputation. Additionally, accumulated teaching experience enables teachers to cultivate their unique teaching styles and characteristics, ultimately leading to increased job satisfaction and social identity.

**Table 6.** Multiple comparisons of social identity in age

Dependent Variable		(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	
Social identity	LSD	Under 25	26-35	-.8156267*	.36730543	.030	
			36-45	-1.3105265*	.39395557	.002	
			Above 46	-1.3704219*	.63281663	.034	
		26-35	Under 25	36-45	.8156267*	.36730543	.030
				Above 46	-.4948998	.26773727	.069
				Above 46	-.5547952	.56297348	.328
		36-45	Under 25	26-35	1.3105265*	.39395557	.002
				Above 46	.4948998	.26773727	.069
				Above 46	-.0598954	.58071236	.918
		Above 46	Under 25	26-35	1.3704219*	.63281663	.034
				36-45	.5547952	.56297348	.328
				36-45	.0598954	.58071236	.918

#### 4.2.3. Academic Differences of English teachers in Rural Primary Schools

**Table 7.** Academic differences of rural primary English teachers

	Record of formal schooling	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	F	Sig
Environmental identity	Diploma or below	-.1636760	.92973758	26	12.908	.000
	Undergraduate	.1289783	1.03587536	36		
	Master or above	4.0864354	4.48385542	2		
	Total	.1337580	1.33820456	64		
Professional identity	Diploma or below	-.1146783	.93638050	26	3.310	.043
	Undergraduate course	.1688774	.98534473	36		
	Master or above	-1.5489755	.96480906	2		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
Social identity	Diploma or below	.2761696	.78513947	26	2.114	.130
	Undergraduate course	-.2219285	1.11167641	36		
	Master or above	.4045080	.50169712	2		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
Personal identity	Diploma or below	.1898203	1.07181574	26	1.314	.276
	Undergraduate	-.0911864	.93935918	36		
	Master or above	-.8263092	.89145363	2		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
Overall identity	Diploma or below	.0141	.55565	26	2.127	.128
	Undergraduate course	.0179	.49252	36		
	Master or above	.8050	1.03845	2		
	Total	.0409	.54179	64		

Table 7 presents the results indicating that educational background does not show a significant difference ( $F= 2.127$ ,  $P = 0.128 > 0.05$ ), whereas environmental identity and professional identity demonstrate significant differences. Specifically, the factor scores for environmental identity increase with higher levels of educational background, and a statistically significant difference exists ( $\text{sig} = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Post-hoc comparisons (LSD) reveal stark contrasts in the identity of teachers holding a post-graduate degree compared

to those with a diploma or lower, or undergraduate degree. Additionally, significant differences exist in the dimensions of professional identity ( $\text{sig} = 0.043 < 0.05$ ). Further analysis through post-hoc comparisons (see Table 8) highlights significant differences between teachers with a graduate degree and those holding a bachelor's degree or lower. Much can be explained by the fact that Individuals with higher education tend to have higher occupational status and social recognition, which may lead to a greater professional identity

and self-esteem. Additionally, higher education provides exposure to broader knowledge and information, which may influence individuals' values and enhance their ability to

adapt to specific social environments, potentially resulting in a stronger sense of environmental identity.

**Table 8.** Multiple comparisons of environmental and professional identity in academic background

Dependent Variable		Record of formal schooling	Record of formal schooling	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Environmental identity	LSD	Diploma or below	Undergraduate	-.2926543	.29339436	.322
			Master or above	-4.2501114*	.83651009	.000
		Undergraduate	Diploma or below	.2926543	.29339436	.322
			Master or above	-3.9574571*	.82816980	.000
Professional identity	LSD	Diploma or below	Undergraduate	4.2501114*	.83651009	.000
			Master or above	3.9574571*	.82816980	.000
		Undergraduate	Diploma or below	-.2835557	.24842323	.258
			Master or above	1.4342972*	.70829085	.047
Professional identity	LSD	Diploma or below	Undergraduate	.2835557	.24842323	.258
			Master or above	1.7178529*	.70122895	.017
		Undergraduate	Diploma or below	-1.4342972*	.70829085	.047
			Master or above	-1.7178529*	.70122895	.017

### 4.3. Professional Background of English Teacher Identity in Rural Primary Schools

The analysis of differences in identity of English teachers in rural primary schools with regard to their professional backgrounds typically involves such factors as teaching experience, professional title, position, and educational

background. Such analysis holds significant implications for improving the quality of English education in rural primary schools and promoting the professional development of teachers.

#### 4.3.1. Differences in Teaching Years of Rural Primary English teachers

**Table 9.** Differences in teaching years of rural primary English teachers

	Years of teaching	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	F	Sig.
Environmental identity	Under 3	.1269924	1.04562427	17	.178	.911
	3-5	.0746276	1.66541582	30		
	6-10	.2676823	.95984521	15		
	11-20	-.8239160	.	1		
	21-30	.9714988	.	1		
	Total	.1337580	1.33820456	64		
Professional identity	Under 3	.3436394	1.10309244	17	1.752	.168
	3-5	-.2243159	.96040388	30		
	6-10	.1464405	.92200721	15		
	11-20	-.3501163	.	1		
	21-30	-.9588838	.	1		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
Social identity	Under 3	-.5096240	1.29047577	17	2.935	.042
	3-5	.1180922	.60891535	30		
	6-10	.3862342	1.11524427	15		
	11-20	-1.0041556	.	1		
	21-30	.3314869	.	1		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
Personal identity	Under 3	.0331262	1.27191267	17	.736	.535
	3-5	.1092456	.82917467	30		
	6-10	-.1830404	1.04171923	15		
	11-20	-.0443335	.	1		
	21-30	-1.0505721	.	1		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
Overall identity	Under 3	.0028	.40861	17	.291	.832
	3-5	.0005	.63112	30		
	6-10	.2145	.48335	15		
	11-20	-.6452	.	1		
	21-30	-.0154	.	1		
	Total	.0409	.54179	64		

In order to investigate whether there exist noteworthy disparities in identity among rural primary school English teachers with varying years of teaching experience, the data obtained from the multi-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) are presented in Table 8. The findings indicate that there is no significant disparity in teaching experience overall ( $F = 0.843$ ,  $p = 0.832 > 0.05$ ). Moreover, there are no notable differences in the dimensions of environmental identity, professional identity, and personal identity ( $\text{sig} > 0.05$ ), except for social identity ( $\text{sig} = 0.042 < 0.05$ ). Subsequent multiple comparisons revealed a significant discrepancy in social identity between those with less than three years of experience and those with more than three years. Maybe it's

because teachers with short tenure in rural areas may see themselves as temporary workers, while those with longer tenure, who are often locals, have stronger social and cultural adaptation abilities and a sense of identity as both educational workers and community members. Short-tenured teachers may experience a cognitive gap between their understanding of rural education and the actual situation, leading to emotional and cognitive dissonance and a choice to adapt or leave. Besides, the rich teaching experience accumulated with increasing tenure is an important constituent element of their self-awareness and identity. Also, rural communities are more likely to accept longer-tenured teachers due to their established social relationships.

**Table 10.** Multiple comparisons of social identity in teaching age

Dependent Variable	(I) Teaching age	(J) Teaching age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>f</sup>
Social identity	Under 3	3-5	-.784 <sup>a,*</sup>	.294	.010
		6-10	-.898 <sup>a,*</sup>	.382	.023
		11-20	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
		21-30	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
	3-5	Under 3	.784 <sup>a,*</sup>	.294	.010
		6-10	-.114 <sup>a</sup>	.318	.721
		11-20	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
	6-10	21-30	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
		Under 3	.898 <sup>a,*</sup>	.382	.023
		3-5	.114 <sup>a</sup>	.318	.721
	21-30	21-30	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
		Above 30	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
		Under 3	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
		3-5	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
	Above 30	6-10	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
		Above 30	-1.644 <sup>a</sup>	1.660	.327
Under 3		. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.	
3-5		. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.	
		6-10	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
		21-30	1.644 <sup>a</sup>	1.660	.327

#### 4.3.2. Differences in Professional Title of Rural Primary English teachers

The multi-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) is utilized to investigate potential variations in identity among rural primary English teachers with distinct professional identities. Table 11 presents the overall identity data, indicating that there is no significant difference in professional title ( $F = 0.491$ ,  $P = 0.512 > 0.05$ ), environmental, professional, and personal identities ( $\text{sig} > 0.05$ ). However, a significant difference is detected in social identity ( $\text{sig} = 0.003 < 0.05$ ). Further analysis using multiple comparisons (LSD) reveals a significant discrepancy in the identity of teachers with and

without professional titles, as evidenced in Table 12. Perhaps it's because teachers who have received professional titles generally possess greater teaching experience and skills, and may have access to a wider range of opportunities and resources, resulting in a higher social status and stronger sense of identity. Furthermore, they may receive more extensive training and learning opportunities, as well as higher remuneration and more favorable career prospects, all of which may contribute to their social identity advantage. Conversely, teachers who have not yet received professional titles may experience a diminished sense of social identity due to a lack of comparable opportunities and resources, as well as a greater burden of teaching and administrative duties.

**Table 11.** Differences in professional title of rural primary English teachers

	Professional title	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	F	Sig
Environmental identity	Unrated	-.0090171	.93944065	30	.435	.785
	Level 3	.5217692	2.05168424	16		
	Level 2	.0212358	1.24889501	13		
	Level 1	.0196910	.51234554	3		
	Associate professors	.0737914	1.26954991	2		
Professional identity	Total	.1337580	1.33820456	64	.435	.637
	Unrated	-.0397179	1.04516403	30		
	Level 3	-.0701485	1.08046139	16		
	Level 2	.2199102	.91971050	13		
	Level 1	.2546934	.91339501	3		
Social identity	Associate professors	-.6545000	.43046362	2	.609	.003
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
	Unrated	.0500207	1.03623392	30		
	Level 3	-.2029123	.96125981	16		
	Level 2	.0211806	.96971934	13		
Personal identity	Level 1	.7144322	1.28970249	3	.261	.667
	Associate professors	-.3363343	.94444183	2		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
	Unrated	-.0004529	1.10376743	30		
	Level 3	-.0819541	.80649507	16		
Overall identity	Level 2	.1333635	1.00006826	13	.491	.512
	Level 1	.2286778	1.46796456	3		
	Associate professors	-.5474528	.71151817	2		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
	Unrated	-.0007	.50491	30		
	Level 3	.0723	.68939	16		
	Level 2	.0936	.48421	13		
	Level 1	.3093	.42630	3		
	Associate professors	-.3303	.44532	2		
	Total	.0409	.54179	64		

**Table 12.** Multiple comparisons of social identity in professional title

Dependent Variable	(I) professional title	(J) professional title	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>f</sup>
Social identity	Unrated	Level 3	1.326 <sup>a,*</sup>	.352	.000
		Level 2	1.362 <sup>a,*</sup>	.408	.002
		Level 1	.951 <sup>a</sup>	.922	.307
		Associate professors	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
		Unrated	-1.326 <sup>a,*</sup>	.352	.000
	Level 3	Level 2	.036 <sup>a</sup>	.330	.915
		Level 1	-.375 <sup>a</sup>	.950	.694
		Associate professors	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
	Level 2	Unrated	-1.362 <sup>a,*</sup>	.408	.002
		Level 3	-.036 <sup>a</sup>	.330	.915
		Level 1	-.411 <sup>a</sup>	.957	.669
		Associate professors	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
	Level 1	Unrated	-.951 <sup>a</sup>	.922	.307
		Level 3	.375 <sup>a</sup>	.950	.694
		Level 2	.411 <sup>a</sup>	.957	.669
		Associate professors	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.
Associate professors	Unrated	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.	
	Level 3	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.	
	Level 2	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.	
	Level 1	. <sup>b,c,d</sup>	.	.	

#### 4.3.3. Differences in Position of Rural Primary English Teachers



**Table 13.** Differences in position of rural primary English teachers

	Position	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	F	Sig
Environmental identity	General teachers	-.0577054	1.10737893	40	1.672	.307
	Grade leader	.8963727	2.19563589	12		
	Guidance directors	.0546399	.53060039	9		
	Subject department head	-.1265001	.71010598	3		
	Total	.1337580	1.33820456	64		
	General teachers	.0133805	1.02879136	40		
Professional identity	Grade leader	-.2107328	1.21102591	12	.281	.784
	Guidance directors	.1681966	.59302380	9		
	Subject department head	.1599349	.97588320	3		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
	General teachers	-.2103064	1.06857275	40		
	Grade leader	.5074675	.65871203	12		
Social identity	Guidance directors	.0863636	.61919862	9	1.998	.004
	Subject department head	.5151247	1.56606961	3		
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
	General teachers	-.0473427	1.08427568	40		
	Grade leader	-.0993915	.82309623	12		
	Guidance directors	.3468368	.74125666	9		
Personal identity	Subject department head	-.0117088	1.41601213	3	.419	.676
	Total	.0000000	1.00000000	64		
	General teachers	-.0780	.49624	40		
	Grade leader	.3424	.64784	12		
	Guidance directors	.1302	.43882	9		
	Subject department head	.1532	.69458	3		
Overall identity	Total	.0409	.54179	64	2.112	.031

The multi-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) is applied to explore whether there are significant differences in identity among rural primary English teachers with different positions (see Table 13). The findings indicate that significant differences exist in overall identity with regards to positions ( $F = 2.112$ ,  $p = 0.031 < 0.05$ ) and Multiple comparisons reveal significant differences between general teachers and grade leaders. However, there are no significant differences observed in the dimensions of environmental identity, professional identity, and personal identity ( $sig > 0.05$ ), except for social identity ( $sig = 0.004 < 0.05$ ). The results of multiple comparisons reveal a significant difference in social identity between general teachers and grade leaders, as well as guidance directors (see Table 14). A comprehensive analysis suggests that teachers with experience in teaching management may differ from their ordinary counterparts in terms of job responsibilities, higher positions, better salaries, and more opportunities for education and career development. These factors may influence their identity and social recognition. Moreover, individual differences are another potential source of divergence in identity and social recognition. Specifically, the differences between various teacher positions manifest in work experience, career aspirations, personal goals, and other facets. Thus, these factors collectively contribute to the discrepancies between teacher identity and social recognition.

## 5. Discussion and Recommendation

Currently, there exists a general trend of low identity levels among English teachers in rural primary schools. To improve their professional development and enhance their identity, measures must be taken such as improving the rural environment, increasing investment in rural education, formulating personalized and humane systems that align with the characteristics of the school, and emphasizing the value of professional development for English teachers in rural primary schools. These efforts will contribute to a more robust and effective education system in rural areas.

### 5.1. Improving Rural Environment and Increasing Investment in Rural Education

Poor rural environment and lack of resources are important factors contributing to the challenges faced by rural teachers, including difficulty in adapting to the rural environment, inability to retain good teachers, and inadequate teaching quality. Therefore, government agencies should increase financial investment to strengthen rural infrastructure and improve the rural environment, to ensure the basic needs of rural teachers are met and to enhance their sense of belonging and identity. On the other hand, the government needs to continue increasing investment in education, raising the

salaries and social status of rural primary school teachers, and providing the necessary material foundation for teachers. Additionally, subsidies for rural teachers should be actively implemented, while also considering the teachers' work input, establishing a reward system based on the principle of "more work, more pay" to stimulate teachers' work enthusiasm.

Finally, a special incentive system should be established for rural teachers, rewarding and recognizing those who have served in rural schools for a long time, showing respect and recognition for rural primary school teachers, inspiring their motivation and confidence to stay rooted in rural education, and reducing teacher turnover.

**Table 14.** Multiple comparisons of social identity and overall identity in position

Dependent Variable	(I) Position	(J) Position	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>c</sup>
Social identity	General teachers	Grade leader	-1.373 <sup>a,*</sup>	.402	.001
		Guidance directors	-.989 <sup>a,*</sup>	.420	.022
		Subject department head	-1.681 <sup>a</sup>	1.054	.117
	Grade leader	General teachers	1.373 <sup>a,*</sup>	.402	.001
		Guidance directors	.384 <sup>a</sup>	.414	.357
		Subject department head	-.308 <sup>a</sup>	1.129	.786
	Guidance directors	General teachers	.989 <sup>a,*</sup>	.420	.022
		Grade leader	-.384 <sup>a</sup>	.414	.357
		Subject department head	-.692 <sup>a</sup>	1.135	.545
	Subject department head	General teachers	1.681 <sup>a</sup>	1.054	.117
		Grade leader	.308 <sup>a</sup>	1.129	.786
		Guidance directors	.692 <sup>a</sup>	1.135	.545
General teachers	Grade leader	-.695 <sup>a,*</sup>	.247	.007	
	Guidance directors	-.500 <sup>a</sup>	.258	.058	
	Subject department head	-.729 <sup>a</sup>	.646	.264	
Overall identity	Grade leader	General teachers	.695 <sup>a,*</sup>	.247	.007
		Guidance directors	.195 <sup>a</sup>	.253	.446
		Subject department head	-.035 <sup>a</sup>	.692	.960
	Guidance directors	General teachers	.500 <sup>a</sup>	.258	.058
		Grade leader	-.195 <sup>a</sup>	.253	.446
		Subject department head	-.230 <sup>a</sup>	.696	.743
Subject department head	General teachers	.729 <sup>a</sup>	.646	.264	
	Grade leader	.035 <sup>a</sup>	.692	.960	
	Guidance directors	.230 <sup>a</sup>	.696	.743	

## 5.2. Developing a humanized system that fits the characteristics of the school

The school's institutional environment is an essential internal guarantee mechanism that affects the teacher's identity. In many rural schools, the teacher evaluation system ties student grades to teacher salaries, which greatly undermines the teacher's enthusiasm for their work. Rural teachers not only have to juggle multiple roles, but also face heavy workloads. Unreasonable mechanisms or mandatory regulations regarding job title assessments and educational training have also increased their sense of professional burnout. In this context, rural schools should establish a people-oriented and humanized system that focuses on enhancing the quality of education, paying attention to the practical needs of teachers, encouraging them to actively participate in the development of regulations, and transforming their role from mere executors or followers to rule designers, participants, and supporters, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging to the school. At the same time, clear quantitative conditions and standards for job title assessments should be established to ensure an objective and fair process and prevent any favoritism or nepotism.

## 5.3. Valuing the professional development of English teachers in rural elementary school

Professional development is not only a requirement for the

reform and development of rural education, but also a pursuit to enhance the professional status and intrinsic value of rural teachers. Currently, rural teachers are often labeled with low quality and poor ability, so improving their own quality and achieving professional development is the only way for them to break free from these labels and reshape their image. In this regard, schools should promote the establishment of "learning-oriented schools," encourage expert teachers or experienced teachers to exchange and help young rural teachers. The goal is to enhance teachers' professional theoretical knowledge, teaching skills, and professional practical abilities. Rural teachers should remain steadfast in their teaching beliefs, and hold onto their teaching positions. At the same time, rural teachers should establish the concept of lifelong learning, learn advanced teaching concepts and modes through various channels, for improving their own educational and teaching skills. In addition, rural primary school teachers should actively reflect on their educational and teaching practices, transform their educational concepts and behaviors, and thus enhance their sense of identity with their own profession.

## 6. Conclusion

Rural teachers, as the main force of rural education reform, play an important role in rural cultural education, inheritance and development. The deep identity of rural teachers has a profound impact on and restricts the rural teachers to root in rural education, and it is the fundamental way to solve the real

dilemma in rural teachers (Zhu Shenghui 2020). In order to promote the positive identity transformation of rural teachers, this research takes the rural primary school English teachers as the research objects, using a questionnaire survey to analyze the current status quo of rural primary school English teachers' identity, and propose the solutions to the identified identity crisis. The results show that the level of identity among rural English teachers is relatively low, which is reflected in the environment dimension, occupation dimension, social dimension and personal dimension. Firstly, they lack a strong sense of environmental identity and the sense of rural belonging, due to the poor environment and weak teaching resources. Indeed, compared with urban teachers, rural teachers need more social support and security as the way to improve their identity and work enthusiasm. Secondly, the limitation of education to some extent impact the prospects of career development. Namely, rural elementary English teachers with low education may face obstacles in career development planning, partly because they lack confidence in their own education and profession. Furthermore, given age, education, salary, etc, the teachers have a weak sense of social identity, accompanying with low evaluation and recognition from society. At length, their personal identity crisis is manifested in the mismatch between their work input and teaching satisfaction. The consequence of excessive workload and the low level of most rural students further exacerbates the psychological and work pressure of the teachers.

In view of the identity crisis of rural elementary English teachers mentioned above, this paper suggests that adjustments should be made from three aspects, namely society, school and teachers, in order to enhance the identity of rural English teachers and promote the construction of a high-quality rural teaching team. In terms of society, it is advisable to improve the rural environment, strengthen the rural public infrastructure construction, increase the investment of rural education, as well as raise the salary of rural teachers for raising their economic and social status. For school, it is necessary to improve the material-cultural environment of the school, creating a harmonious atmosphere of respecting teachers. Most significantly, formulating humane system that fits the characteristics of the school, which can largely help to reduce the burden of rural teachers, as well as increase the teachers' sense of happiness and belonging. For teachers, they should adhere to the good professional ethics, establish the concept of lifelong learning, and learn advanced teaching concepts which is conducive to improving their educational and teaching skills, alleviate the professional pressure and demonstrate the self-value. Doubtless, with the joint efforts of all parties, the identity of rural primary English teachers will be enhanced in an all-round, thereby promoting the training of high-quality rural teachers and effectively driving the construction of rural education.

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