

An Empirical Study on the Influence Mechanism of Teaching Commitment among Pre-service Teachers in Vocational Colleges from the Perspective of Ecosystem Theory

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Abstract: Pre-service teachers' Teaching Commitment is crucial to the overall quality of the teaching workforce. The deficiency in such commitment stems from the complexity of influencing factors. Guided by the ecosystem theory, this study constructs a multi-level mechanism model encompassing six dimensions across the micro-individual, meso-institutional, and macro-societal levels. Using questionnaire data and the smartPLS software for empirical testing, the results indicate that all three levels exert a significant positive impact on pre-service teachers' Teaching Commitment, with the individual level playing a notable mediating role. Accordingly, this study proposes strategic recommendations in three aspects: first, at the individual level, to integrate the spirit of educator ethos and strengthen professional motivation and identity; second, at the institutional level, to establish a comprehensive training system that fosters a virtuous cycle of "cognition, emotion, volition, and practice"; and third, at the societal level, to enhance policy support for education, thereby safeguarding professional prestige and attractiveness. These recommendations aim to reinforce pre-service teachers' Teaching Commitment and improve the quality of teacher training.

Keywords: Ecosystem Theory; Pre-service Teachers; Structural Equation Modeling; Teaching Commitment.

1. Introduction

Teachers are the primary resource for high-quality educational development. As the reserve force for this critical resource, cultivating pre-service teachers' Teaching Commitment is not only a key factor influencing the quality of teacher training in higher education institutions but also a core task in promoting the spirit of educators. However, higher normal institutions have been relatively ineffective in nurturing the professional ideals and convictions of their students, resulting in gaps in their vocational awareness education and insufficiently firm commitment to teaching. [1] In recent years, with policy advancement and deepening research, the connotation of pre-service teachers' teaching commitment and its influencing factors have been extensively explored. In the field of education, ecosystem theory, with its multi-level interactions and systemic perspective, provides a suitable theoretical framework for integrating the various levels of factors influencing pre-service teachers' teaching commitment. This paper aims to validate the influencing mechanisms of vocational pre-service teachers' teaching commitment based on ecosystem theory through empirical research and structural modeling, and to propose corresponding strategy recommendations based on these findings.

2. Literature Review

Beliefs or commitment are intrinsically linked to will, attitudes, emotions, and even values, grounded in an individual's specific system of values, assumptions, preferences, and expectations.[2] The conceptual definition of teachers' teaching commitment remains inconsistent. From a macro perspective, Li and Liu (2010) [2] define teaching commitment as pedagogical philosophies rooted in one's own

teaching cognition, highly abstracted behavioral directives forming personal teaching ideologies or theories, and individual teachers' understanding and experience of life's meaning. Borg (2003)[3] regarded language teachers' commitment as an unobservable cognitive dimension in teaching, encompassing what teachers know, believe, and think. From a micro perspective, Pajares (1992) [4] subdivided teaching commitment into multiple aspects including teaching efficacy, cognitive beliefs, teaching activity beliefs, self-perception and evaluation perspectives, and self-efficacy. Domestic scholars Wu and Su (2023) [5] propose that pre-service teachers' teaching commitment primarily encompass teaching motivation, career cognition, professional identity, and career planning. All these concepts incorporate elements of cognitive and affective identification. Integrating the essence of commitment, this study defines pre-service teachers' teaching commitment as comprising three elements: career cognition, professional affect, and professional will.

Pre-service teachers' teaching commitment is influenced by various factors. Some scholars have investigated the factors affecting teaching motivation and professional identity within the affective-cognitive dimension. They found that only 13.2% of all teacher education graduates expressed a strong intention to teach after graduation, with professional education playing a certain role in shaping teaching intentions[6]. In order to understand the composition of factors influencing professional identity, Scholars Liang and Wu (2025) [7] employed grounded theory to distill five core factors: university training systems, societal support, professional maturity, personality traits, and individual biography. Their research successfully constructed a theoretical model of influencing factors and mechanisms for professional identity. The in-depth exploration of the partial

dimensions above reflects multi-level, multi-faceted influence mechanisms involving the profession, institutions, society, and individuals.

In comprehensive investigations of factors influencing pre-service teachers' teaching commitment, domestic and international research exhibit divergent tendencies. Overseas scholars tend to focus on specific aspects. For instance, Maria Borines and Arlyn Marasigan (2024) [8] examined the impact of teaching practicums on pre-service teachers' teaching commitment in the Philippines. They employed Calderhead's five-dimensional framework for teaching commitment as their qualitative research structure, expanding it to include two additional dimensions: school culture and mentor guidance. The study further refined the dimensions influencing teaching commitment from the perspective of the practice setting. In contrast to international approaches, domestic scholars tend to consider comprehensive factors. Wang and Li (2021)[9] argued that pre-service teachers' teaching commitment formation was influenced by school environment, teaching practicum, personal disposition, and parental attitudes. They proposed enhancing professional commitment through improving comprehensive free education policies and adjusting training methods and content. Scholars Wu and Su (2023) [5] analyzed the trajectory of pre-service teachers' teaching commitment changes, identifying teaching practice, living environment, and interpersonal relationships as factors influencing long-term teaching commitment. They proposed measures such as optimizing curriculum design and practical arrangements, improving the environment, and enriching interpersonal interactions and care approaches to solidify teaching commitment.

Existing research spans micro-level (e.g., personal traits), meso-level (e.g., institutional training and professional education), and macro-level (e.g., societal environments and policy support). These systemic dimensions reflect Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective. However, studies predominantly focus on isolated, static aspects rather than presenting results through systemic and complexly interactive lenses. Accordingly, the study employs Ecological Systems Theory framework to investigate the reciprocal interactions and mediating effects among micro-, meso-, and macro-

system levels on pre-service teachers' teaching commitment. This approach aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms that shape the professional commitment of vocational teacher candidates.

3. Research Design

3.1. Conceptual Framework

American developmental psychologist Uri Bronfenbrenner proposed the Ecological Systems Theory in the 1970s. This theory emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their environments, positing that individuals are embedded within a series of interconnected environmental systems. The dynamic, bidirectional interactions between these environmental systems and the individual shape human growth and development.[10] The ecological systems theory breaks from the traditional mindset of explaining behavior solely from the individual's perspective. It advocates interpreting human behavior, including the causes of growth, through multiple hierarchical systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, or from micro, meso, and macro levels. [11] In the field of education, Liu, Yu and Ma(2025) [10] constructed a framework for teachers' lifelong learning capabilities based on ecological systems theory, encompassing individual systems (personal characteristics, experiences, and beliefs), microsystems (daily teaching practice environments), mesosystems (collaboration and guidance among teachers and others), exosystems (educational policies), and macrosystems (societal norms). Given that the formation of teachers' teaching commitment is influenced not only by external educational environments but also by personal experiences, personality traits, etc.[12] , and drawing on the aforementioned classification of educational systems, this study interprets the factors influencing pre-service teachers' teaching commitment from three hierarchical levels: micro (i.e. personal factors), meso (i.e. college factors), and macro (societal factors). Based on this framework, we aim to construct a model of factors influencing pre-service teachers' teaching commitment (see Figure 1).

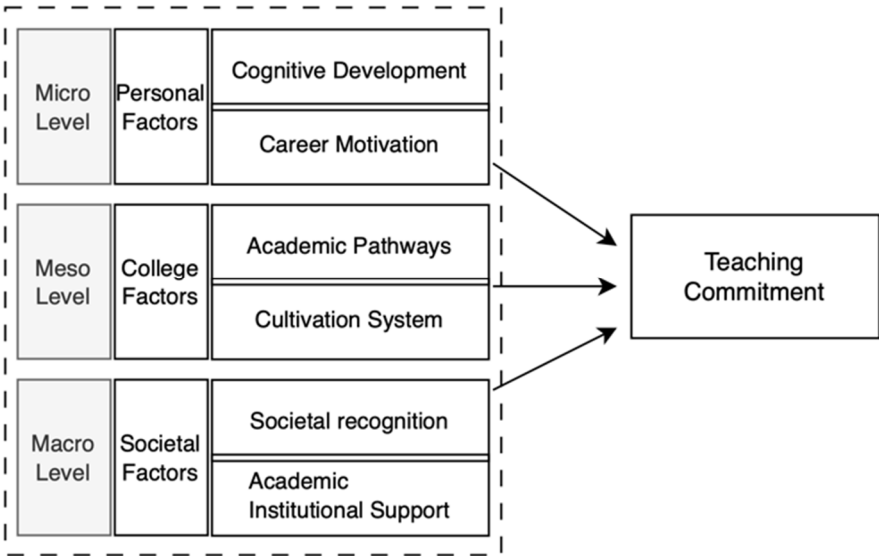


Figure 1. Model of Factors Influencing Pre-service Teachers' Teaching Commitment

The micro-level focuses on individuals within the ecosystem. Among the various environmental factors

influencing pre-service teachers' teaching commitment, personal cognitive development and individual career motivation form the endogenous foundation for its development. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Cognitive development and motivation at micro-level exert a positive influence on pre-service teachers' teaching commitment.

The meso-level emphasizes collaboration among micro-systems within the college. This encompasses not only diverse training pathways jointly constructed by various professional, practical, or career-oriented courses and extracurricular activities, but also the formulation and implementation of various management systems and regulations within the college. These systems interact to fulfill the college's educational role. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: College training pathways and institutional systems at meso-level exert a positive influence on pre-service teachers' teaching commitment.

The macro-level manifests as the external environment at the societal level. Societal cultural recognition of the teaching profession, along with various educational policies, regulations, and labor conditions, indirectly regulate pre-service teachers' teaching commitment. When society respects teachers and values education, pre-service teachers perceive the dignity and value of their profession, thereby strengthening their professional commitment. Based on this, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Recognition and institutional safeguards at macro-level exert a positive influence on pre-service teachers' teaching commitment.

The ecological system emphasizes the interactive influence

of environmental factors across levels. College training and environment may shape individuals' professional cognition and value recognition, while societal support and broader contexts may alter personal perceptions and career choices. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: The College Factors exert a positive effect on professional commitment through the mediating role of the Personal Factors.

H5: The societal Factors exert a positive effect on vocational conviction through the mediating role of the Personal Factors.

3.2. Variable Design and Data Collection

This study distributed questionnaires via Wenjuanxing, a widely used Chinese online survey platform to students from nine classes in higher vocational teacher education majors. A total of 430 questionnaires were collected, with 398 valid responses. The constructed model comprises three independent variables and one dependent variable, each with multiple observational indicators. The questionnaire drew upon Huang Yifei's (2022) survey on vocational beliefs among publicly funded teacher education students, with modifications tailored to this study. It consists of two sections: Part One covers participants' basic information and current vocational belief status; Part Two investigates factors influencing teaching commitment. The final question was an open-ended response designed to capture students' reflections and insights following their educational practicum experiences. All other items, excluding this open-ended question and basic demographic questions, employed a five-point Likert scale, where "1" indicated "Strongly Disagree" and "5" indicated "Strongly Agree." Specific variables and sample items are presented below.

Table 1. Dimensions and Variables of the Questionnaire

Dimension	Construct/Latent Variable	Observed Variable Example
PF (Personal Factors)	PF1 Cognitive Development	I understand the objectives of cultivating teacher professional beliefs among pre-service teachers
	PF2 Career Motivation	I applied to this program because I enjoy the teaching profession
CF (College Factors)	CF1 Academic Pathways	Educational practicum experience cultivates my professional commitment to teaching
	CF2 Cultivation System	The college will assess teacher candidates' professional commitment to teaching
SF (Societal Factors)	SF1 Societal Recognition	Society holds the teaching profession in high regard
	SF2 Academic Institutional Support	The state places great emphasis on the teaching profession
TC (Teaching Commitment)	TC1 Professional Will	If given the chance to choose again, I would still choose to be a teacher
	TC2 Professional Affect	I love the teaching profession.
	TC3 Career cognition	I understand the responsibilities of a teacher

4. Result Analysis

This study employed the smartPLS 3.2.9 structural equation modeling software to analyze data and validate research hypotheses. smartPLS utilizes structural equation modeling (SEM) principles—a statistical technique for assessing the fit of theoretical or hypothesized models—capable of simultaneously handling multiple variables within

causal models. [13] By creating a project, data exported from the Questionnaire Star backend was saved in CSV format and imported into the software. Through model construction, Algorithm operations, and Bootstrapping calculations, the following relevant data results were obtained.

4.1. Reliability and Validity Testing and Correlation Analysis

Table 2 demonstrates the questionnaire's reliability and

validity. All Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceed 0.7, with a minimum of 0.750. External loadings all surpass 0.7 (range: 0.881–0.949), while CR values exceed 0.8, with a minimum of 0.888. This indicates high internal consistency, confirming good reliability and convergent validity. Furthermore, according to Fornell et al., discriminant validity can be assessed by examining the magnitude of AVE values for latent variables and comparing the square root of AVE for a latent

variable with its correlation coefficients to other latent variables. The data in Table 2 show that the AVE values for each factor are above 0.5, with the lowest being 0.758. Moreover, the square root of the AVE value is greater than the correlation coefficients with other latent variables (see Tables 3 and 4), indicating good discriminant validity and a low possibility of multicollinearity among latent variables.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity Data Table

Dimension	Factor Loadings (loading)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Cronbach's Alpha	Combined Reliability (CR)	Average Extraction Variance (AVE)
PF	PF1: 0.907	4.16	0.64	0.750	0.888	0.799
	PF2: 0.881	3.83	0.84			
CF	CF1: 0.949	3.99	0.67	0.889	0.947	0.900
	CF2: 0.948	4.13	0.67			
SF	SF1: 0.924	4.08	0.71	0.815	0.915	0.844
	SF2: 0.912	4.28	0.65			
TC	TC1: 0.888	4.04	0.68	0.840	0.904	0.758
	TC2: 0.903	4.07	0.64			
	TC3: 0.819	4.47	0.55			

Table 3. Distinctive Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criteria) Table

	PF	CF	SF	TC
PF	0.894			
CF	0.731	0.949		
SF	0.620	0.654	0.918	
TC	0.574	0.534	0.505	0.871

Table 4. Correlation Matrix

	PF1	PF2	CF1	CF2	SF1	SF2	TC1	TC2	TC3
PF1	1								
PF2	0.600	1							
CF1	0.660	0.582	1						
CF2	0.698	0.529	0.800	1					
SF1	0.539	0.527	0.561	0.550	1				
SF2	0.521	0.441	0.580	0.593	0.688	1			
TC1	0.457	0.496	0.450	0.436	0.441	0.390	1		
TC2	0.444	0.468	0.482	0.458	0.426	0.422	0.732	1	
TC3	0.455	0.355	0.405	0.413	0.358	0.384	0.566	0.610	1

4.2. Structural Model Analysis

Using bootstrapping operations in smartPLS, a resampled

sample of 5000 was selected from the original data to test the significance of path coefficients. Specific results are presented in Table 5 and Figure 2.

Table 5. Model Hypothesis Verification Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	Adjusted R-squared	T-value	P-value	Conclusion
H1: PF→TC	0.336***	TC: 0.372	4.972	0.000	Strong Support
H2: CF→TC	0.164*		2.459	0.014	Weak Support
H3: SF→TC	0.190***		3.579	0.000	Support
H4: CF→PF→TC	0.192***	PF: 0.568	4.558	0.000	Significant, partial mediation
H5: SF→PF→TC	0.083***		3.572	0.000	Significant, partial mediation

Note: * indicates $P < 0.05$; *** indicates $P < 0.001$; $r^2 \geq 0.25$ denotes moderate explanatory power, ≥ 0.50 denotes strong explanatory power

After testing, all path VIF values were less than 3, with a maximum of 2.505 (CF→TC), indicating no multicollinearity issues in the model and reliable path coefficients. Table 5 shows that the variance explained at the micro-level (PF) is 56.8% ($r^2 = 0.568$), indicating strong predictive effects from

both the meso-level (CF) and macro-level (SF). Strong bidirectional relationships exist between the SF and PF, as well as between CF and PF. SF and CF strongly drive changes at PF, laying the foundation for subsequent mediation effects on teaching commitment. TC exhibits a variance explained

rate of 37.2% ($r^2 = 0.372$), indicating that PF, CF, and SF collectively account for 37.2% of its variance, demonstrating moderate explanatory power.

Among all hypotheses, except H2 ($T=2.459$, $P=0.014 < 0.05$), all T-values exceeded 3.28, and all P-values passed the stringent significance test ($p < 0.001$). Therefore, overall, PF, CF, and SF exert significant positive influences on pre-service teachers' teaching commitment, with PF playing a particularly crucial role. Although H2 and H3 were statistically significant, examining effect sizes revealed that CF exerted negligible direct influence on TC ($f^2 = 0.017$). Its positive impact

primarily mediated through PF (H4). Additionally, SF's direct effect on TC was modest ($f^2 = 0.031$, > 0.02), which is classified as a small effect size according to Cohen's (1988) reference standard. Analysis of the indirect effect at SF (Hypothesis H5) revealed that the mediation effect accounted for 30.4% of the total effect ($VAF = \text{indirect effect} / \text{total effect}$), indicating that nearly 30% of the societal influence was mediated by PF, representing a medium-to-high level of mediation contribution.

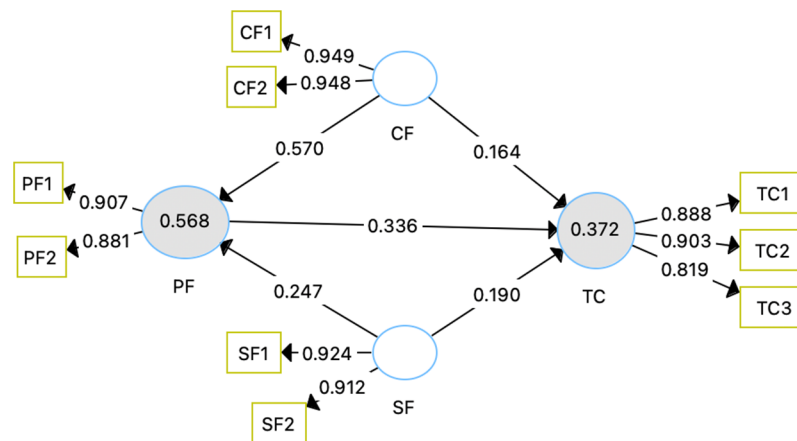


Figure 2. Model Calculation Results

Note: Internal values for latent variables represent factor loadings; external values denote path coefficients; values within circles indicate adjusted R^2 values

5. Discussion

Through smartPLS modeling analysis, all five hypotheses were confirmed. However, further examination of data variations reveals significant asymmetry in the influence mechanisms between variables, offering implications for cultivating pre-service teachers' teaching commitment.

5.1. Infusing Educator Spirit, Strengthening Professional Motivation and Identity

At the micro-level, the mean value for vocational motivation was the lowest (3.83), indicating weak personal vocational motivation. On one hand, recent pandemic and economic conditions may have shifted employment perspectives. The relative stability of the teaching profession is a key factor influencing parents and students when selecting majors. This practical consideration often outweighs both prospective teachers' deep reflection on the profession and their genuine inner calling. On the other hand, when confronted with challenges and difficulties in educational practice, students often lack sufficient confidence and perseverance, making them prone to wavering or even abandoning the teaching profession [14]. The questionnaire's concluding section, which invited students to reflect on their educational practice experiences, revealed significant frustration. For instance, Student H described the difficulty of classroom management beyond teaching: "There are always pupils who ignore guidance and engage in disruptive behavior. Despite using my knowledge and employing verbal cues to redirect their attention, I couldn't get them to change..."

However, compared to other dimensions, PF contributes most significantly to TC, with a path coefficient of 0.336. This

further underscores the need to prioritize cultivating pre-service teachers' teaching commitment, strengthen their professional cognition and identity, enhance their vocational motivation and sense of mission, and guide their career development with the spirit of educators.

The spirit of educators represents the future professional aspiration for teacher education students. As future educators, they must embody a noble sense of mission to serve the nation through education. Grounded in high moral character and benevolence, they should realize their educational ideals through exceptional pedagogical wisdom and diligent, hands-on dedication. Addressing the widespread issues among teacher education students—such as insufficient intrinsic motivation and inadequate professional understanding [15], only by deepening their understanding of the educational cause and grasping the essence of the spirit of educators can they genuinely develop a sense of value recognition and deep motivation for the educational cause from within.

5.2. Establishing a Comprehensive College Training System to Foster Positive Feedback Loops in Knowledge, Emotion, and Action

At the meso-level, college's training pathways and systems exert the strongest influence on individual career cognition and motivation, with a path coefficient of 0.570. Additionally, in the mediating pathway, the VAF value (indirect effect/total effect) for CF→PF→TC is 0.54, indicating that 54% of the CF influence is mediated by PF. The deep interconnection between CF and PF establishes college-level development as the core component in cultivating professional conviction.

College development pathways primarily encompass

specialized courses, practical training, and extracurricular activities. Cultivation systems include assessment criteria and supporting policies. This encompasses both theoretical knowledge infusion and the emotional experiences and value orientations derived from practical actions—reflecting the psychological model of *"cognition, emotion, volition, and behavior"* in educational practice. Only by establishing a comprehensive college training system can the positive cycle of *"knowledge, emotion, will, and action"* be promoted, thereby deepening students' understanding and identification with professional commitment while strengthening their resolve and perseverance in teaching.

First, optimize the curriculum design within the college training system. Xiao and Huang (2025)[16] suggest incorporating courses such as teacher ethics education and rural education to strengthen public-funded normal students' identity recognition, rural knowledge, and practical capabilities. In light of this, we propose two key adjustments to professional coursework: First, increase offerings related to grassroots education, educational beliefs, and professional values to enhance students' awareness and enthusiasm for serving local education. Second, integrate value education into existing courses to cultivate professional skills while simultaneously strengthening occupational identity and belonging. Regarding practical courses, educational practicums—including school-based teaching internships, field placements, foundational teaching skills training, and professional competency workshops—currently account for 19% of total course hours, indicating significant room for expansion. Scholar Cao (2020) [17] argues that educational internships can mitigate the "knowledge-action gap" and promote "the unity of knowledge and action." Based on this, we can appropriately increase the content and proportion of educational practice courses while extending their duration. This allows students to experience comprehensive educational practice throughout their entire academic journey, from enrollment to graduation, achieving an uninterrupted positive cycle of *"knowledge, awareness, intention, and action."*

Second, optimize the college's extracurricular programs and campus culture development. Enhance teacher identity pride by establishing teacher-training cultural spaces, regularly hosting "Master Teacher Forums" and "Exemplary Educator Exhibitions," founding student learning societies like the "Future Teachers Association," launching a "Teacher Education Culture Festival," and conducting local education history lectures. These initiatives cultivate a supportive external ecosystem for teacher education students, fostering positive human-environment interactions and symbiosis within the educational ecosystem. This leverages the subtle, pervasive influence of campus culture[18].

Finally, optimize the faculty's talent cultivation assessment mechanisms and systems. First, refine course evaluation systems. For instance, addressing internship evaluations that prioritize outcomes over processes and exhibit loose, arbitrary assessments[19], appropriately increase process documentation by collecting logs and establishing growth portfolios to achieve formative value-added evaluations. Second, introduce a "dual-mentor system" into talent cultivation plans[20] by supplementing on-campus practice mentors with external primary or secondary school mentors to enhance continuity in practical guidance. Third, establish a career conviction incentive mechanism. During campus cultural activities, implement reward systems that emphasize

guiding values such as "passion for education," "social contribution," and "educator spirit." Fourth, establish a career development guidance system encompassing both career counseling and psychological support. Form a mentor team comprising counselors, homeroom teachers, and psychologists to provide ongoing career development guidance and psychological resilience training for teacher education students. These institutional frameworks and human resource support can effectively alleviate employment anxiety, enhance psychological resilience, and serve as crucial pillars for upholding students' teaching commitment.

5.3. Strengthen Educational Policy Support to Safeguard Professional Prestige and Attractiveness

From a macro perspective, societal cultural recognition and national education policies and institutional safeguards exert latent influence on the development of teacher candidates' teaching commitment. Mediated pathway data indicates that nearly one-third of this influence is mediated at PF. However, the state has recently issued a series of directives on building a new-era teaching workforce, emphasizing the need to strengthen high-level teacher training and implement academic advancement programs [21]. Similarly, the "Special Post Program" for rural compulsory education teachers now requires bachelor's degrees or higher in teacher education. These new policies pose significant challenges for vocational college students preparing for kindergarten and elementary school positions. Education bureaus and local institutions can proactively expand pathways for students to pursue bachelor's degrees. Local governments may introduce policies for in-service degree advancement based on actual teacher demand, thereby safeguarding students' career development. Concurrently, governments and schools can collaborate with communities to launch "Respect Teachers, Value Education" cultural campaigns, enhancing the social prestige and status of the teaching profession.

6. Conclusion

Cultivating teaching commitment among pre-service teachers is a vital pathway to promoting the spirit of educators. By strengthening their recognition and sense of mission toward the teaching profession, they can internalize this spirit as steadfast value pursuits and externalize it as concrete educational practices, thereby providing robust talent support for educational development.

The professional conviction of teacher education students is not the result of a single factor but is influenced by multiple levels and dimensions. Ecosystem theory posits that micro, meso, and macro-level systems intertwine and collaborate synergistically to shape individual growth and development. It is within such a system that pre-service teachers' teaching commitment is constructed and developed. From an outcome perspective, positive influences on their teaching commitment extend across all levels: micro-level (i.e. personal development cognition and motivation), meso-level (i.e. college training pathways and systems), and macro-level (i.e. societal recognition and institutional safeguards). Furthermore, regarding mediating effects, the role of PF mediators—particularly in moderating the positive relationship between CF and TC—cannot be overlooked. However, the factors influencing pre-service teachers' teaching commitment exhibit complexity and dynamic

variability. Future research should therefore explore additional potential determinants and emphasize longitudinal tracking approaches to provide more strategic insights for cultivating professional commitment.

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