

Article

Sustainability as a Goal in Teaching Workforce Retention: Exploring the Role of Teacher Identity Construction in Preservice Teachers' Job Motivation

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Abstract: With the rapid increase in the number of students learning Chinese as a second or foreign language (CSL/CFL), there is a great demand for Chinese language teachers. Although many teacher preparation programmes have been established, only a few graduates from these programmes enter the profession of Chinese language teaching. This has caused instability of the teaching team and has threatened the sustainability of Chinese language education. To explore the reasons why graduates leave this area and the role of professional identity construction in preservice Chinese teachers' job motivation, this longitudinal qualitative study investigates the job motivation of three student-teachers as a goal of sustainability in teaching force retention. This study was conducted during the participating teachers' teaching practicum as part of a master's degree programme in China. By interviewing the three participants and analysing their self-reflective journals, we found that their job motivations changed considerably during the course of their training. Indeed, their professional identity construction did not determine their career choice. Extrinsic factors, such as income and permanent residence, seemed to significantly affect their motivation of entering the profession. Such findings are important, as they help us gain a better understanding of why preservice CSL/CFL teachers choose other careers upon completing teacher education. These results are especially pertinent to those working in Chinese contexts.

Keywords: teacher identity; job motivation; Chinese as a second/foreign language; teaching practicum



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1. Introduction

As China continues to develop at a fast pace, the number of students learning Chinese as a second or foreign language (CSL/CFL) has increased. At the 2019 International Chinese Language Education Conference, it was reported that there are now over 25 million Chinese learners across the world [1], in contrast to just 13,000 in 2006 [2]. Such rapid growth has created increased demand for CSL/CFL teachers. About 20 years ago, under half of the students interested in learning Chinese enjoyed access to Chinese lessons, due to the limited number of qualified CSL/CFL teachers [3]. This situation has not improved in recent years. Indeed, it was reported that, at the end of 2018, there were 47,000 full-time and part-time CSL/CFL teachers across the world, serving an estimated 2.67 million Chinese language learners in wide-ranging contexts [4], indicating a severe shortage of CSL/CFL teachers.

As a result of this considerable demand for CSL/CFL teachers, teacher education programmes are needed to prepare more individuals to teach the Chinese language. To date, more than 60 Chinese universities have established teacher training programmes to prepare teachers of Chinese to speakers of other languages (TCSOL). Moreover, China has developed a complete academic educational system for CSL/CFL teacher education in order to meet this demand.

Nonetheless, the number of CSL/CFL teachers graduating from these programmes remain insufficient. In fact, only a small number of graduates from these teacher education programmes ultimately join the teaching profession as CSL/CFL teachers [5], as many prospective teachers leave the TCSOL field after graduating. Hu and Feng [6] reported that only about 40% of these graduates stayed in the TCSOL field in 2007; moreover, this number dropped to less than one third in 2009, a trend that became evident in a later survey. A survey [7] in 2010 showed that 57% of the graduates of the CSL/CFL teacher education programme at Shandong University became CSL/CFL teachers. In 2012, however, only 28% of the graduates chose TCSLO as their career [7]. This situation has not improved in recent years. According to a survey of postgraduate students' employment in the last three years, only 19% have entered the TCSOL profession [8]. Thus, it appears that even though teacher education programmes were initially set up to prepare CSL/CFL teachers, they have faced some challenges in realising this goal.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to explore the reasons why preservice Chinese language teachers leave the profession after the completion of teacher preparation programmes. It also attempts to understand the role of professional identity construction in retaining Chinese language teacher candidates, as many scholars have pointed out its significance in teachers' decision making [9–11]. To be specific, the following three research questions are addressed in this study:

- (1) How do preservice Chinese language teachers' job motivations change during their teaching practicum?
- (2) What factors affect preservice Chinese language teachers' career choice?
- (3) What role does teacher professional identity construction play in Chinese language teacher candidates' job motivation?

Based on the findings of the research questions, this study discusses the strategies that contribute to the retention of the Chinese language teaching force.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teachers' Job Motivations

Teachers' job motivations are defined as the motives that cause teachers to choose, remain committed to or leave the teaching profession [12]. Research into teachers' job motivations has gained considerable attention because teacher shortages represent a critical concern in many countries, one that will potentially constrain their sustainable development as teachers make a significant contribution to their workforce. Understanding student-teachers' motivations to become teachers (or not) is significant for teacher education [13], and investigating the factors that motivate individuals to pursue a teaching career is important to policy-makers in order to understand how best to recruit teachers and thereby meet this demand [14].

Many studies across the world have examined preservice teachers' motivations for entering the teaching profession and the factors influencing their career choice [12,15–18]. To study the job motivations of preservice teachers, researchers have used various methods, especially quantitative. Richardson and Watt [19] have developed the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice scale (FIT-Choice) to investigate large groups of aspiring teachers' job motivations in Australia. This instrument has since been used by many other researchers to investigate the factors that influence people's decisions to become teachers in other countries, stimulating increased numbers of quantitative research studies on this topic [14,16,20–22]. In addition to FIT-Choice, some researchers have used the Teachers' Ten Statements Test [23] and the Motivation for Choosing Teacher Education Questionnaire [24].

By using various research instruments, scholars have taken different perspectives when studying motivations for choosing teaching as a career. Extrinsic motives (e.g., salary, holidays, job guarantee, job security, social security and relative ease), intrinsic motives (e.g., personal value, interest in teaching and passion for the profession) and altruistic motives (e.g., serving the community) are considered to be three general types of motivation with regard to choosing teaching as a career [25]. Among these, altruistic motives tend to

be dominant among females, while mercenary-based extrinsic motives predominate for males [26]. Based on data from 1653 teacher candidates from Australia, Richardson and Watt [19] draw the conclusion that aspiring teachers' career choices are mainly influenced by intrinsic and altruistic factors, such as the love of their career, perceived teaching ability, positive prior teaching experience, and an interest in working with children and serving society. Moreover, Glutsch and König [20] claim that subject interest, as one example of an intrinsic value factor, plays a crucial role in shaping aspiring teachers' career choice. In these authors' study, subject-specific interest was rated as the most important factor by the participating preservice teachers.

How to keep preservice teachers in the teaching profession remains a challenge, as well as a significant goal for the sustainability of the teaching profession. Nevertheless, very little attention has been paid to foreign language teachers [14]. In terms of research methods, a disproportionate amount of quantitative research has been conducted, while qualitative research, which offers deep understanding of the issue, is not adequate. In addition, although researchers have identified a large number of motivational factors, how teacher professional identity affects preservice teachers' career choices is not fully discussed.

2.2. Chinese Teachers' Job Motivation

Since this study focuses on retaining the workforce of CSL/CFL teachers, it is necessary to put our research in the context of teacher education in China and review the literature on Chinese teachers' job motivation.

While reviewing the literature, we notice that preservice teachers' motivations to work in rural schools have drawn most attention. Such studies are conducted against the background of Chinese government's mission of enhancing education development in rural China. To improve teacher quality and promote education equity, China started to implement the *Special Post Plan for Rural School Teachers in the Stage of Compulsory Education* from 2006 [27]. This plan intended to encourage preservice teachers to work in rural schools by providing a guaranteed wage plan and other supporting policies. For instance, after three years' teaching in rural schools, special post teachers could be exempted from examinations for a master's degree in Education. In 2007, the Minister of Education announced to exempt tuition fees for teacher-education students at the traditionally poised "normal universities" if they promised to stay in the teaching profession for more than ten years after graduation, including two years' teaching in rural primary or secondary schools.

Against this backdrop, some scholars became interested in examining the effect of these policies. In 2011, Fu and Fu [28] surveyed the first graduates from the non-tuition teacher education programme and found only 2% would like to teach in the countryside. This result was disappointing because it indicated that the policies did not achieve the goal of enhancing the rural teaching workforce. Since then, many researchers began to study the influential factors that contributed to preservice teachers' motivations to teach in rural China [29–34]. To date, they have found that factors at the personal, institutional, and social and national levels all played significant roles. The personal factors they investigated include gender, subject, subject knowledge, teaching competence, family financial situation, family members, family location, parents' professions, etc. As is seen clearly, family background is very important to the Chinese people, and this unique culture greatly influences Chinese teacher candidates' career choice. For instance, it has been found that preservice teachers from low-income families have stronger motivation to work in rural schools [33]; teachers from an only-child family would care more about salary [34]; some rural schoolteachers see it as a challenge when they are separated from their family who live in cities [32], and these teachers could hardly stay in rural areas as part of the teaching workforce. Institutional factors include both the quality of the teacher education programme and the working conditions in the rural schools. He [29] suggests that good teaching practicum experience in rural schools could enhance preservice teachers' intention

to stay in the countryside. Poor working conditions in rural schools, however, would discourage their retention. Researchers have found that some teacher candidates choose to teach in rural regions because of the high social prestige of the teaching profession and the government's supporting policies [29,30]. These results reflect the social and national factors that contribute to the teaching force retention in rural China.

Besides prospective rural schoolteachers from normal universities, Chinese scholars have also examined other groups of teachers in relation to their staying on in the teaching workforce. The Chinese education system includes kindergarten, primary, secondary and university as four significant stages in learning progression. Our literature search shows that nationally kindergarten teachers have drawn the most attention (see, e.g., [35,36]). Physical education teachers' job motivations are researched most extensively (see, e.g., [37,38]). These teachers have gained researchers' attention mainly because the recruitment and retention of these teachers is a continuous challenge in the sustainable development of education. Importantly, the research findings from these studies of teachers' job motivations are quite similar to those of rural schoolteachers, suggesting a similar situation between the contexts of these studies and the context in which rural teachers live and work.

Some researchers have noticed the great challenges that CSL/CFL teachers face in their career choices [39,40], but they have not investigated the factors that impact CSL/CFL teachers' job aspiration. Based on the first author's direct experience with CSL/CFL teacher candidates learning in a CSL/CFL teacher education programme, it is observed that many preservice CSL/CFL teachers have strong motivation to enter the profession of TCSOL but leave this area eventually. This phenomenon has not been fully examined. To date, little is known about how preservice CSL/CFL teachers' job motivations change and what factors influence their career choice.

2.3. Teacher Professional Identity and Teachers' Job Motivation

"Teacher professional identity" generally refers to how teachers understand themselves as teachers and how they present their teacher images to others in their situated context [41,42]. Over the past 20 years, a growing number of researchers have come to recognise the importance of teacher professional identity in teacher development, leading to an increase in studies in the field [43–47], indicating the issue's significance. Teacher professional identity is important because it "stands at the core of the teaching profession" [11] (p. 15) and it "matters in what and how they [teachers] teach and thus, to students, families, communities, and institutions" [48] (p. 548).

Some researchers have recognised the inherent link between individuals' perceptions of self and the motivations for their actions. For example, Oyserman [49] proposed identity-based motivation theory, emphasising the importance of identity in explaining people's motivations. Teacher identity is similarly considered to be closely related to teachers' job motivations. Kelchtermans [12] (pp. 449–450, for a further description) has also suggested that teacher professional identity consists of five interrelated parts, one of which is job motivation. Beijgaard [50] has stated that teachers are more likely to develop stable careers if their professional identities are successfully constructed through interactions with their contexts. He additionally posits that teachers' careers may be unstable if they do not "function well in the school organisation" (p. 292). Teachers' lives, in which their perceptions of self are embedded, have been identified as playing a role in affecting their job motivations. For instance, Chang-Kredl and Kingsley [51] suggest that preservice teachers' narratives of their memories and previous life experiences account for their decisions to teach as a career. Similarly, Rots et al. [52] argue that preservice teachers' experiences during their teacher education programmes, especially their self-affirmation as competent teachers, provide a key source of job motivation.

However, researchers have not treated teacher identity in much detail in relation to preservice teachers' job motivation in the Chinese context. The effects of identity construction on preservice CSL/CFL teachers' career choices have yet to be closely examined.

This study aims to fill this research gap by investigating preservice CSL/CFL teachers' professional identity construction, their job motivation changes during an initial teacher education programme and the role of teacher identity construction in their career choices.

3. The Study

3.1. Research Context

This study was undertaken at a two-year master's programme of TCSOL (popularly known as a Master of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages, or MTC SOL for short) in B University. Second language education and research have been provided and conducted at this university for more than 70 years, and it is widely known as one of the first universities to establish a TCSOL programme in China. The MTC SOL programme aims to produce qualified CSL/CFL teachers by equipping student teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills. The programme generally consists of three parts: course learning, teaching practice and dissertation writing. Student teachers mainly take courses in the first six months of the programme to gain knowledge of Chinese linguistics and literature, theories of second language acquisition, and principles of second language education. They subsequently participate in the teaching practicum. They can either look for an intern teaching position in China or apply to teach in other countries by joining volunteer teaching programmes organised by the Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban). Once student teachers finish their teaching practicum, they must write a dissertation and pass an oral examination in order to attain their master's degree. The investigation reported in this paper pertains to the second part of the MTC SOL programme, when the participants were undertaking their teaching practicum.

3.2. Participants

This study represents part of a larger project investigating the formation and transformation of preservice CSL/CFL teachers' professional identities during their initial teacher education. The project involved eight participants who were selected through a purposive sampling method [53] from those who had expressed interest in this study. Table 1 describes the criteria for participant selection.

Table 1. Criteria for selecting participants.

Criterion 1:	They must be students of MTC SOL.
Criterion 2:	They must be in their first year or second year of master's study.
Criterion 3:	They would start their teaching practicum within six months when the research began.
Criterion 4:	They had a strong wish to share their stories.

In this article, we only report three of the students as examples: Joanna, Zoe and Lilian (all pseudonyms). These three participants were chosen to be discussed in this article mainly because their stories present three different types of motives that influence preservice CSL/CFL teachers' career aspirations. The three women all come from different parts of China and were all around 22 years old when the research commenced. They were studying in their first year of the preservice CSL/CFL teacher education programme and were about to start their teaching practicum. Both Joanna and Lilian undertook their teaching practicum in China: Joanna did not want to be a volunteer teacher overseas, while Lilian failed in her application for a volunteer teacher position abroad. By contrast, Zoe had been successfully selected to be a volunteer teacher and undertook her practicum at an Australian primary school.

3.3. Methods of Data Collection

This study uses narrative inquiry as its research method [54]. As a method for data collection, narrative inquiry has been widely used in educational and social science research

(see, e.g., [54–56]). Connelly and Clandinin [56] note that “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 2). We first selected participants by following the principles of purposive sampling [53]. They were then formally invited to participate in the study by signing a participant consent form after being granted human ethics approval. We spent considerable time with them collecting their stories through a variety of data, including their self-reflective journals and individual interviews with the participants. The context of the stories was also collected, such as their family background and life experiences, the time and places of the stories, and the cultural or political backgrounds of these stories. Data collection was conducted in accordance with the participants’ teaching practicums, which lasted for ten months. Details are provided in the sections that follow.

3.3.1. Journals

Self-reflective journals were used as the main data collection tool. Participants were asked to write a journal to share their stories and thoughts every month during the data collection process. Ten topics were given to the participants, which were established at the outset of the data collection period. The topics each month were identical and were related to the participants’ teaching experiences and job motivations, comprising:

- Please write down stories that recently happened in your teaching practicum.
- Please write down recent days’ stories of teacher training.
- Please write down stories of your interactions with your supervisor or your mentor teacher.
- Please write down stories of your interactions with your students.
- Please record all the emotions you would like to share, such as happy, excited, inspired, disappointed, sad, depressed, or confused.
- Please record any small changes in your understanding of yourself as a MTCSOL student.
- Please record any small changes in your understanding of yourself as a CSL/CFL teacher.
- Please record any small change in your motivation to become and motivations for becoming a CSL/CFL teacher.
- Please make a metaphor for CSL/CFL teachers based on your recent understanding of the teaching profession.

Please write down any other stories, thoughts or feelings you would like to share besides those above.

3.3.2. Interviews

Interviews represented the other data collection tool and were conducted across three sessions: before, in the middle and at the end of the participants’ teaching practicums. The three interviews were semi-structured around questions of teacher identity and job motivation. Furthermore, each interview gathered additional data as follows. The first interview collected participants’ demographic information, their previous life experience and their identity at the beginning of the study. The second interview included questions about the teacher education programme. The third interview asked the participants to look back on their teaching practicums. The second and third interviews also incorporated questions based on the content of the participants’ self-reflective journals. The data from these two resources were triangulated to enrich each other, facilitating a vivid account of student CSL/CFL teachers’ professional identity construction and their changing motivations during the teaching practicum.

3.4. Analysis

A qualitative inductive approach [57] was adopted to analyse the data in three phases: (1) processing and preparation; (2) first cycle coding; and (3) second cycle coding. In the

processing and preparation phase, the audio recordings of the participants' self-reflective journals and interview transcripts were organised and transcribed. In the first cycle coding phase, the data were carefully reviewed by the first author by reading, coding and memoing them. A profile of motivation change was derived from each participant, including a series of stories about their teaching practicum. In this phase, participants' stories were retold by the first author, and Clandinin and Connelly's [54] three-dimensional narrative inquiry space was included in these stories. In the second coding phase, deep analysis was conducted, and the preservice teachers' professional identities were examined. By reading the vivid and detailed teaching stories again, the authors discerned their professional identity construction. Various identities enacted by the participants during the teacher practicum were identified and connected to their job motivation stories. Once each participant's profile had been analysed, cross-case analysis was carried out [57] to examine the similarities and differences between and among the three participants' stories and then to draw and verify conclusions on the relations between teacher identity and job motivation. The stories were compared and modified with reference to relevant theories and previous studies. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, the authors' interpretation was sent back to the participants to be verified and was modified according to their feedback before the final conclusion was formed [53].

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were considered before the commencement of the study. Before the participants were contacted by the authors, ethical approval had been gained from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (Reference No. 016330). Permission had also been gained from the dean of the school where the participants were studying. The dean assured that neither participation, non-participation, nor withdrawal by the participants in our study would affect the evaluation of their teaching practicum. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason. A Participant Information Sheet and a Consent Form were signed before data collection started. During the data collection process, the participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded only with their permission and they could ask the first author to turn off the recorder at any time during the interview. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used, and participants' personal information would not be given to any other third parties.

4. Findings

In the following section, we present the findings case by case, aiming to provide a rich account of the changes to student CSL/CFL teachers' job motivation with stories of their professional identity construction.

4.1. Joanna

Becoming a TCSOL master's student was not Joanna's original choice. She entered the programme because it seemed to be the one in which she was most interested out of all the disciplines she could choose.

Joanna studied Korean Language as the major for her bachelor's degree. When she graduated, she had the chance to enrol in a master's programme without having to take the entrance examination, due to her excellent academic record. However, her faculty did not plan to enrol master's students in the year of her graduation, so she was compelled to consider other subjects. Among all the master's programmes provided by her university, Joanna chose MTC SOL because, as she claimed, she "was kind of interested in education" and MTC SOL "was an educational thing".

Her choice was also influenced by a peer who had previously majored in Korean Language for their bachelor's degree and MTC SOL for their master's degree:

"There is a senior apprentice-sister in my faculty who studied this subject (MTC SOL). When I was in the third year of my bachelor's degree, she was a year two master's student, and she was doing her teaching practicum at the School of Chinese Linguistics and Literature I would say my senior apprentice-sister walked a road and I followed her way." (Excerpt from the first interview with Joanna)

It thus seems that Joanna chose a convenient route that appeared to be "pretty good". Before starting her master's degree, Joanna participated in a voluntary teaching programme in Tibet because she "wanted to experience being a real teacher" in a real classroom. However, this teaching experience seemed rather unpleasant. On returning from Tibet, Joanna decided "not to choose to become a teacher anymore". Joanna expected to have an influence on her students, but she felt disappointed to "have no gains". Thus, her interest in education was compromised by this teaching experience. She lost her motivation to become a teacher even before she had started the teacher education programme.

Nonetheless, Joanna undertook her teaching practicum because she was required to do so to gain credits for her master's degree. To our surprise, Joanna treated her teaching practicum seriously, even though she had decided against becoming a CSL/CFL teacher. She shared stories that she kept thinking about "how to ensure that every student was treated equally in class". Moreover, she reflected on her teaching and thought about "whether to explain grammar points and do plenty of grammar exercises" in her speaking class. She also shared how she tried to "act as a cheerful teacher" to create an engaging classroom and realised that she needed to "read more books about classroom management" to learn how to "design various classroom activities" to engage her students.

Devoting herself wholeheartedly to the teaching practicum enabled Joanna to earn her students' love and trust as a reward. Joanna achieved a sense of fulfilment and happiness, increasing her motivation to become a CSL/CFL teacher. In the first three months' self-reflective journals, Joanna stated that she would like to become a CSL/CFL teacher. As we can see, Joanna's attitude towards teaching Chinese as a career changed dramatically from her earlier thoughts. However, her desire to become a Chinese teacher at this stage was based on the premise of ruling out extrinsic factors. She said that she would consider becoming a CSL/CFL teacher if she did not need to consider issues like household registration.

Joanna's motivation reached its peak during the fourth month of her teaching practicum, when her first teaching assignment was completed. She received an album from her students containing photos of them with her. The photos were taken without her knowledge and every picture was annotated carefully. Joanna believed that her students loved her sincerely, which made her feel grateful. At the same time, Joanna felt deeply responsible for teaching Chinese to a good standard and established a clear image of China because of her own fascination with the Chinese language and culture. Thus, she was now much more determined to become a CSL/CFL teacher.

Q: Do you want to become a Chinese teacher after graduation? Why or why not?

A: Yes. To pay and to gain. I am happy spending time with my students. I feel fulfilled every minute. I love this job. (Excerpt from Joanna's self-reflective journal)

Unfortunately, Joanna's motivation to enter TCSOL did not last long. After teaching in a summer school programme, she decided to abandon TCSOL. While teaching in this programme, Joanna saw the dark side of being a CSL/CFL teacher in a private language learning institute: the working hours depended on students' schedule and the wages relied on student enrolment. This was not Joanna's ideal life. She wanted to find a stable job.

Joanna also decided against becoming a CSL/CFL teacher because she "did not gain a sense of belonging" or membership to TCSOL. She stated that when she was studying Korean Language, she believed that she was "in the circle", but she did not have the same

feeling while studying in the MTC SOL programme. It seemed that Joanna did not construct an identity as a group member in the TCSOL community.

Later in her teaching practicum, Joanna totally lost her motivation to become a CSL/CFL teacher. After finishing her teaching practicum in the summer school programme, she concentrated on preparing for the national Civil Service Selection Examination for entry into government service. It seems that her pleasant experience of teaching did not lead her to construct a strong teacher identity. For Joanna, her teaching experience was more like a utopia, where she could gain a sense of value and did not need to think about financial returns from a job. This utopia, however, was not her common life. She had to consider factors such as ‘*hukou*’ (a unique household registration system that entitles one a permanent residential status in a particular city), which is highly significant in China’s household administration system. Indeed, Joanna expected that having legitimate Beijing resident status would open up numerous career opportunities for her and her family as well as provide a stable income from her salary.

4.2. Zoe

Zoe’s interest in TCSOL originated in her preference for Chinese in high school. Her high school Chinese teacher had a positive influence on her. As Zoe recalled in her first interview, this teacher treated her “extremely well”: she often commended Zoe for her good performance in Chinese; she posted Zoe’s Chinese essays on the wall as model compositions after almost every exam; she encouraged Zoe to practise calligraphy; she sometimes asked Zoe to help her mark exam papers, suggesting that she had “great trust” in Zoe; and she wrote a short poem to autograph Zoe’s graduation album. Enamoured by this teacher, Zoe was fond of Chinese language and literature.

Zoe heard about TCSOL as a subject from her classmate while preparing for her university entrance examination. She thought “it might be nice to teach foreigners to speak Chinese” and that “it might be more interesting than teaching Chinese literature to Chinese students”. Zoe regarded TCSOL as her dream and started to pursue it from this point. However, this dream did not come true until Zoe enrolled in the MTC SOL master’s programme:

Well, I had this idea (to become a Chinese language teacher) from then on (the last year of high school), and I have always kept it in my mind. And, because I did not get my wish at the university, you know, the more difficult it is to get, the more precious it is to me. So, when it came to the master’s programme, I felt I still wanted to study it, and then I applied. (Excerpt from the first interview with Zoe)

Zoe mentioned that she studied History for one year at university because she did not achieve a satisfactory score in the university entrance examination. Thus, TCSOL seemed harder to attain and thus more desirable to her. One year later, Zoe applied to transfer to the Faculty of Chinese Language and Literature, hoping that she could move one step closer to her dream.

Although Zoe did not major in TCSOL for her bachelor’s degree, she had the opportunity to work as a Chinese tutor for two Korean children. This tutoring experience was pleasant and “meaningful”, encouraging her to continue pursuing her dream:

It was pretty interesting. At first, there were two children, I taught two children. Actually, I was just a tutor, tutoring their Chinese writing . . . Their mum treated me well, too, so I felt it was quite an interesting and meaningful experience. I would say it had a positive effect. (Excerpt from the first interview with Zoe)

Talking about her career plan, Zoe said that she never thought about other jobs. It seemed that her motivation remained high from the beginning of her teaching practicum, or even much earlier. Nonetheless, we can still observe some changes in Zoe’s motivation. Her self-reflective journals provided evidence that her motivation to become a CSL/CFL teacher grew along with her construction of an identity as a teacher. From the first to the fourth self-reflective journals, Zoe said that she wanted to become a Chinese teacher

because she “could not think what else I could do”. From the fifth month, however, she realised that she “needed to learn more education theories” to “ascend another storey”. She would probably become an educator or a researcher. This motivational change was also reflected in her interview:

I feel that my current thought is a little bit different. Previously, I thought I was a MTCSOL student. I did not think much. Like, I was learning this, and I could probably do some relevant things or find a relevant job. But now, I'm not reconciled . . . I feel I'm not satisfied with just becoming a primary or a middle school (CSL/CFL) teacher . . . I used to believe that it was good to be a teacher, well, I still believe it, but I want to go further, and go higher . . . I feel that there are many theories, many things that are worth studying, so I want to learn more. I can't stop here. (Excerpt from the second interview with Zoe)

We can see that Zoe's motivation developed along with her deeper understanding of her possible future self. She realised that she “could have more opportunities” if she obtained a doctoral degree and “might be able to work in a university”. Actively engaging in her teaching practicum in Australia, Zoe had some new thoughts about what she could possibly become in the future. Walking on the road towards becoming a CSL/CFL teacher, she set a higher goal. She wanted to develop into a better self. She realised her shortcomings and decided to improve herself in order to gain a sustainable development in the area of TCSOL. At the end of the teaching practicum, her motivation to become a CSL/CFL teacher was still high.

4.3. Lilian

Lilian's intention to become a CSL/CFL teacher originated while she was at high school and was considering her possible university major. Lilian learnt that the courses provided by the TCSOL programme covered both Chinese and English. Her interest in these courses was “the only reason for choosing this major”.

After four years of studying at university, Lilian decided to pursue a master's degree. Lilian was still keen on TCSOL, but her decision seemed more utilitarian. In fact, there were two master's degree programmes in TCSOL: (1) Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, which was three years in duration and was more academically oriented; and (2) MTCSOL, which was two years in duration and was more practice-focused. Lilian chose to take the MTCSOL because the programme recruited more students and “it was easier to prepare” for admission. Lilian also acknowledged that the teaching abroad opportunity that the MTCSOL provided was extremely attractive and she had dreamed of becoming a volunteer CSL/CFL teacher for two years.

However, this dream did not come to fruition, as she failed the teacher selection examination. This event, as Lilian noted, was a major blow to her. She fell into self-doubt, suspecting that she “was not cut out for that (being a CSL/CFL teacher)”. This event appeared to endanger Lilian's identity negotiation. Her imagined possible future self was not as steadfast as it had been before.

Lilian then undertook her teaching practicum in China. She participated in two practicum-focused programmes. The first programme was at a public university. In this teaching practicum, Lilian gained “a great sense of achievement”. She “was glad” that the students learnt “a lot” from her class. She found her self-value in the process of not only transmitting knowledge to her students but also interacting with them.

The second programme, however, was not as rewarding as the first. This programme was held at a private language training institution and it was dramatically different from the programme at the public university. Lilian introduced the model of the programme and reported her feeling of being a CSL/CFL teacher in her self-reflective journal, as shown in the following:

In a for-profit organisation, students are at the centre. Everything should be student-oriented, including teaching content, classroom activities and teaching practice. The role of a Chinese language teacher is like a server assisting students' learning. As a teacher, I lack a sense of fulfilment. (Excerpt from Lilian's self-reflective journal 4)

It seemed that Lilian felt a considerable loss of autonomy. She perceived that she was no longer the most important part in the students' Chinese language-learning process. Instead, she provided only trivial assistance whenever students required her help. Teaching in this programme resulted in Lilian losing her self-worth, which further affected her motivation to become a CSL/CFL teacher.

The teaching practicum provided Lilian with an opportunity to look at the profession of TCSOL more closely. She recognised that CSL/CFL teachers' real lives were not as positive as she had imagined. She realised that it was impossible to obtain a permanent position at a university without a doctoral degree and that CSL/CFL teachers in private institutes could not attain official and legitimate household registration. Furthermore, CSL/CFL teachers at private institutes had to adjust their teaching schedules according to students' timetables and their wages varied according to student enrolment. TCSOL was not, therefore, a stable occupation from Lilian's point of view. Knowing this, Lilian started to consider transferring to another profession. With her enthusiasm for teaching but dissatisfaction with the TCSOL profession, Lilian finally decided to stay in the field of education and become a teacher of another discipline. After graduating from the master's programme, Lilian became a teacher of Confucianism, teaching classic Chinese literature and philosophy to Chinese students.

4.4. Cross-Case Analysis

We have presented three cases of how different types of professional identity construction occurred. Joanna never regarded herself as a student learning to become a CSL/CFL teacher. She undertook a teaching practicum only because it was one of the requirements for her master's degree. Although she performed all her duties conscientiously during her teaching practicum, this did not mean that she successfully constructed a teacher identity. Joanna admitted that she would complete every job diligently. Working professionally and responsibly was part of her character. She also expressed her desire to finish the teaching practicum quickly so that she could graduate with the expected qualification and "have more time for job seeking" in other professions by relying on that qualification. Joanna enjoyed her teaching and gained a sense of fulfilment through interacting with her students, but this teaching experience did not bring her a sense of belonging to the group of Chinese language teachers. It can be argued that Joanna did not successfully construct a teacher identity at the end of her teaching practicum, resulting in her leaving the TCSOL profession and becoming a public servant.

Zoe seemed to be the opposite of Joanna. She had long dreamed of becoming a CSL/CFL teacher. She regarded the teaching practicum as the path to her dream and regarded herself as a student teacher learning to teach. During the teaching practicum, Zoe reflected on her teaching regularly and thought deeply about the nature of education. On her initiative she learned teaching skills from her mentor teacher and used these in her own teaching. From Zoe's self-reflective journals, we can see that she kept thinking about how to improve her teaching ability and teach effectively. Thus, she appeared to construct a strong teacher identity during the teaching practicum. She never doubted that she would become a CSL/CFL teacher. Her strong teacher identity was tied to her strong motivation, resulting in her staying in the field of TCSOL after graduation.

Lilian's case was more complicated. Like Zoe, Lilian had considered becoming a CSL/CFL teacher since high school. She studied hard to increase her theoretical knowledge of the subject and to become a competent teacher. She also actively and eagerly sought to become an overseas volunteer teacher, believing that such an experience would benefit her when seeking a Chinese teacher position in the future. However, she failed the selection and did not have the chance to teach overseas. This event affected her self-confidence and

her teacher identity construction. She admitted that for quite a long time she was not sure if she was suitable for teaching. Lilian regarded the teaching practicum as an opportunity to experience teaching life from which she could test whether this was her ideal choice. Unlike Joanna, Lilian constructed a teacher identity, but her identity was not as strong as Zoe's. Due to external factors, the teacher identity that Lilian aimed to construct weakened, leading her to abandon her dream of becoming a teacher of Chinese as a foreign or a second language, but encouraged her to stay in the general field of education and become a teacher of Confucianism.

5. Discussion

Previous studies have found that intrinsic factors are the primary reasons why people enter the teaching profession [16,18,58–60]. Some scholars have suggested that teachers are more likely to develop stable careers if their professional identity is successfully constructed [50,61]. The findings of this study, however, present a complex picture. Drawing on the findings of this study, we argue that constructing a professional teacher identity does not necessarily lead student teachers of CSL/CFL to choose TCSOL as their career. In another word, professional identity construction does not have a sufficient relationship with preservice teachers' career aspiration. Lilian, for example, successfully constructed a teacher identity during the teaching practicum, but ultimately left the TCSOL profession. Rots et al. [62] have suggested that preservice teachers' experiences during their teaching practicum constitute a "double-edged sword" to their job motivation. This result indicates that a teaching practicum and the teacher identity constructed during this process do not necessarily have a positive influence in the sustainability of the teaching force. The first step to realise the sustainability of the CSL/CFL teaching force is to attract enough qualified teachers to the field. Having a strong teacher identity may help these new teachers to remain in the teaching profession, but it does not seem to be a powerful contributing factor in either the recruitment of prospecting teachers, nor in retaining them in the teaching profession.

We also found that preservice Chinese language teachers care most about extrinsic factors, such as the household registration, salaries, the stability of the job, and the opportunity for future development. These findings are in line with Heinz's [63] conclusion that extrinsic reasons are important, if not the most influential reasons, for choosing teaching as a career in developing countries such as Brunei, China, Zimbabwe, Malaysia, Jamaica, Turkey and Malawi. Such findings need to be interpreted with reference to the different contexts that define people's job motivations, as seen in our discussion below.

Our finding about preservice CSL/CFL teachers' consideration of salaries accords with many Chinese researchers' investigations [28,29,33–37] which show that payroll greatly influences Chinese teacher candidates' career choice. Jia [8], for instance, suggests that payroll is the first factor that TCSOL postgraduate students consider when they look for jobs. Financial income serves as one of the main influential factors in preservice teachers' career choice in developing countries like China. This is not surprising. The allowance for each special-post teacher, as we introduced in the literature review section, is only about €360 per month. The situation in big cities is not any better. Living expenses in big cities like Beijing are quite high. Renting a one-bedroom apartment in Beijing could be as high as €630 per month, while the average salary for Beijing university graduates is only about €870 per month, meaning that graduates have to consider income as a priority. In the field of TCSOL, however, many posts do not guarantee a stable income. As Lilian wrote in her journal, student enrolment in the private language training institution where she had her second teaching practicum was very unstable, resulting in extremely variable income each semester. It is not hard to imagine that CSL/CFL teachers could receive very little income in 2020, when the COVID-19 outbreak meant that few international students were able to come to China. If the payroll is not guaranteed, it is hard to establish, nor to retain a sustainable CSL/CFL teaching force.

CSL/CFL student teachers care about household registration because it relates to many issues in China: people who have household registration can purchase apartments and vehicles in Beijing and enjoy the benefits of public service, such as low-price public schools for their children and public medical care. CSL/CFL student teachers' career choices also reflect the pressures that modern young Chinese people feel in terms of entering or remaining part of the middle classes. The participants in this research were living in one of the biggest cities in China, a dream for millions of young Chinese people. As the price for an apartment in this city is extremely high, prospective teachers must consider the salary offered by the jobs available. Although there is great demand for CSL/CFL teachers and CSL/CFL student teachers are able to find jobs in the field of TCSOL, the positions offered are not satisfactory considering their limited benefits. Rots et al. [43] claim that there is a negative relationship between employment opportunities and the intention to enter the teaching profession, which means that a strong labour market could reduce preservice teachers' motivations to enter the teaching profession.

Although professional identity construction does not play a decisive role in CSL/CFL student teachers' career choices, it is important to some extent. Which is to say, professional identity is not a sufficient condition but a necessary condition to preservice teachers' job motivation. The unsuccessful construction of a teacher identity is certainly likely to result in defection. Joanna was an example of this. Based on this research finding, we recommend that teacher educators integrate professional identity construction into teacher education programmes and help preservice teachers successfully build a teacher identity. Furthermore, a strong CSL/CFL teacher identity constructed during the teacher training programme may increase one's commitment to TCSOL, as was the case with Zoe. Although she intended to become a CSL/CFL from the beginning, she was not clear about her career path. Teacher professional identity, however, contributed to her deeper understanding of the teaching profession and her decision to pursue a higher degree to improve her teaching competence. In the end, Lilian stayed in the field of education and became a teacher of other subjects. In other words, the successful completion of the teacher education programme did increase her teaching competence and her successful construction of a teacher identity led her to become a teacher in the general field of education. From this perspective, the teacher education programme can be regarded as playing a significant role in cultivating a large number of qualified teachers, including some CSL/CFL teachers, for reaching the goal of sustainability in retaining trained teachers in the teaching force.

6. Conclusions

The main goal of this study was to investigate preservice CSL/CFL teachers' professional identity construction, their changing motivations during their teacher education programme and the role of professional identity construction in their career choices. The results of this investigation showed that the unsuccessful construction of a teacher identity did not see the CSL/CFL student teachers stay in the TCSOL profession and the successful construction of a teacher identity did not mean that the CSL/CFL student teachers would definitely choose TCSOL as their career. Extrinsic factors, such as salary and household registration, proved to be important variables affecting CSL/CFL student teachers' job motivations in the Chinese context. The results of this study suggest that successful or unsuccessful professional identity construction is not a decisive factor that affects CSL/CFL student teachers' career choices.

The findings of this study might have practical implications for policy-makers and teacher educators. Although it is a perennial challenge for many governments, our findings clearly show that policy-makers need to think about raising the average salary of CSL/CFL teachers and better reward them financially or in other ways. In the case of CSL/CFL teachers in China, this may be by helping them to gain legitimate household registration. In this way, more graduate students from TCSOL programmes are likely to become CSL/CFL teachers or teachers of related subjects in the field of education. Policy-makers could control the extrinsic factors that attract prospective CSL/CFL teachers, while teacher educators on

language teacher education programmes can also contribute to teacher retention. When a CSL/CFL teacher education programme is envisaged, it is essential to consider how the programme might help preservice teachers to construct a professional identity and increase their motivation to choose to stay in the profession or a closely related field.

The study has contributed to our understanding of preservice CSL/CFL teachers' job motivations in the Chinese context. It has also provided a deeper insight into the relationship between professional identity construction and student teachers' motivations for choosing TCSOL as a career. Nevertheless, we must point out the limitations of this study. The scope of this qualitative study was limited due to the small number of participants. Moreover, given that the research was conducted in the Chinese context, the findings cannot be generalised to all teacher education programmes. To deepen the understanding of CSL/CFL teachers' job motivations, future studies should expand on this study and examine other factors that may impact CSL/CFL teacher candidates' career choice, such as preservice CSL/CFL teachers' teaching competence, self-efficacy, teaching believe, satisfaction with the teaching practicum, satisfaction with educational policies, etc. It is also recommended that future studies examine CSL/CFL teachers in other contexts.

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