Professional Identity Construction in Transnational Language Teacher: Integrating Conservation of Resources and Identity Theories in a Cross-cultural Context

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Introduction

In the context of the multilingual turn in global education, transnational language teachers—those working across linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries—face complex professional identity (PI) challenges. Their identities are continuously negotiated within institutional structures, language ideologies, and cultural expectations, often leading to identity uncertainty, emotional vulnerability, and psychological strain. Identity theory highlights that PI is formed through ongoing social interaction and identity verification, while Conservation of Resources (COR) theory explains how stress emerges from threats to valued psychological and organisational resources.

In cross-cultural teaching contexts, psychological capital (PsyCap) functions as a crucial internal resource enabling teachers to cope with uncertainty and sustain self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience. Meanwhile, perceived organisational support (POS) serves as an essential external resource that validates teachers' roles, buffers role stress (RS), and strengthens professional belonging. However, RS arising from ambiguous responsibilities, cultural misalignment, and institutional constraints can deplete psychological resources and destabilise identity.

Despite growing research on transnational teacher identity, limited studies have systematically examined how PsyCap, POS, and RS interact to shape PI, particularly among non-English transnational teachers such as transnational Chinese language teachers. To address this gap, the present study integrates Identity theory and COR theory to investigate the joint effects of PsyCap, POS, and RS on PI construction in cross-cultural educational contexts.

Analysis

Grounded in Identity theory and COR theory, this study proposed a chain mediation model in which PsyCap influences PI through POS and RS. A two-wave survey design with a 20-day interval was employed to reduce common method bias. Data were collected from 421 transnational Chinese language teachers using validated scales for PsyCap, POS, RS, and PI. Structural equation modelling in AMOS was conducted to test hypothesised relationships, and the model demonstrated good fit indices (χ^2/df = 1.686, RMSEA = 0.040, CFI = 0.987). Bootstrap resampling further confirmed the significance of mediation effects.

Results

Results showed that transnational Chinese teachers reported moderately high levels of PsyCap, PI, and POS, while RS remained relatively low. Correlation analysis indicated that PI was positively associated with PsyCap and POS, and negatively associated with RS. Structural modelling further revealed that PsyCap directly and positively predicted PI. PsyCap also positively predicted POS and negatively predicted RS, whereas POS positively predicted PI and negatively predicted RS. Bootstrap mediation analysis confirmed that POS and RS independently mediated the PsyCap–identity relationship. Moreover, a significant chain mediation pathway was identified, demonstrating that PsyCap enhances POS, which reduces RS and ultimately strengthens PI.
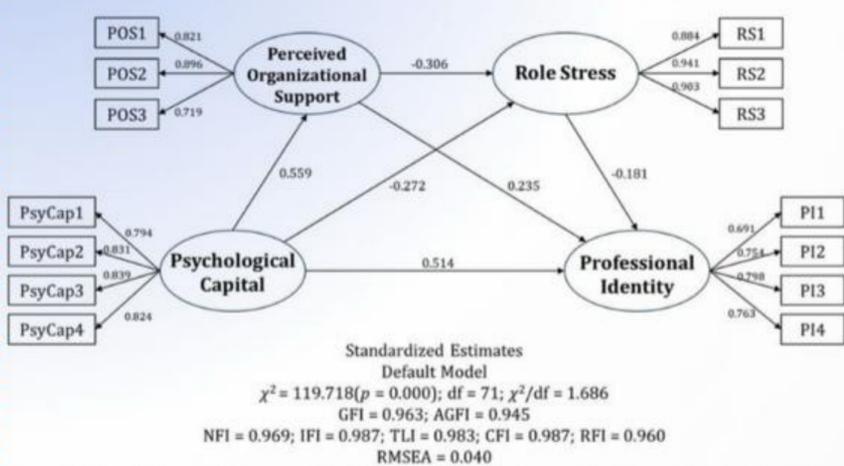

Figure 1. A multiple mediation model of the association between PsyCap and Professional Identity through POS and RS

Standardized Estimates
Default Model
χ^2 = 119.718(p = 0.000); df = 71; χ^2/df = 1.686
GFI = 0.963; AGFI = 0.945
NFI = 0.969; IFI = 0.987; TLI = 0.983; CFI = 0.987; RFI = 0.960
RMSEA = 0.040

Note: χ^2/df = chi-square, DF = degrees of freedom, GFI = the goodness-of-fit index, AGFI = the adjusted goodness-of-fit index, IFI = the incremental fit index, CFI = the comparative fit index, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. All pathway coefficients were significant.

Table 1. Different paths of variables in the structural equation modelling.

Pathway	Standardised estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p
Psycap → PI	0.514	0.064	8.253	***
Psycap → RS	-0.272	0.105	-4.487	***
RS → PI	-0.181	0.029	-3.747	***
Psycap → POS	0.559	0.066	10.036	***
POS → PI	0.235	0.048	4.199	***
POS → RS	-0.306	0.089	-4.995	***

Table 2. Chain mediating effect testing.

Pathway	β	Boot SE	95% CI LLCI	95% CI ULCI	Percent (%)	P
Direct effect	0.514	0.063	0.390	0.637	70.80%	***
PsyCap → RS → PI	0.050	0.019	0.016	0.091	6.89%	**
PsyCap → POS → PI	0.134	0.037	0.068	0.212	18.16%	***
PsyCap → POS → RS → PI	0.031	0.012	0.010	0.059	4.27%	**
Indirect effect	0.212	0.036	0.146	0.287	29.20%	***
Total effect	0.726	0.040	0.644	0.801		***

Note: **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval; LLCI = lower limits confidence interval; ULCI = upper limits confidence interval.

Conclusion

This study reveals that PI construction among transnational language teachers is jointly shaped by internal psychological resources and external organisational environments. PsyCap plays a foundational role in strengthening PI, yet its effect is contingent upon sufficient POS and manageable RS. POS not only enhances PsyCap but also buffers RS, facilitating identity verification and professional belonging. Conversely, unresolved RS depletes psychological resources and destabilises identity.

By integrating COR theory and Identity theory, this study provides empirical evidence that organisational environments are critical in protecting psychological and identity resources in cross-cultural teaching contexts. Practically, educational institutions should strengthen organisational support systems, foster teachers' PsyCap, and clarify role expectations to reduce RS. Such efforts are essential to sustaining PI, enhancing teacher well-being, and promoting long-term retention of transnational language teachers in multilingual and multicultural educational settings.

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