

Group Disparities in the Coordinated Development of Rural Teachers' Spirit and Ability with Policy Enlightenments

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Abstract: The synergistic development of "spiritual ethos and professional competence" among rural teachers constitutes a core issue in building a high-quality teaching workforce for the new era. This study surveyed 281 rural kindergarten educators under Liangshan Prefecture's "One Village, One Kindergarten" policy using a self-designed questionnaire. Results indicate: (1) Teachers' professional spirit $M=4.35$ and professional competence $M=4.22$ generally remain at moderate to high levels, with-- "innovative thinking," "teaching design skills," and "resource integration capabilities" being notable areas for improvement; (2) Teaching experience, educational background, and training participation significantly influence both spiritual ethos and professional competence ($P<0.01$), with training participation demonstrating the strongest leverage effect; (3) Soft environmental factors (colleague collaboration and social recognition) exhibit significantly stronger correlations with spiritual-competence development ($r=0.69-0.71$) compared to hard conditions (salaries/hardware facilities, $r\approx 0.59-0.62$); (4) Professional spirit positively predicts professional competence $\beta=0.68, R^2=0.462$. The study identifies 6-10 years of teaching experience as a critical period for enhancing this synergy. Recommendations include prioritizing spiritual cultivation for early-career teachers, providing targeted training for those with lower educational backgrounds, expanding training coverage in remote areas, and fostering supportive soft environments.

Keywords: Rural teachers; Synergy between spirit and ability; Difference analysis; Policy Enlightenments

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1. Introduction

The development of rural teacher teams is an essential task for rural revitalisation and high-quality development of education. In 2023, President Xi Jinping mentioned in his speech that there is a "unique spirit of educators characteristic of China", shifting the focus of teacher team development from being "competency-oriented" to stressing the synergy between spirit and competence [1]. Since the implementation of the "one village, one kindergarten" policy in 2015, Liangshan Prefecture has made good progress in preschool education coverage, opening 2,438 early childhood education centres and increasing the gross enrollment rate from 50.7% to more than 90%. However, most of the instructors are temporary employees who receive a monthly subsidy of about 2,000 yuan, and training opportunities are unevenly distributed and out of touch with actual demands such as mixed-age teaching and cultural integration. At present, the main direction of policies is to strengthen capabilities, but there is no systematic construction system for fostering professional spirit, and the synergy mechanism between the two is underdeveloped [2-3]. According to the literature, most of the previous research has concentrated on only one issue, such as policy evaluation or teacher attrition [4-6]. Although some recent research has explored the spiritual factors of "local attachment" and "professional identity" [7-8], there has been no quantitative verification of how "spirit" and "competence" work together, and the qualitative framework put forward is that there is an "activation-intermediation-sublimation" mechanism for the development of educator spirit, but it has not been quantitatively confirmed among ordinary rural teachers [9]. Based on the above, this paper will take teachers from schools participating in the "one village, one kindergarten" project in Liangshan Prefecture as the subjects and carry out a survey to assess the overall level and structural deficiencies in the development of students' spirituality and

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competencies, analyse the differences among groups according to teaching experience, educational background and training participation, as well as the impact of external factors on this synergy.

2. Research Design

2.1. Research Subjects

In accordance with the implementation of the "One Village, One Kindergarten" policy in the villages of Liangshan Prefecture, we selected preschool teachers from these areas as the objects of our study and employed stratified cluster sampling.

A total of 284 questionnaires were distributed; after removing the 3 outliers, 281 valid answers were collected, and thus the valid response rate was 98.9%.

The sample was 92.5% female and 7.5% male teachers; most were between 26 and 35 years old (66.9%), followed by those aged 36–45 (26.7%), 25 and under (5.3%), and 46 and over (1.1%). Regarding teaching experience, 71.2% had 6–10 years, 22.8% had 1–5 years, 4.6% had 11 years or more, and 1.4% had less than one year. In terms of educational attainment, 50.5 per cent had an associate's degree, 43.8 per cent had a bachelor's degree, 5.7 per cent had only a high school diploma or secondary vocational qualification, and none had a master's degree or higher. In addition, 93.6% of the teachers have taken part in the training organised by "One Village, One Kindergarten", and only 6.4% have not. Xichang City in Liangshan Prefecture had a proportion of 3.9% for the participants, and the other counties accounted for 96.1%.

2.2 Research Tools

This research utilized a self-designed questionnaire on rural Preschool teachers' professional spirit and competence, comprising three major components detailed below:

Demographic information section: This section collects data on participants' gender, age, teaching tenure, academic qualifications, location, and attendance at training sessions under the "One Village, One Kindergarten" policy.

Professional Spirit Scale (6 items): Developed based on General Secretary Xi Jinping's statements regarding educators' spirit, the scale encompasses three sub-dimensions: Ideals and Beliefs (2 items), Benevolent Heart (2 items), and Innovative Spirit (2 items). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Professional Competence Scale (6 items): According to the Professional Standards for Kindergarten Teachers (Trial Version), there are three parts in this scale: Classroom Management Capacity (2 items), Teaching Design and Delivery Capacity (2 items), and Resource Integration Capacity (2 items). All the above items were rated by respondents on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being very poor and 5 being excellent.

Five factors of the system (1 to 5 scale): Training opportunities, wages and bonuses, peer cooperation, social recognition, equipment, etc. It is a 5-point Likert scale, and 1 is no influence; 5 is a high degree of influence.

2.3 Validity and reliability testing

SPSS 26 was employed to carry out the verification and reliability analyses. The overall scale has a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.923, and the alpha coefficients for the three dimensions of professional spirit, professional competence, and influencing factors are 0.897, 0.885, and 0.872, respectively; all are greater than 0.8 and thus have good internal consistency. Exploratory Factor Analysis shows that KMO = 0.912 and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant ($p < 0.001$), so it was concluded that three factors could be extracted to explain a cumulative variance of 76.8%, all items had factor loadings greater than 0.65, and thus the structure validity met the requirements.

2.4 Analysis Methods

Descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation analysis, and linear regression analysis were employed. The significance level was set at $\alpha=0.05$. All analyses were performed using

SPSS 26.

3.Results and Analysis

3.1 The Overall Level of Spirit and Competence Among Rural Teachers

The average score for professional spirit was 4.35, higher than that for professional competence (4.22). Among its subdimensions, benevolence received the highest score (4.68), followed by ideals and beliefs (4.57), while innovative spirit scored the lowest (4.56). Regarding professional competence, classroom management demonstrated the highest score (4.48); eaching design and implementation, as well as resource integration, both scored 4.37, indicating significant weaknesses.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics on Rural Teachers' Mental Health and Competencies

dimension	Number of Items	Item Mean Values	standard error	sort
professional spirit	6	4.35	0.48	1
—— ideal and faith	2	4.57	0.52	Subdimension 1
—A heart full of compassion	2	4.68	0.48	Subdimension 1
—— creative spirit	2	4.56	0.53	Subdimension 3
professional ability	6	4.22	0.53	2
—Class Management	2	4.48	0.56	Subdimension 1
—— instructional design	2	4.37	0.63	Subdimension 3
—— resources integration	2	4.37	0.62	Subdimension 3

Our analysis shows that participants in Liangshan's "One Village, One Kindergarten" initiative maintain firm educational ideals and empathy for children, yet they struggle noticeably with innovative teaching design and resource coordination. This imbalance of strong dedication and weak innovation requires targeted focus.

3.2 Analysis of Differences Among Different Groups

3.2.1 Differences in teaching experience

Our one-way analysis of variance found that teachers of varying service years differed significantly in professional dedication ($F=5.123$, $P=0.002$) and professional competence ($F=6.791$, $P=0.000$). Post-hoc tests (LSD) demonstrated that teachers with 11 or more years of service exhibited significantly higher levels of professional dedication than those with 1-5 years of service $M=27.85$ vs. 25.12 , $P<0.01$; teachers with 6-10 years of service showed significantly greater professional competence than those with 1-5 years $M=25.68$ vs. 24.23 , $P<0.001$; additionally, teachers with 6-10 years of service perceived development influencing factors more strongly than their counterparts with 1-5 years of service $F=4.015$, $P=0.008$.

We identify the 6-10-year teaching tenure as a key developmental stage. Teachers within this bracket score far higher on professional competence and awareness of influencing factors than educators with 1-5 years of experience, while their results do not differ statistically from teachers with 11 or more years in service. This indicates that the coordinated growth of psychological quality and professional abilities tends to hit a relative plateau after six to ten years of teaching.

3.2.2 Differences in Educational Background

Significant differences were observed between teachers with different educational backgrounds in terms of professional spirit $F=4.321$, $P=0.014$ and professional competence $F=5.289$, $P=0.006$. Post-hoc analyses revealed that teachers with bachelor's degrees $M=26.45$ and associate degrees $M=26.23$ demonstrated significantly higher levels of professional spirit than those with high school/secondary vocational education qualifications $M=23.88$; $P<0.05$, while their professional competence was also markedly superior $M=25.67$ vs. $M=25.48$; $P<0.01$. However, no significant difference was found between associate degree holders and bachelor's degree holders,

indicating that the marginal benefits of further education attainment reach a high level at the associate degree level.

3.2.3 Differences in Training Participation

We conducted an independent samples t-test (Table 2) and found that teachers participating in the "One Village, One Kindergarten" policy training possessed markedly stronger professional dedication and expertise than those who did not receive the training. Specifically, the training's impact on enhancing professional competence (mean difference of 3.51) was slightly greater than its effect on improving professional dedication (mean difference of 3.23), suggesting that the program is more effective in skill development.

Table 2 Independent samples t-test for participation in training

dimension	Training participant group n = 263	Non-participating group n = 18	t price	P price	Mean Difference
professional spirit	26.35±2.78	23.12±3.12	4.892	0.000	3.23
professional ability	25.58±3.05	22.07±3.45	5.134	0.000	3.51

3.3 Correlation Analysis of Influencing Factors

The analysis of survey data reveals that the soft environment-defined by colleague collaboration and social recognition-exhibits a moderate to strong positive correlation with both professional dedication and expertise ($P < 0.001$), whereas hard conditions such as compensation and physical facilities show slightly weaker correlations. The Z-test indicated that the correlation coefficient between the soft environment and professional competence is significantly higher than that between hard conditions ($P < 0.05$). These findings demonstrate that humanistic care and professional respect exert a more pronounced promoting effect on the synergistic development of mental well-being and professional competence among rural teachers compared to material support.

3.4 Regression Analysis of Professional Spirit on Professional Competence

We performed a linear regression analysis to further verify how professional spirit predicts competence, with the overall score of professional spirit set as the independent variable and the overall score of professional competence as the dependent variable. The results demonstrated that professional spirit has a significant positive predictive effect on professional competence ($\beta = 0.68$, $P < 0.001$), with a model explanatory power of $R^2 = 0.462$ and an adjusted $R^2 = 0.460$, indicating that professional spirit independently accounts for 46.2% of the variation in professional competence. These findings strongly support the theoretical hypothesis of "spiritual empowerment of competence."

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Principal Findings

We observe that teachers in Liangshan Prefecture's "One Village, One Kindergarten" initiative mostly hold moderate to high professional ethos and competence. However, they lack prominent strengths in innovation spirit, teaching design and resource integration, which forms a structural feature of strong dedication yet inadequate innovation. Professional competence and mental well-being are positively impacted by teaching experience, educational background, and professional training involvement, with training participation showing the largest leverage effect. Novice teachers within the first five years of employment are an important population that requires targeted care since the six-year teaching period marks a pivotal crossroads for synergistic improvements in both mental health and professional qualities. Soft settings and mental capacity have a substantially larger link than hard conditions, suggesting that humanistic care-focused institutional designs may have more transformative efficacy than just increasing material benefits. Professionalism enhances professional competence and supports the theoretical hypothesis of "spiritual empowerment capability."

4.2 Policy Recommendations

We believe that researchers and schools should cultivate the vocational aspirations of young teachers and help them remain in the teaching profession for a long time. An all-round professional development support system should be constructed for teachers who have served from 1 to 5 years and combine the cultivation of ideals and convictions with a mentorship mechanism. The spirit of excellent teachers should be included in the mandatory pre-service training for new teachers, and experienced core teachers can provide regular one-on-one guidance to help new teachers reduce confusion and stress at the beginning of their teaching careers. Build an official management system for the temporary contract teachers and set up a clear promotion path for them to become regular permanent employees. Thus, the young frontline teachers will have stable and well-developed career paths.

Tiered interventions can be used to address the deficiencies in academic qualifications of teachers and improve their practical teaching ability. According to fieldwork, it has been observed that teachers who have only attended high school or vocational schools generally have weaker professional awareness and teaching skills in the classroom than those with college degrees or bachelor's degrees. Special funds for academic improvement will be set up, and practical training will be organised based on the daily teaching and rural education situations. The two-track system can help teachers strengthen their academic foundations in order to teach better and thus improve their own learning and ability.

Reduce the obstacles for training in the remote area and ensure that all teachers can participate in learning. According to the statistics, about 6.4% of the teachers in the remote-teaching area have never participated in the standardised policy and professional training due to distance. Various forms can be taken for mobile outreach training and research platforms of online digital teaching to offer offline tutoring and synchronous online courses. The above measures will reduce the geographic constraints of education and increase training resources for all grassroots schools.

A favourable working Environment that can give teachers a sense of purpose in their work should be created. A mentor-mentee pair will be appointed to regularly organise seminars and share teaching experience and other knowledge among the teachers. A special reward and recognition system should be established for the grassroots teachers, especially those in rural areas. Through peer support and a good honour system, it can be expected that the teachers will develop a strong sense of professional responsibility and teach the students with all their heart.

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