

# THE IDENTITY OF THE NEW GENERATION OF RURAL NOVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2025



05-4506832



pustaka.upsi.edu.my



Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun  
Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah



PustakaTBainun



ptbupsi

# THE IDENTITY OF THE NEW GENERATION OF RURAL NOVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS

YANG RUIJUN



05-4506832



pustaka.upsi.edu.my



Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun  
Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah



PustakaTBainun



ptbupsi

THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION  
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2025



05-4506832



pustaka.upsi.edu.my



Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun  
Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah



PustakaTBainun



ptbupsi



Please tick (v)  
Project Paper  
Masters by Research  
Master by Mixed Mode  
PhD

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK**

This declaration is made on the .....5 August.....2025.....

**i. Student's Declaration:**

I, Yang Ruijun (PLEASE INDICATE STUDENT'S NAME, MATRIC NO. AND FACULTY) hereby declare that the work entitled THE IDENTITY OF THE NEW GENERATION OF RURAL NOVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS is my original work. I have not copied from any other students' work or from any other sources except where due reference or acknowledgement is made explicitly in the text, nor has any part been written for me by another person.

Yang Ruijun

Signature of the student

**ii. Supervisor's Declaration:**

I Assoc Pro. Dr. Mazura Mastura Muhammad (SUPERVISOR'S NAME) hereby certifies that the work entitled THE IDENTITY OF THE NEW GENERATION OF RURAL NOVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS (TITLE) was prepared by the above named student, and was submitted to the Institute of Graduate Studies as a \* partial/full fulfillment for the conferment of Doctor of Philosophy (PLEASE INDICATE THE DEGREE), and the aforementioned work, to the best of my knowledge is the said student's work.

25 August 2025

Date

Signature of the Supervisor



**INSTITUT PENGAJIAN SISWAZAH /  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**BORANG PENGESAHAN PENYERAHAN TESIS/DISERTASI/LAPORAN KERTAS PROJEK  
DECLARATION OF THESIS/DISSERTATION/PROJECT PAPER FORM**

Tajuk / Title: The Identity of the New Generation of Rural Novice English Teachers

No. Metrik /Matric's No.: P20192001194

Saya / I :

(Nama pelajar / Student's Name)

mengaku membenarkan Tesis/Disertasi/Laporan Kertas Projek (Kedoktoran/Sarjana)\* ini disimpan di Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun) dengan syarat-syarat kegunaan seperti berikut:-

*acknowledged that Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Tuanku Bainun Library) reserves the right as follows:-*

1. Tesis/Disertasi/Laporan Kertas Projek ini adalah hak milik UPSI.  
*The thesis is the property of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris*
2. Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun dibenarkan membuat salinan untuk tujuan rujukan dan penyelidikan.  
*Tuanku Bainun Library has the right to make copies for the purpose of reference and research.*
3. Perpustakaan dibenarkan membuat salinan Tesis/Disertasi ini sebagai bahan pertukaran antara Institut Pengajian Tinggi.  
*The Library has the right to make copies of the thesis for academic exchange.*
4. Sila tandakan ( ✓ ) bagi pilihan kategori di bawah / Please tick ( ✓ ) for category below:-

**SULIT/CONFIDENTIAL**

Mengandungi maklumat yang berdarjah keselamatan atau kepentingan Malaysia seperti yang termaktub dalam Akta Rahsia Rasmi 1972. / Contains confidential information under the Official Secret Act 1972

**TERHAD/RESTRICTED**

Mengandungi maklumat terhad yang telah ditentukan oleh organisasi/badan di mana penyelidikan ini dijalankan. / Contains restricted information as specified by the organization where research was done.

**TIDAK TERHAD / OPEN ACCESS**

Yang Rujun

(Tandatangan Pelajar/ Signature)

Tarikh: September 3rd, 2024

(Tandatangan Penjawat / Signature of Supervisor)  
& (Nama & Cop Rasmi / Name & Official Stamp)

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mazura@Mazura Binj Mulanizat  
Dean  
Faculty of Languages and Communication  
Sultan Idris Education University  
35000 Tanjong Malim, Perak

Catatan: Jika Tesis/Disertasi ini **SULIT** @ **TERHAD**, sila lampirkan surat daripada pihak berkuasa/organisasi berkenaan dengan menyatakan sekali sebab dan tempoh laporan ini perlu dikelaskan sebagai **SULIT** dan **TERHAD**.

Notes: If the thesis is **CONFIDENTIAL** or **RESTRICTED**, please attach with the letter from the organization with period and reasons for confidentiality or restriction.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study is a complex and long process. I would like to thank all the people who helped me.

First of all I would like to thank my supervisor: Dr. Mazura Mastura Binti Muhammad. She provided me with a lot of support during my thesis writing and research. She constantly encouraged me to continue my research and hoped that I could graduate successfully. Without her moral support I might not have been able to finish my research. In addition, she gave me a lot of constructive advice during my research, which helped my research go smoothly. My supervisor showed great patience and kindness throughout my research process. I feel very lucky to have met her.

I would also like to thank all the professors who helped me selflessly in my thesis project. They gave me many useful suggestions. It is because of these suggestions that my research went smoothly. During my years in Malaysia, I deeply felt the kindness of the people here. Whether it was the staff of the university or strangers, they were warm and helpful to me in any time I needed help. Last but not least, I would like to thank all the wonderful people in Malaysia.





## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the identity of China's new-generation rural novice English teachers (post-1990s) within the Western Development Plan. Using a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the research systematically examines these teachers' identity. First, a questionnaire survey was conducted among 339 novice English teachers (with 0-6 years of teaching experience) from rural primary schools across seven provinces under China's Western Development Plan, with data analyzed using SPSS. Subsequently, based on growth backgrounds, six novice teachers were selected from the quantitative sample for semi-structured interviews, and the interview transcripts were coded using NVivo through grounded theory. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods enabled a comprehensive analysis of teachers' identity satisfaction level and its determinants. The findings highlight the urgent need for multifaceted reforms that integrate equitable policy implementation with targeted professional development to address systemic challenges in rural education. These reforms must be complemented by community-driven initiatives that enhance social recognition and foster stakeholder collaboration. Such efforts are essential for rebuilding teachers' professional identity and ensuring sustainable educational improvement in rural regions. This study underscores the importance of a holistic approach that combines policy, professional growth, and community engagement to create lasting positive change in underserved educational contexts.





## **IDENTITI GENERASI BAHARU GURU BAHASA INGGERIS NOVIS LUAR BANDAR**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini menyiasat identiti guru bahasa Inggeris baru di pedalaman China (kelahiran selepas tahun 1990-an) dalam Rancangan Pembangunan Barat. Objektif kajian adalah untuk menerokai identiti yang dirasakan sendiri, mengenalpasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi, menganalisis kesan latar belakang pertumbuhan, tahun pengajaran, dan gelaran pekerjaan, mencadangkan strategi untuk meningkatkan kepuasan identiti, dan membangunkan model pembangunan profesional. Menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran, 339 borang soal selidik dan enam temu bincang dianalisis melalui teori sosiokultur dan teori komuniti pembelajaran. Penemuan menunjukkan tahap kepuasan identiti sederhana, yang dipengaruhi oleh faktor-faktor sosiokultur, cabaran pekerjaan, dan halangan pertumbuhan profesional. Latar belakang pertumbuhan, pengalaman mengajar, dan gelaran pekerjaan secara signifikan mempengaruhi kepuasan, dengan guru yang dibesarkan di bandar dan mereka yang mempunyai gelaran yang lebih tinggi melaporkan kepuasan yang lebih besar. Strategi untuk meningkatkan identiti termasuk kempen pengiktirafan awam, insentif kewangan, dan dasar pembangunan profesional yang terpencil. Model yang dicadangkan menggabungkan sokongan sosiokultur, keadilan organisasi, dan peluang pertumbuhan berterusan. Penemuan ini memerlukan reformasi berlapis yang menggabungkan pelaksanaan dasar yang adil dengan pembangunan profesional yang terpencil untuk menangani cabaran sistemik. Seterusnya, inisiatif komuniti yang meningkatkan pengiktirafan sosial dan kerjasama pihak berkepentingan adalah penting untuk membina semula identiti profesional guru dan memastikan peningkatan pendidikan yang berkesinambungan di kawasan pedalaman.



## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK</b>	ii
<b>DECLARATION OF THESIS FORM</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	iv
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	v
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	vi
<b>CONTENTS</b>	vii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xii
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xiv
<b>APPENDIX LIST</b>	xv
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of Study	3
1.3 Problem Statement	5
1.4 Objectives of Study	7
1.5 Research Questions	8
1.6 Definition of Terms	9
1.7 Limitation of Study	14
1.8 Significance of Study	15
1.9 Summary	18
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
2.1 Introduction	19

2.2	Sociocultural Theory	20
2.3	Learning Communities	26
2.4	Theoretical Framework	33
2.5	Research on Teachers' Identity	34
2.5.1	Definitions and Connotations of Identity	34
2.5.2	Research on English Teachers' Identity	37
2.6	Research on Novice Teachers	43
2.7	Research on Traditional Rural Teachers and New Generation Rural Teachers	50
2.8	Research Gaps	55
2.9	Summary	56

### CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1	Introduction	57
3.2	Data Description	58
3.2.1	Research Design	58
3.2.2	Population and Sample	59
3.2.3	Instruments	64
3.2.3.1	Quantitative Research Instrument	64
3.2.3.2	Qualitative Research Instrument	67
3.3	Data Collection	71
3.3.1	Data Collection Methods	71
3.3.2	Data Collection Procedures	72
3.3.2.1	Quantitative Data Collection Procedures	73
3.3.2.2	Qualitative Data Collection Procedures	75
3.4	Data Analysis	77
3.4.1	Data Analysis Methods	77

3.4.2	Pilot Study	78
3.4.2.1	The reliability analysis	84
3.4.2.1	Unidimensional Analysis	87
3.4.2.2	Exploratory Factor Analysis	88
3.4.3	Analysis of the Questionnaire	90
3.4.3.1	Reliability Analysis	90
3.4.3.2	Validity Analysis	91
3.4.3.3	Demographic Analysis	100
3.4.4	Coding Process	107
3.4.4.1	Open Coding	109
3.4.4.2	Axial Coding	117
3.4.4.3	Selective Coding	121
3.5	Validity and Reliability	125
3.5.1	Expert Validation Process	126
3.5.2	Submission of Interview Questions to Expert Reviewers	126
3.5.3	Experts' Review Report	127
3.5.4	Incorporation of Feedback	128
3.6	Summary	128

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

4.1	Introduction	130
4.2	Perceptions of Teachers' Identity	131
4.2.1	Overall Identity	131
4.3.2	Identity Perception Dimensions	133
4.3.2.1	Negative Social Image	134
4.3.2.2	Attitudes for Occupational Environment	140

4.3	Factors Affecting Identity	177
4.3.1	Socio-environment Factors	178
4.3.1.1	Social Evaluation	178
4.3.1.2	Social Bias	184
4.3.1.3	Social Status	188
4.3.2	Occupational Environment Factors	191
4.3.2.1	Organizational Situations	192
4.3.2.2	Professional Values	206
4.3.2.3	Interpersonal Relationships	219
4.3.2.4	Professional Emotions	239
4.3.2.5	Work Environment	244
4.3.3	Professional Growth Factors	259
4.3.3.1	Internal Factors	260
4.3.3.2	External Factors	265
4.4	Influence of Growth Backgrounds, Teaching Years and Job Titles on Identity	275
4.4.1	Impact from Growth Backgrounds	277
4.4.2	Impact from Teaching Years	280
4.4.3	Impact form Job Titles	282
4.5	Ways to Enhance Teachers' Identity Level of Satisfaction	284
4.5.1	Strengthening Publicity for Teachers	285
4.5.2	Increasing Financial Support	288
4.5.3	Implementing Development Support Policies	290
4.6	Development Model of Teachers' Identity	294
4.7	Summary	299

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1	Introduction	300
5.2	Conclusion	301
5.3	Discussion	311
5.4	Contribution	314
5.4.1	Theoretical Contributions	314
5.4.2	Practical Contributions	315
5.4.3	Sociocultural Contributions	316
5.4.4	Methodological Contribution	317
5.5	Implication	317
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	319
	<b>APPENDIXES</b>	

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table No.</b>		<b>Page</b>
3.1	Classifications of questions in the questionnaire	65
3.2	Explanations of the process of solving the research questions (RQ)	69
3.3	Basic information statistics	78
3.4	Item analysis	80
3.5	Reliability analysis	85
3.6	Unidimensional validity analysis	87
3.7	Scale validity test	88
3.8	Reliability analysis of variables	91
3.9	KMO and Bartlett's test	92
3.10	Factorial rotation matrix	93
3.11	Main evaluation indicators and evaluation criteria for overall model fitness	95
3.12	Validated factor model	95
3.13	Model fit indicators	96
3.14	Convergent validity analysis results	98
3.15	Discriminant validity test	99
3.16	Basic information statistics	102
3.17	Basic information of interviewees	108
3.18	Interview data coding form	109
3.19	Examples of open coding process	110
3.20	Original category results	112
3.21	Axial coding list	117



3.22	Selective coding results	123
3.23	Framework analysis	125
3.24	Review report	127
4.1	Descriptive statistics	132
4.2	Analysis of differences in the variables by growth background	278
4.3	Descriptive statistics	279
4.4	Analysis of differences in variables by teaching years	280
4.5	Descriptive statistics	281
4.6	Analysis of differences in variables by job titles	282
4.7	Descriptive statistics	283



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure No.		Page
2.1	Diagram of the elements of activity theory	25
2.2	Diagram of the relationship between learning communities and identity	32
2.3	Diagram of the theoretical framework	34
3.1	Diagram of research design in quantitative and qualitative research	59
3.2	Western and eastern regions of China	60
3.3	Diagram of the data collection procedure	73
3.4	Diagram of the data collection procedure in quantitative research	75
3.5	Diagram of the data collection procedure in qualitative research	76
3.6	Ratio of different teaching years	105
3.7	Ratio of different job titles	105
4.1	Development model of the identity of the new generation of rural novice English teachers	297

## APPENDIX LIST

- A Questionnaire on the identity of the new generation of rural novice English teachers
- B Interview outlines on the identity of the new generation of rural novice English teachers
- C Xun Yang's interview outlines on high school English teachers' identity
- D Qi Mingjun's interview outlines on novice college English teachers' professional identity
- E Analysis of differences by genders
- F Analysis of differences by ages
- G Analysis of differences by educational attainment



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



#### 1.1 Introduction



China has a large population. According to the latest statistics from the Chinese census on May 11, 2021, China has a total population of 1,411.78 million, of which 509.79 million live in rural areas, accounting for 36.11% (Hongheiku, 2021). Although the rural population is less than half, the improvement of the educational quality of the rural population is inseparable for economic and social development. In order to ensure the enhancement of the comprehensive education level of the population, China fully implemented compulsory education in 2006 (<https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/451199538.html>). The “Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China” revised and adopted by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China in 2006 stipulates that all school-age children and adolescents with the nationality of the





People's Republic of China, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, family property status, religious beliefs, and other elements, enjoy the equal right to receive compulsory education in accordance with the law, and fulfill the obligation to receive compulsory education (Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China, 2006). The compulsory education law mainly includes two stages: primary and junior high school periods. The Chinese laws emphasizes that children and adolescents must receive the education guaranteed by the state, society, schools, and families. Children have the right to receive nine-year compulsory education, which consists of six-year primary and three-year junior high school. The compulsory education stage is free of charge, and the state bears all educational expenses (Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China, 2006).



In 2020, the China Rural Education Development Research Institute released the *Chinese Rural Education Development Report 2019* (360kuai, 2020). The report stated that there are 321,901 compulsory education schools in China, 41,196 in urban areas, 79,072 in townships and 201,633 in rural areas. From the above data, we can conclude that the proportion of rural schools in China is very large, and the demand for rural teachers is high. Hence, in order to improve the quality of teaching in rural areas, the Chinese government has increased the recruitment of teachers. The increase in the number of rural teachers has greatly promoted the improvement of the teaching quality in the rural compulsory education.

This chapter consists of seven parts. It begins with an introduction to the background of the study. The Chinese government is currently concerned about the improvement of backward rural education and encourages college graduates to





become rural teachers. After that, problem statement. There are some difficulties and challenges for the new generation of rural novice English teachers in rural schools. Next are the objectives and research questions of the study, which explore teachers' identity from 5 perspectives. The fifth part is the definition of terms and limitation of the study. The last part is the significance of the study.

## 1.2 Background of Study

The rapid development of China's economy has also driven the development of China's education. With the improvement of material conditions, the Chinese government pays more and more attention to the improvement of education level, and the number of teachers trained in China has also increased rapidly. Figures released by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2020 showed that the number of teachers had increased from 15.39 million to 17.32 million during the five-year plan (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021). There is an increase of 12.5% for the past five years. In 2020, more than 700,000 primary, secondary and kindergarten teachers were openly recruited, and the total number of applicants were close to 5 million (Xinhuanet, 2020).

The above data fully demonstrates the importance that the Chinese government attaches to education. On the other hand, it shows that the competition for teaching positions is very fierce. With the government's policy support and the influence of employment concept, more and more college students choose to be teachers (Sohu, 2019). At present, the career choices of graduates are mainly affected





by the following two aspects. The first is the huge pressure of urban employment. Due to the increase of teachers' recruitment, the number of teachers in large, medium and small cities in China is currently saturated, the probability of urban employment is greatly reduced, and the competition for employment becomes fierce. Second, the support of the national rural teacher policy. In order to improve the quality of rural teachers, the state has adopted a series of measures to improve the treatment of rural teachers and change the working environment of rural schools (General Office of the State Council, 2015). At present, most rural classrooms have been equipped with the modern equipment, and the salary level of rural teachers has been improved. Due to employment pressure and encouraged by national policies, graduates increasingly choose to teach in rural areas (Sohu News, 2018). However, compared to urban schools, working and living conditions in rural areas are generally at a disadvantage (General Office of the State Council, 2015).



In a word, poor living conditions, far from home, unable to take care of family, a poor sense of achievement seems to be a common difficulty for rural teachers (Chen, 2022) The research object of this study is the newly recruited English teachers in the primary school. Most of them were born in the 1990s. They are a generation who grew up in the information age. They enjoy the convenience and advancement of the era, who are called the new generation. The backward condition of rural schools poses a great challenge for the new generation teachers.





### 1.3 Problem Statement

China's post-reform era (post-1978) has been characterized by rapid socioeconomic transformations, with generational shifts occurring approximately every decade (Deng, 2016, p. 25). These generational cohorts—labeled as “post-60s,” “post-70s,” and so forth—reflect distinct sociocultural identities shaped by their unique historical contexts. The “post-90s” generation (born 1990–1999), also termed the “new generation,” is particularly notable for its divergence from predecessors. Growing up amid economic prosperity, technological advancement (e.g., internet proliferation), and globalized cultural exchanges, this cohort exhibits distinct values: individualism, secular materialism, openness to innovation, and weaker organizational loyalty (Fan, 2020; Guo, 2018; Bing et al., 2019). Karl Mannheim's (2002) generational theory further posits that such cohorts often face resistance from older generations entrenched in traditional norms (p. 68), a dynamic observable in China's intergenerational discourse.

Rural education remains a critical yet underdeveloped pillar of China's compulsory education system, serving 29.3% of the nation's students. However, rural teachers—particularly those in impoverished regions—face systemic challenges.

First, high attrition rates: Between 2010 and 2013, rural teacher numbers plummeted by 30% (Ministry of Education), with a 45.5% attrition rate among recent recruits (Lei, 2018).





Second, structural inequities. Rural teachers endure salary disparities, delayed professional title promotions (5–8 years longer than urban counterparts), and inadequate living conditions (Wu, 2017; Sohu News, 2015).

Third, demoralization. Limited career advancement, student management difficulties, and societal stigma (e.g., low social status) contribute to burnout and diminished professional identity (Zheng, 2018; China Teachers Daily, 2020).

To address these issues, the Chinese government introduced reforms such as the *Rural Teacher Support Plan (2015–2020)* and preferential title evaluations for rural educators (Ministry of Education, 2018). While these policies have improved recruitment, retention remains precarious. Lei Wanghong’s (2018) national survey reveals that material incentives alone fail to resolve deeper issues: rural teachers’ lack of professional fulfillment, isolation, and weak organizational commitment persist as barriers to retention.

Existing scholarship on rural teachers predominantly focuses on traditional generations (pre-1990s cohorts), emphasizing structural challenges through qualitative case studies (Jing, 2021; Wu, 2017). However, the influx of “post-90s” novice teachers—a generation with higher education, digital literacy, and distinct values—introduces new dynamics. Early studies suggest this cohort’s lower resilience to adversity, weaker institutional loyalty, and stronger demand for self-actualization (Fan, 2020; Shi, 2018) may conflict with rural teaching realities, yet systematic research remains scarce. Specifically:





Limited Scope: Prior work examines localized cases or single provinces, neglecting regional diversity.

Methodological Constraints: Overreliance on qualitative methods (e.g., interviews) limits generalizability.

Generational Blind Spot: No studies holistically analyze how the “post-90s” identity intersects with rural teaching challenges.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the professional identity of post-90s novice English teachers in seven western provinces under China’s Western Development Plan. Combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, it asks:

How do sociocultural, institutional, and generational factors shape the professional identity and retention of China’s new-generation rural teachers?

By bridging generational theory, education policy, and identity studies, this research offers actionable insights to refine retention strategies and advance rural education equity.

#### **1.4 Objectives of Study**

The research object of is the new generation of rural novice English teachers. The research objectives are:





a. To explore how the new generation of rural novice English teachers perceive their identity

b. To ascertain the factors that affect the construction of the new generation of rural English teachers' identity

c. To discuss how the growth backgrounds, the teaching years and the job titles impact the new generation of rural novice English teachers' identity level of satisfaction

d. To identify ways to enhance the identity level of satisfaction of the new generation of rural novice English teachers



e. To propose a development model of the identity of the new generation of rural novice English teachers

## 1.5 Research Questions

Based on the above research objectives, the main questions of this research are as follows:

a. How do the new generation of rural novice English teachers perceive their identity?





b. What are the factors that affect the construction of the new generation of rural novice English teachers' identity ?

c. How do the growth backgrounds, the teaching years and the job titles impact the new generation of rural novice English teachers' identity level of satisfaction?

d. How to enhance the identity level of satisfaction of the new generation of rural novice English teachers?

e. How do social and school environments shape the identity level of satisfaction of the new generation of rural novice English teachers?



## 1.6 Definition of Terms

The following definition of terms are pertinent in the current research.

Identity:

A multidimensional, evolving construct representing an educator's self-conceptualization (Tickle, 1982), shaped by interactions between personal experiences, sociocultural contexts (Vygotsky, cited in Engeström, 2001), and institutional environments. It encompasses four aspects: Self-Perception: Beliefs about teaching efficacy and emotional engagement (Mayer, 1999). Sociocultural





Embeddedness: Negotiation of societal roles (Fan, 2020; Zheng, 2018). Dynamic Adaptation: Responses to challenges like resource limitations and job title hierarchies (Wu, 2018). Communal Influence: Formation through learning communities (Jin, 2016; Li, 2020).

### Learning Communities:

Community refers to a group formed in a natural state in human society, and expresses a sense of belonging and identity to a specific group (Tnnies, 1887). Maciver (1920) further developed the theory of community. His description of the community is as follows: A community is a spiritual union. A community is the common life of people in society. It is an area where people live together, ranging from villages, towns, cities, to countries and even larger areas. The common life can make an area form some of its unique characteristics, thus forming a meaningful boundary between this community and other communities. Sato (1999) believes that the community refers to the community of learners. Wenger (2011) believes that the community of practice refers to a group of individuals who share common concerns and interests and promote professional improvement through regular mutual exchanges. The learning communities of teachers refers not only to the teachers participating in the study group, but also to the teacher interpersonal relationships formed thereby, involving the specific purpose of teachers' professional development, and also including the systematic and open learning environment formed by members (Jin, 2016). Learning communities refer to teachers in the community through active learning and peer-to-peer collaboration to improve teaching abilities (Li, 2020). In this research, learning communities refer to a group composed of individuals with the





same beliefs and values and interpersonal relationships formed thereby. Individuals continuously improve their own abilities through active collective activities, collaboration, and complete their self-identity through continuous participation in collective activities.

#### New Generation:

In 2003, Shi Xiaoling mentioned that the new generation of college students refers to young people who grew up at the end of the 20th century, most of whom were born in the 1990s. The “post-90s” are a new generation group and become the new generation in the social structure. “Post-90s” naturally become a common concept of the new generation (Deng, 2016). The post-1990s are those who were born in 1990-1999 with the ability to work (Qin, 2018). The majority of the post-90s group is currently between 21 and 30 years old. They are the main force of social development and are called the new generation (Fan, 2020). Shenjie (2016) believes that the “new generation” refers to the young generation after the 1980s and later (up to now, it mainly includes the post-80s, post-90s, and post-00s) (p. 9). In the current study, the author defines new generation as the post 90s generation, which refers to the groups with labor capacity born between 1990 and 1999. It defines and characterizes the characteristics of today’s young generation that are different from those of previous generations, and describes their different values and behaviors.





### Novice Teacher:

A newly qualified educator in the initial zero to six years of professional practice (Lu, 2023; Zhang, 2023), working in rural schools within China's Western Development regions. This cohort (primarily post-1990s graduates) navigates the transition from theoretical training to practical teaching while confronting challenges such as limited resources, social biases, and professional isolation (Fan, 2020; Su & Wang, 2021). Their identity is shaped by sociocultural contexts (Vygotsky, 2001) and interactions within learning communities (Wenger, 2011), distinguishing them from older generations through higher educational backgrounds, technological proficiency, and a stronger focus on self-realization (Deng, 2016; Guo, 2018).



### Rural Teacher:



It refers to teachers who work in rural schools. In China, they are divided into two types.,traditional rural teachers and new generation rural teachers. Rural teachers appeared in the 1950s and 1960s. In order to solve the problem of rural education, governments at all levels took measures to recruit a large number of rural teachers.

Traditional rural teachers' communication scope is narrow, and most of them are farmers, and almost all of them are young people from their own villages or townships (Wang, 2014). Traditional rural teachers live in villages near the school. They are not only rural teachers, but also part of the rural community (Guo, 2016). New generation rural teachers refers to teachers who were born in the 1990s. They are unfamiliar with the rural life. "Strangers" in rural culture, "escapers" in rural





governance, “technical people” in rural education are the labels of the new generation of rural teachers (Su & Wang, 2021)

#### Teacher Identity:

Tickle (1982) believes that teacher identity refers to the teacher’s own practical experience and professional life of personal background as well as the expectations of the external society for teachers, the two are intertwined. Mayer (1999) believes that teacher identity is more personal, it is how a teacher determines and perceives himself as a teacher, and it focuses on the teacher’s expectations and values. It is defined here in terms of the influences on teachers, how individuals see themselves and how they enact their profession in their settings (Varghese, 2006). Qi Mingjun (2019) pointed out that teacher identity is gradually formed by teachers in teaching and academic practice, and it is the overall understanding and cognition of the individual as a teacher and the relationship between the individual and others in professional life. This study defines teacher identity as how individuals see themselves, and it is a cognition of individual as a teacher and the relationship between the individual and the society.

#### Western Development:

The development of western China mainly refers to the provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government in western China, with an area of 6.85 million square kilometers, accounting for 71.4% of the whole country. At the end of 2013, the population was 366.37 million,





accounting for 26.92% of the national total. In 2013, the GDP was 12,608.978-yuan, accounting for 22.15% of the national total. The western region is rich in natural resources, has great market potential and is strategically located. However, due to natural, historical, social and other reasons, the economic development of the western region is relatively backward, and the per capital GDP is only two-thirds of the national average and less than 40% of the average of the eastern region. The western region urgently needs to speed up the pace of reform, opening up and modernization.

### 1.7 Limitation of Study

Due to limited personal ability, resources, time and space, this research has certain limitations and deficiencies.



First, the time span of this research is limited. The time span of this study is one year. Due to time constraints, the problems of novice teachers may not be revealed in this time period. Therefore, the problems faced by novice teachers may not be fully covered.

Second, this study will be focusing on only seven western provinces, which is limited, due to the vast territory of China and the differences in the rural environment of the regions, the identity status of novice teachers may be different. Hence, the findings of the current study cannot be generalized for the whole territory of China.





Third, this research is conducted in the context of China, which is influenced by Chinese culture and social environment. Therefore, the results of this study may not be applicable to other countries and regions.

## 1.8 Significance of Study

With the development of China's economy, China's educational development level has gradually improved. Rural education is an important part of education in China. According to the latest data from the seventh national census of the State Council released on May 11, 2020, the population living in cities and towns in China is 901.99 million, accounting for 63.89%; the population living in rural areas is 509.79 million people, accounting for 36.11%. In the past ten years, with the improvement of China's urbanization level, the proportion of rural population in China has dropped significantly, but the improvement of China's education level is still inseparable from the improvement of rural education level. This research further explores the current situation of rural teachers by studying the identity of rural novice English teachers. The main significance of this study is as follows:

On one hand, it is about the theoretical significance. Firstly, this study uses management, psychology, pedagogy and other interdisciplinary theories to analyze the status of teachers' identity, which is helpful to comprehensively understand the characteristics of Chinese novice teachers in the new era. Secondly, this study helps to enrich the research theories of the new generation of rural teachers. At present, the number of studies on the new generation of novice teachers in rural areas is





insufficient, and the attention is not enough. This study adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, and adopts large-scale questionnaire surveys and interviews to solve the problems that the current research is not comprehensive and in-depth.

On the other hand, it is about the practical significance. Firstly, it contributes to the development of teacher education. Fred (2004) likened teachers' self-change to an onion, that is, the inner and outer layers of an onion can influence each other, so the outer layer is easier to change, and the inner layer is relatively difficult to change. Teacher identity formation resembles an onion's layers, requiring changes in beliefs, self-perception, and mission at its core. Therefore, the task of teacher education can not only stop at the change of teachers' behavior and ability, but the deep change in teachers' inner.



Secondly, it is helpful for the implementation of China's teaching reform. With the continuous development of society, the reform of education is imperative. Teachers are a key factor in curriculum change. L. Stenhouse (1975), a famous British education expert, believes that the key to curriculum development is teacher development. If teachers do not change accordingly, curriculum changes will be difficult to achieve. In the actual curriculum reform, the most prominent problem is that the role of teachers has not changed. "New" changes require "new" changes in teachers, but the reality is just the opposite. Analyzing its root causes will find that there are contradictions and conflicts between the external "role regulation" and the internal "identity". In the process of teacher development, only by realizing the transformation from external role regulation to internal identity can we effectively





play the main role of teachers. The difference of teachers' attitude towards reform should be analyzed from the perspective of identity and the relationship between teachers and education reform, so as to understand why teachers have different educational values and attitudes, and why different teachers resist in curriculum reform or inertia (Li, 2009).

Thirdly, it provides a research basis for rural teacher attrition. Giddens (1998) points out that "What to do? How to act? Who to be?" are central questions for everyone living in the scene of late modernity (p. 80-81). Teacher work is a kind of "practice of practitioners". As a person living in the real world, the exploration of teachers' self-identity is always subject to spiritual torture (Shi, 2006, p. 56). As a professional way of life for teachers, it constantly shapes or constructs the professional identity of teachers. As a molecule in the social organism, individual teachers are constantly confronted with the realistic impact and influence of post modernity on their own way of life and practice, which directly leads to experiencing the loss of a sense of self-worth and meaning in an uncertain world (Li, 2012). Attracting and retaining talent teachers is an important guarantee for China's rural development. The support of national policies provides powerful conditions for the development of rural education. After the arrival of college graduates, how to retain them, let them take root in the countryside with peace of mind, and help rural development are the issues that rural areas need to pay attention to. The poor living and working environment in rural areas, limited space for personal development, and limited opportunities for self-improvement have led to a serious loss of rural teachers, especially excellent rural teachers. The study of novice teachers' identity will help to understand the causes of rural teacher attrition.





Finally, it helps to pay attention to the self-existing state of the new generation of teachers. The role of teachers emphasizes the social status of teachers, the responsibilities and obligations in teachers' positions, and the corresponding social expectations. Paying attention to the identity of the new generation of rural novice English teachers is to emphasize the subjectivity of the active self-construction of the individual, to analyze the rationality and legitimacy of the teachers themselves from the perspective of the subject and internal, and to emphasize the importance of the life value of teachers' existence and individual self.

## 1.9 Summary

This chapter mainly discusses the research background, problem statement, research questions, research objectives, limitation of the study and research significance. Rural education, especially rural teachers, has received much attention in recent years, and the identity status of rural teachers is directly related to the quality of rural education. After the preferential policies implemented by the state, the work and life status of rural teachers can be understood through their identity status. In short, through the analyses, this study clarifies the purpose and significance of the study. The following chapter focuses on the theoretical underpinnings and the current state of research.

