



The Role of Professional Identity and Teaching Efficacy in Shaping Retention Intention among University Foreign Teachers in Guangxi, China

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the impact of professional identity—specifically, professional values and professional behavioral inclination—on retention intention, with teaching efficacy as a mediating variable, among university foreign teachers in Guangxi, China. Drawing on Self-Efficacy Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional design, surveying 384 foreign educators from public universities across the region. Using multiple regression and mediation analysis via SmartPLS, the findings reveal that both professional identity dimensions significantly predict retention intention, with behavioral inclination exerting a stronger influence than values. Both dimensions also significantly predict teaching efficacy, which in turn has a robust positive effect on retention intention. Mediation analysis confirms that teaching efficacy significantly mediates the relationship between professional identity and retention. These results highlight the psychological and professional mechanisms that underpin foreign teacher retention in cross-cultural academic settings. The study offers theoretical contributions to educational psychology and practical guidance for higher education institutions aiming to improve international faculty retention through targeted support of identity development and efficacy enhancement.

KEYWORDS:

Professional Identity,
Teaching Efficacy,
Retention Intention,
Foreign Teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Background

In recent years, China's education system has undergone significant transformation, particularly in response to the growing demand for global integration in higher education. This transformation has placed increasing emphasis on internationalization, curriculum reform, and the adoption of

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global teaching methodologies. As part of this shift, universities across the country—including those in ethnically diverse and developing regions such as Guangxi—have increased their employment of university foreign teachers. These educators play a central role in enhancing students' English proficiency, facilitating intercultural communication, and enriching academic environments through diverse pedagogical approaches (Sun, 2022)

However, the professional experience of foreign teachers in Guangxi is shaped by a complex intersection of institutional expectations, cultural differences, and individual adaptation processes. Guangxi's cultural and linguistic diversity, combined with its unique social norms and regional policies, presents specific challenges for foreign educators. These

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include language and communication barriers, difficulties integrating into local communities, and mismatches between personal teaching philosophies and institutional expectations. These conditions directly influence the formation of professional identity, which refers to how individuals define themselves within their professional roles in relation to institutional values, social context, and ethical standards.

Among the multiple dimensions of professional identity, professional values and professional behavioral inclination are particularly important for foreign educators. Professional values represent the guiding principles and moral commitments that teachers uphold, such as a dedication to student welfare, fairness, respect, and integrity. Professional behavioral inclination, on the other hand, reflects a teacher's tendency to consistently act in ways that align with professional standards, including collaboration, accountability, adaptability, and ethical conduct. Both dimensions are critical to how foreign teachers navigate new institutional cultures and develop a sustainable sense of purpose in their work.

Despite the importance of professional identity, its influence on retention intention—a teacher's intention or desire to continue working at their current institution—may be moderated by internal psychological factors. One such factor is teaching efficacy, which is defined as a teacher's belief in their ability to influence student learning, manage the classroom effectively, and implement instructional strategies that lead to positive educational outcomes. Rooted in Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, teaching efficacy has been shown to be a critical determinant of professional satisfaction, motivation, and resilience. It encompasses dimensions such as efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management—all of which are crucial for foreign teachers managing diverse and unfamiliar classroom settings (Ou & Gu, 2022; Cáceres et al., 2021).

In culturally rich and administratively complex settings like Guangxi, the development of teaching efficacy is often shaped by institutional support systems, professional development opportunities, peer mentoring, and classroom experiences (Eslamdoost et al., 2020). Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to remain in their positions, despite initial adaptation difficulties, while those with low efficacy may experience burnout, disillusionment, or intent to leave (Eden et al., 2024). These interconnections suggest that teaching efficacy may serve as a mediating mechanism linking

professional identity to retention outcomes.

Given these contextual and psychological dynamics, it is important to examine how specific dimensions of professional identity—professional values and professional behavioral inclination—interact with teaching efficacy to influence retention intention among university foreign teachers in Guangxi. Such inquiry is essential to improving institutional support practices, understanding teacher motivation, and addressing the growing challenge of foreign teacher turnover in China's evolving educational landscape.

Problem Statement

While foreign university teachers have become increasingly central to China's push toward educational internationalization, their retention remains a persistent challenge—particularly in less developed or ethnically diverse provinces like Guangxi. These educators face a distinct professional context shaped by cultural adaptation requirements, administrative complexity, and limited institutional familiarity with foreign staff integration (Sun, 2022; Jiang et al., 2021). Despite institutional efforts to recruit international talent, high turnover rates continue to disrupt academic continuity and undermine long-term educational goals. The ability to retain qualified foreign teaching staff is essential for maintaining teaching quality, fostering international partnerships, and ensuring sustainable educational reform—yet the factors influencing retention intention among this population remain underexplored (Liu & Sammon, 2021).

Recent research underscores that professional identity plays a vital role in shaping teachers' professional engagement, workplace satisfaction, and long-term commitment to the institution (Chen et al., 2021; Hanum et al., 2023). However, few studies have examined how specific dimensions of professional identity, particularly professional values (e.g., ethical integrity, equity, student-centered beliefs) and professional behavioral inclination (e.g., accountability, collaboration, and adaptability), influence the intention to remain employed—especially in culturally complex settings such as Guangxi (Markey et al., 2021; Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2021). This represents a critical gap, as professional identity construction among foreign educators in China often intersects with local cultural expectations, language challenges, and institutional norms.

Furthermore, although professional identity provides a strong foundation for occupational commitment, its influence

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on retention intention may not be straightforward. Teaching efficacy, grounded in Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, is increasingly recognized as a core psychological mechanism linking professional experiences to job-related outcomes (Wang et al., 2020; Eden et al., 2024). Educators with strong teaching efficacy—reflected in their belief that they can effectively engage students, deliver instruction, and manage classrooms—are more likely to persist in their roles, even under demanding cross-cultural conditions (Zhang & Hyland, 2022; Cáceres et al., 2021). However, there remains a lack of empirical evidence on how teaching efficacy mediates the relationship between professional identity and foreign teacher retention intention within the unique socio-educational context of regional China (Ou & Gu, 2022; Eslamdoost et al., 2020).

By narrowing the investigation to these specific constructs and situating the analysis in Guangxi, this research fills an urgent empirical gap and contributes to the ongoing discourse on faculty retention in internationalized education systems. The findings are expected to offer both theoretical value and practical guidance for institutional leaders seeking to cultivate a committed and professionally empowered foreign teaching workforce in China.

Significance of Study

This study offers significant theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions to the understanding of foreign teacher retention in Chinese higher education, particularly within the under-researched context of Guangxi Province. As institutions across China strive to internationalise their curricula and faculty structures, the ability to attract and retain qualified university foreign teachers is increasingly viewed as essential to sustaining institutional quality, global competitiveness, and cross-cultural pedagogical innovation (Sun, 2022). Yet high turnover rates, inconsistent integration practices, and limited long-term commitment from international staff continue to pose challenges to regional universities, especially in culturally complex areas such as Guangxi (Jiang et al., 2021; Liu & Sammon, 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, this study advances the discourse on teacher retention by integrating Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura) with empirical research on professional identity and retention intention. Specifically, the research isolates two critical but underexamined dimensions of professional identity—professional values and professional behavioural inclination—and investigates how they influence

retention intention through the mediating role of teaching efficacy. While earlier studies have confirmed the importance of professional identity in shaping job satisfaction and commitment (Chen et al., 2021; Hanum et al., 2023), few have empirically tested these pathways within the cultural and institutional context of China's foreign academic workforce. By conceptualising teaching efficacy as a mediator, this study responds to scholarly calls for more mechanism-based models that can explain how internal beliefs and dispositions translate into behavioural intentions (Wang et al., 2020; Ou & Gu, 2022).

Empirically, the study fills a clear gap in research on university foreign teachers in China's non-metropolitan regions. Much of the existing literature on international faculty focuses on well-funded institutions in major cities or on general trends across Asia, often ignoring the regional disparities in institutional support, policy interpretation, and social integration that affect teacher experiences in areas like Guangxi. By focusing on a specific region with unique linguistic, cultural, and administrative characteristics, this study offers context-sensitive insights that can better explain retention behavior in diverse academic environments. Additionally, the study contributes to the limited but growing body of literature that explores foreign educators' identity formation, adaptation, and psychological outcomes in the Chinese context (Eslamdoost et al., 2020; Zhang & Hyland, 2022).

Practically, the findings will be valuable to university administrators, human resource managers, and policymakers who are responsible for supporting and sustaining international faculty. By identifying the professional and psychological factors that enhance retention intention, the study can guide the design of evidence-based interventions like mentoring and orientation programs aligned with teachers' professional values, ongoing training to strengthen efficacy in culturally diverse classrooms, and institutional policies that affirm ethical and behavioral expectations in ways that resonate with foreign teachers' identity frameworks.

Improving these areas can lead to greater job satisfaction, more effective teaching performance, and reduced faculty turnover. In turn, this enhances educational quality, supports long-term internationalization efforts, and fosters inclusive academic environments where foreign educators feel a genuine sense of belonging (Markey et al., 2021; Eden et al., 2024).

In sum, this study provides a timely and policy-relevant investigation into the psychological and professional

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mechanisms that support the retention of university foreign teachers in Guangxi, China. Its contributions extend beyond theoretical refinement by offering practical implications for institutional improvement and localized strategies that can be adapted by similar institutions seeking to cultivate a stable, effective, and globally engaged teaching workforce.

Research Question

- **RQ1:** What is the impact of professional identity (professional values and professional behavioral inclination) on Retention intention among university's foreign teachers in Guangxi, China.
- **RQ2:** What is the impact of professional identity (professional values and professional behavioral inclination) on Teaching Efficacy among university's foreign teachers in Guangxi, China.
- **RQ3:** Does Teaching Efficacy significantly mediate the relationship between professional identity (professional values and professional behavioral inclination) and Retention Intention in Guangxi, China?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional Identity in Higher Education

Professional identity refers to how educators perceive and enact their roles within an institutional and cultural context. It encompasses a set of values, beliefs, motivations, and behaviors that guide teaching practices and shape the sense of professional self. In the context of foreign educators, particularly those working in culturally diverse environments such as China, professional identity is not only shaped by formal training and institutional expectations but also by personal adaptation, social engagement, and perceived alignment with local norms (Chen et al., 2021; Hanum et al., 2023).

Two critical components of professional identity—professional values and professional behavioral inclination—have been highlighted as essential for understanding how teachers develop a meaningful and sustainable sense of purpose in their work (Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2016). Professional values represent the core ethical and moral principles that underpin a teacher's decisions and interactions, including fairness, commitment to student development, and a respect for diversity (Markey et al., 2021; Skinner, 2021). These values serve as a moral compass, helping teachers align their actions with broader educational objectives. In cross-cultural

environments, values also serve as a stabilizing force, allowing teachers to uphold consistency in their instructional approach despite contextual uncertainties.

Professional behavioral inclination, on the other hand, captures the tendency of teachers to exhibit conduct consistent with professional standards. This includes collaboration with colleagues, effective classroom communication, reflective practice, and responsiveness to diversity (Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013; Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan, 2021). In the case of university foreign teachers in Guangxi, professional behavioral inclination becomes particularly important as these educators are often required to navigate unfamiliar institutional structures, teaching methodologies, and communication norms.

Previous studies suggest that professional identity is strongly linked to work commitment, instructional quality, and emotional resilience. However, empirical studies examining the distinct effects of professional values and behavioral inclination on foreign teachers' retention intention remain limited, especially in regional Chinese universities where socio-cultural integration may be more complex and less institutionally supported (Sun, 2022; Jiang et al., 2021).

Teaching Efficacy in Cross-Cultural Academic Contexts

Teaching efficacy, grounded in Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to influence student learning and behavior effectively. It is widely considered a central motivational construct in educational psychology, shaping how educators approach instruction, manage classrooms, and respond to challenges (Dinarvand & Golzari, 2022). For university foreign teachers operating in culturally diverse and linguistically unfamiliar environments such as Guangxi, teaching efficacy is not only a reflection of pedagogical confidence but also an indicator of psychological adjustment and institutional engagement (Eslamdoost et al., 2020; Ou & Gu, 2022).

The literature often distinguishes teaching efficacy into three interrelated domains: efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Wang et al., 2020). Efficacy in student engagement pertains to a teacher's ability to motivate students and foster interest across diverse learning styles. Efficacy in instructional strategies involves adapting pedagogical approaches to suit classroom needs, while efficacy in classroom management refers to maintaining an environment conducive to learning (LI & He, 2022).

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Recent studies affirm that teachers with high teaching efficacy demonstrate greater persistence, job satisfaction, and adaptability in complex educational settings (Cáceres et al., 2021; Eden et al., 2024). For foreign teachers, efficacy beliefs are influenced by their cultural assimilation, institutional support, and perceived alignment between their teaching philosophy and local expectations. A supportive institutional environment, professional development opportunities, and peer modeling within professional learning communities have been shown to strengthen these efficacy beliefs (Zhang & Hyland, 2022; Liang et al., 2020).

Importantly, teaching efficacy may function as a mediating variable that explains how deeper constructs like professional identity translate into behavioral outcomes such as job performance and retention. Teachers with strong professional values and proactive behavior are more likely to perceive themselves as effective, which in turn may reinforce their desire to stay in their current institutions. This study builds on this theoretical logic by empirically testing teaching efficacy as a mediator between professional identity and retention intention in the specific context of Guangxi's foreign teacher population.

Retention Intention in Higher Education

Retention intention refers to an employee's psychological inclination or commitment to remain in their current position over time. In the context of higher education, particularly among international faculty, retention intention is influenced by multiple factors, including workplace satisfaction, career development opportunities, institutional culture, and personal values alignment (Das & Baruah, 2013; Liu & Sammon, 2021). For foreign teachers, these factors often intersect with additional layers of complexity such as cultural adjustment, language barriers, and limited administrative inclusion (Jiang et al., 2021).

Recent research has reaffirmed that job satisfaction is one of the most direct predictors of retention, encompassing not only compensation and workload but also alignment with personal teaching values, relationships with colleagues, and student interactions (Xu et al., 2023; Gao, 2024). Moreover, organizational commitment, defined by emotional attachment and moral obligation to the institution, further reinforces retention, especially when educators feel respected and engaged in decision-making processes (Van Waeyenberg et al., 2022; Mwesigwa et al., 2020).

Within the Chinese context, scholars have found that institutional support mechanisms—such as professional development, mentorship, and transparent communication—are critical to fostering a positive perception of job security and belonging among foreign teachers (Johari et al., 2018; Hanum et al., 2023). However, in regions like Guangxi where support resources may be less accessible or culturally mismatched, retention challenges persist.

The literature also suggests that psychological variables like teaching efficacy are crucial in determining whether foreign teachers feel capable and valued in their roles (Ou & Gu, 2022). Teachers who feel ineffective or isolated are more likely to consider early exit. Hence, the present study contributes to this body of research by exploring how professional identity—through its influence on teaching efficacy—may lead to stronger or weaker retention intentions among university foreign teachers.

UNDERPINNING THEORIES

This study is conceptually grounded in two established psychological frameworks: Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory and Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Together, these theories provide a robust explanation for how internal beliefs, values, and behavioral inclinations shape educators' professional experiences and long-term intentions to remain in their teaching roles. By integrating both theories, the study offers a dual-lens approach that links identity development, motivational processes, and behavioral intentions in a cross-cultural academic context.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory posits that individuals' beliefs about their capabilities to perform specific tasks significantly influence their behavior, effort, resilience, and emotional reactions. In educational settings, teaching efficacy—a teacher's belief in their ability to positively impact student learning—is a direct application of this theory. Bandura identified four key sources of efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional states, all of which are highly relevant to foreign teachers adapting to new institutional and cultural environments (Wang et al., 2020; Ou & Gu, 2022).

In this study, teaching efficacy is proposed as a mediator that links professional identity—specifically, professional values (e.g., ethical commitment, care for student development)

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and professional behavioral inclination (e.g., reflective practice, collaboration, adaptability)—to retention intention. Teachers with strong professional values are more likely to internalize a sense of moral duty and personal satisfaction in teaching, while those with positive behavioral inclinations tend to actively engage with their professional environment and adapt to challenges (Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013; Markey et al., 2021). These identity dimensions are expected to foster a stronger belief in one's teaching efficacy by reinforcing self-perceptions of competence, control, and purpose. In turn, teachers with higher teaching efficacy are more likely to persist in their roles and contribute to the institution, even in complex or unfamiliar environments (Eslamdoost et al., 2020; Eden et al., 2024).

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior provides an additional foundation for understanding retention intention by proposing that behavioral intentions are shaped by three key factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In this framework, retention intention can be interpreted as a deliberate behavioral choice influenced by professional beliefs, workplace norms, and the perceived ability to continue teaching effectively.

This study aligns professional identity with the attitudinal component of TPB. Teachers' internalized values and behavioral standards influence their overall evaluation of their work and their professional alignment with the institution. When foreign teachers feel that their professional identity is respected and enacted meaningfully, their attitudes toward staying in the institution tend to be more positive.

Teaching efficacy, within the TPB framework, can be mapped onto perceived behavioral control—the extent to which teachers believe they have the capacity to manage classroom challenges, adapt to local norms, and be effective in their roles. A teacher who feels efficacious is more likely to perceive that they can remain successful in their position, increasing their intention to stay.

Additionally, while subjective norms are not directly examined as a construct in this study, they may be indirectly influenced through professional behavioral inclination—particularly through behaviors such as collaboration, communication with colleagues, and modeling culturally appropriate conduct, which reinforce institutional expectations and social approval.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The conceptual framework for this study is developed based on Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), both of which provide complementary explanations for how individuals' internal beliefs, values, and behaviors shape their professional engagement and long-term behavioral intentions. These theories collectively support the proposed relationships among professional identity, teaching efficacy, and retention intention among university foreign teachers in Guangxi, China. From the lens of Self-Efficacy Theory, professional identity—specifically through professional values and professional behavioral inclination—is seen as a precursor to the development of teaching efficacy. Teachers who internalize ethical principles (values) and consistently act in accordance with professional standards (behavioral inclination) are more likely to believe in their teaching capabilities, which in turn enhances their persistence, motivation, and adaptability in complex academic environments (Wang et al., 2020; Ou & Gu, 2022; Zhang & Hyland, 2022). In parallel, Theory of Planned Behavior offers a behavioral perspective by suggesting that individuals' attitudes toward work (shaped by professional identity) and their perceived control over their performance (captured by teaching efficacy) jointly determine their intention to remain in their professional roles (Ajzen, 1991). When foreign teachers believe they are professionally aligned with their institution and capable in their roles, they are more likely to exhibit strong retention intention.

Based on these theoretical insights, this study proposes a model where professional values and professional behavioral inclination serve as independent variables that directly influence Teaching efficacy and Retention intention. Additionally, teaching efficacy is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between professional identity and retention intention. The model also implicitly assumes that stronger teaching efficacy can reinforce the positive effects of professional identity on retention behavior.

As shown in the conceptual framework diagram, the key hypotheses are derived:

- **H1:** Professional values have a significant positive effect on retention intention.

Educators who hold strong ethical and student-centered values are more likely to experience satisfaction and

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alignment in their roles, which increases their intention to stay.

- **H2:** Professional behavioral inclination has a significant positive effect on retention intention.

Foreign teachers who actively engage in professional behaviors such as collaboration, adaptability, and reflective practice are more likely to integrate well and commit to the institution long-term.

- **H3:** Professional values have a significant positive effect on teaching efficacy.

Values such as responsibility, fairness, and commitment to growth enhance teachers' confidence in their instructional effectiveness.

- **H4:** Professional behavioral inclination has a significant positive effect on teaching efficacy.

Frequent engagement in professional conduct reinforces a teacher's sense of control and effectiveness, particularly in unfamiliar teaching context.

- **H5:** Teaching efficacy has a significant positive effect on retention intention.

Teachers who believe in their ability to effectively teach, manage classrooms, and engage students are more likely to persist in their roles and demonstrate commitment to their institution.

- **H6:** Teaching efficacy significantly mediates the relationship between professional identity (professional values and behavioral inclination) and retention intention. Teachers who feel effective in their roles are more resilient and more likely to remain in their positions, thus translating the influence of identity into sustained professional commitment.

This conceptual framework, supported by a theory-driven set of hypotheses, offers a structured explanation for the internal (identity), cognitive (efficacy), and behavioral (intention) mechanisms that underpin foreign teacher retention in China's regional higher education institutions. It provides a foundation for empirical testing using structural equation modeling in the next stages of the study.

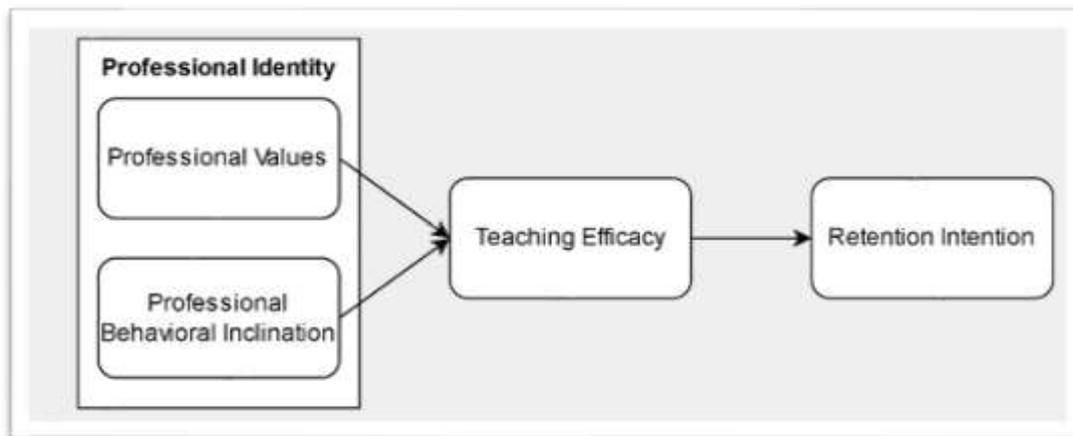


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the study

Source(s): Authors own constructed work

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Paradigm

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships between professional identity (professional values and behavioral inclination), teaching efficacy, and retention intention among university foreign teachers in Guangxi, China. This design enables the analysis of relationships among multiple variables at a single point in time, offering a snapshot of psychological and

behavioral patterns within a specific educational context (Kesmodel, 2018). Aligned with a positivist research paradigm, this study is grounded in the philosophical assumption that reality is objective, observable, and measurable through systematic procedures. The study emphasizes hypothesis testing and the generalization of results based on statistically derived patterns (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This paradigm is consistent with the study's goal of uncovering causal and correlational links among psychological and professional

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constructs.

Population, Sampling, and Sample Size

The target population comprised university foreign teachers currently teaching in Guangxi Province, China. This group includes educators from various countries and academic disciplines, employed full-time or part-time across public universities in the region.

To ensure adequate representation across different nationalities and teaching backgrounds, the study employed a stratified random sampling technique. Participants were stratified based on factors such as nationality and teaching discipline to enhance diversity and reduce sampling bias.

Using Cochran's formula with a 95% confidence level, estimated effect size of 0.5, and an assumed population of 1,000 university foreign teachers, a minimum sample size of 280 was determined to ensure statistical validity and generalizability (Chaokromthong & Sintao, 2021).

Data Collection Instruments

Primary data were collected through a structured online survey distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire was developed using previously validated instruments and adapted for cultural and contextual relevance. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

The instrument comprised four key sections:

- Professional Values: Adapted from Toropova et al. (2021), this section included 5 items assessing fulfillment, pride, and ethical commitment in the teaching role.
- Professional Behavioural Inclination: Adapted from Toropova et al. (2021), this construct was measured using 6 items evaluating collaborative behavior, feedback-seeking, and teamwork.
- Teaching Efficacy: Adapted from Ortan et al. (2021), this section comprised 7 items covering efficacy in student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management.
- Retention Intention: Adapted from Suadicani et al. (2013), 16 items were used to measure job satisfaction, organizational commitment, career development, work environment, and job security.

The questionnaire was pilot tested among a subset of the population. All constructs demonstrated acceptable to excellent reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.716 to

0.969.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS for descriptive statistics and reliability analysis, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using SmartPLS to examine relationships and mediating effects.

The following techniques were applied:

- Descriptive statistics (mean, SD, frequency) for demographic and construct-level summary.
- Pearson correlation analysis to examine initial relationships between variables.
- Multiple regression analysis to assess predictive relationships.
- Mediation analysis using SmartPLS SEM to test the indirect effects of teaching efficacy between professional identity and retention intention, following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2017).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were rigorously followed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after providing a clear explanation of the study's objectives, confidentiality assurance, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participant anonymity was maintained by anonymizing responses, and data were securely stored in password-protected formats in compliance with privacy regulations. Ethical clearance procedures adhered to academic research standards and ensured minimal risk and maximum transparency for participants.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile

The study involved 384 university foreign teachers currently working in Guangxi, China. In terms of age, most respondents were between 26 and 35 years old (35.2%), followed by those under 25 (28.6%) and 36 to 45 years (23.4%). Only 7.3% were aged 46 to 55, and 5.5% were above 55. Regarding nationality, the sample included participants from five continents, with the largest group from Asia (40.4%), followed by North America (17.4%), Europe (13.3%), South America (14.6%), and Africa (14.3%). In terms of academic qualifications, a majority of respondents held doctoral degrees (39.1%), while 33.3% had master's degrees, and 13.5% held bachelor's degrees. Additionally, 14.1% reported involvement in postdoctoral research.

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Concerning marital status, 46.1% of participants were single, 45.1% were married or in a relationship, while smaller groups were divorced (6.5%) or widowed (2.3%). In terms of income levels, 44.0% reported monthly earnings between 15,001 and 25,000 RMB, followed by 29.7% in the 25,001 to 40,000 RMB bracket, 16.1% earning under 15,000 RMB, and 10.2% earning over 40,000 RMB. The respondents also varied

in their years of teaching experience in China: 31.0% had 4 to 6 years, 29.7% had 1 to 3 years, 19.8% had less than one year, and 19.5% had 7 to 10 years. These demographics indicate a well-distributed and diverse sample, offering a rich basis for analyzing the factors related to professional identity, teaching efficacy, and retention intention among foreign educators.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
Under 25	110	28.6
26-35	135	35.2
36-45	90	23.4
46-55	28	7.3
Above 55	21	5.5
Total	384	100.0
Nationality		
Asia	155	40.4
Europe	51	13.3
North America	67	17.4
South America	56	14.6
Africa	55	14.3
Total	384	100.0
Highest Educational Attainment		
Bachelor's Degree	52	13.5
Master's Degree	128	33.3
Doctoral Degree	150	39.1
Postdoctoral Research	54	14.1
Total	384	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	177	46.1
Married/In a relationship	173	45.1
Divorced	25	6.5
Widowed	9	2.3
Total	384	100.0
Income Level		
Under 15,000 RMB	62	16.1
15,001 to 25,000 RMB	169	44.0
25,001 to 40,000 RMB	114	29.7
Over 40,000 RMB	39	10.2
Total	384	100.0
Years of Working Experience (as a foreign teacher residing in China)		
Less than a year	76	19.8

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1 to 3 years	114	29.7
4 to 6 years	119	31.0
7 to 10 years	75	19.5
Total	384	100.0

Descriptive Statistic

Descriptive statistics were calculated to assess the overall perceptions of respondents regarding each of the main constructs: professional values, professional behavioral inclination, teaching efficacy, and retention intention. The results, as shown in Table 2, indicate consistently high mean scores across all constructs, suggesting generally positive attitudes and perceptions among the university foreign teachers in Guangxi.

Specifically, the mean score for professional values was 4.3125 (SD = 0.43890), indicating that most respondents strongly identified with ethical commitments and core principles guiding their teaching practice. Similarly,

professional behavioral inclination recorded a mean of 4.3229 (SD = 0.42483), reflecting frequent engagement in collaborative, adaptable, and reflective professional conduct. The mean score for teaching efficacy was 4.3400 (SD = 0.44249), suggesting that respondents generally held strong beliefs in their ability to manage classrooms, engage students, and deliver effective instruction. Lastly, the construct of retention intention yielded a mean of 4.3247 (SD = 0.40633), which denotes a high level of intent among foreign teachers to remain in their current positions. Overall, these high scores across constructs suggest a positively oriented sample in terms of both professional and psychological commitment to their teaching roles.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Professional Values	4.3125	0.43890	High
Professional Behavioural Inclination	4.3229	0.42483	High
Teaching Efficacy	4.3400	0.44249	High
Retention Intention	4.3247	0.40633	High

Constructs Reliability

To assess the internal consistency and convergent validity of the measurement model, three key metrics were evaluated: Cronbach’s alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The results, shown in Table 3, indicate that all constructs exceeded the acceptable threshold for internal consistency, with some exceptions noted for AVE values.

Cronbach’s alpha values for all constructs surpassed the minimum acceptable value of 0.60 (Hair et al., 2017), ranging from 0.681 for professional values to 0.887 for retention intention. Similarly, composite reliability scores for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating a high degree of internal consistency: professional

values (0.796), professional behavioral inclination (0.810), teaching efficacy (0.846), and retention intention (0.904).

However, the average variance extracted (AVE) values for all constructs were slightly below the recommended cutoff of 0.50, ranging from 0.372 to 0.441. While this may indicate limited convergent validity, Fornell and Larcker (1981) and more recent scholars have argued that if composite reliability is above 0.60, AVE values below 0.50 can still be acceptable in exploratory or early-stage research, particularly in social sciences where latent variables are inherently complex (Sarstedt et al., 2022). Therefore, despite the AVE values falling slightly short, the measurement model demonstrates sufficient reliability and acceptable convergent validity for further structural model testing.

Table 3. Construct Reliability Analysis

Constructs	Cronbach's (>0.5)	Alpha	Composite Reliability (>0.7)	AVE (>0.5)
Professional Values	0.681		0.796	0.439
Professional Behavioral Inclination	0.719		0.810	0.417
Teaching Efficacy	0.788		0.846	0.441
Retention Intention	0.887		0.904	0.372

Multiple Linear Regression

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which professional values, professional behavioral inclination, and teaching efficacy predict retention intention among university foreign teachers in Guangxi. As shown in Table 5, all three predictors were found to have statistically significant and positive effects on retention intention.

The results indicate that professional values exert a modest yet significant influence on retention intention, with a standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.085$, a t-value of 2.444, and a p-value of 0.015. Likewise, professional behavioral inclination had a statistically significant effect ($\beta = 0.108$, $t = 2.996$, $p = 0.003$), suggesting that teachers who actively engage in collaborative, adaptive, and professional behaviors are more likely to remain committed to their institutions.

Importantly, teaching efficacy emerged as the strongest

predictor in the model, with a standardized beta coefficient of $\beta = 0.371$, a t-value of 10.311, and a p-value < 0.001 . This confirms that foreign teachers who perceive themselves as effective in their teaching—especially in terms of student engagement, instructional delivery, and classroom management—are significantly more inclined to continue their employment in Chinese universities. This provides empirical support for the newly articulated Hypothesis H5.

Collinearity statistics were well within acceptable limits, with tolerance values above 0.70 and VIF values well below the threshold of 10, indicating no multicollinearity issues among the predictors. Taken together, these results offer strong support for Hypotheses H1, H2, and H5, confirming that both professional identity components and teaching efficacy are key contributors to the retention intention of university foreign teachers in regional China.

Table 4. Regression Analysis-Predictors of Retention Intention

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.054	0.105		0.521	0.603		
Professional Values	0.079	0.032	0.085	2.444	0.015	0.730	0.125

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Professional Behavioral Inclination	0.104	0.035	0.108	2.996	0.003	0.761	0.152
Teaching Efficacy	0.341	0.033	0.371	10.311	0.000	0.832	0.469

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to examine the extent to which professional values and professional behavioural inclination predict teaching efficacy among university foreign teachers in Guangxi. As shown in Table 4, both predictors had statistically significant and positive effects on teaching efficacy.

Specifically, professional values were found to positively influence teaching efficacy, with a standardized beta of $\beta = 0.119$, a t-value of 2.423, and a p-value of 0.016, indicating a modest but significant contribution. In contrast, professional behavioral inclination showed a stronger predictive effect, with a standardized beta of $\beta = 0.330$, a t-value of 6.737, and a highly

significant p-value < 0.001 . These results suggest that while a strong set of personal values enhances teaching confidence, the practical enactment of professional behaviors—such as collaboration, adaptability, and responsiveness—plays an even more substantial role in shaping teachers’ efficacy beliefs.

Collinearity statistics confirmed the independence of the predictors, with tolerance values of 0.664 and 0.727, and VIF values well below the critical threshold of 10. These findings provide empirical support for the revised Hypotheses H3 and H4, affirming that both professional values and behavioral inclination significantly contribute to the teaching efficacy of university foreign teachers working in cross-cultural contexts.

Table 5. Regression Analysis-Predictors of Teaching Efficacy

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.191	0.163		1.172	0.242		
Professional Values	0.120	0.050	0.119	2.423	0.016	0.664	0.124
Professional Behavioral Inclination	0.343	0.051	0.330	6.737	0.000	0.727	0.327

Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis using SmartPLS bootstrapping confirmed that teaching efficacy significantly mediates the relationship between both dimensions of professional identity and retention intention. As shown in Table 6, the indirect effect of professional values on retention intention via teaching efficacy was significant ($\beta = 0.056$, $t = 2.359$, $p = 0.018$). Likewise, the mediation effect from professional behavioral

inclination was stronger and also significant ($\beta = 0.133$, $t = 5.633$, $p < 0.001$). These results support Hypothesis H6, indicating that foreign teachers with strong identity traits are more likely to remain committed when they also feel efficacious in their roles. Teaching efficacy thus serves as a key psychological mechanism linking professional identity to retention intention.

Table 6. Mediation Analysis Results

	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation	T statistics	P-values
Professional Values -> Teaching Efficacy -> Retention Intention	0.056	0.023	2.359	0.018
Professional Behavioral Inclination -> Teaching Efficacy -> Retention Intention	0.133	0.024	5.633	0.000

DISCUSSION

Research Objective 1

The findings reveal that both dimensions of professional identity significantly predict foreign teachers’ intention to remain at their institutions, with behavioral inclination exerting a noticeably stronger effect than values. This pattern underscores Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior: while values shape favorable attitudes toward staying, it is the enacted component—observable collegiality, adaptability, and reflective practice—that most powerfully feeds teachers’ day-to-day sense of alignment with their workplace, thereby strengthening behavioral intention.

Comparable studies corroborate this hierarchy. For instance, Hanum et al. (2023) found that Indonesian teachers who actively engaged in collaborative behaviors reported higher organizational commitment than peers who merely espoused student-centered values. Likewise, Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan (2021) argued that teachers’ “visible professionalism” (e.g., sharing resources, mentoring colleagues) attracts institutional recognition, which in turn reinforces commitment. These external affirmations appear especially salient in Guangxi’s linguistically and administratively complex universities, where foreign faculty must navigate unfamiliar norms. Behavioral inclination becomes a conductive response for positive feedback loops: proactive engagement is noticed, rewarded, and internalized as proof of belonging, thereby deepening retention intention.

Nevertheless, professional values remain a statistically significant predictor. Teachers whose ethical principles—fairness, respect for diversity, dedication to student growth—resonate with institutional culture attach greater meaning to their roles, echoing Chen et al. (2021), who showed that value-congruence enhances job satisfaction and lowers turnover across Chinese higher-education settings. Guangxi universities that explicitly endorse inclusive, learner-centered

philosophies therefore cultivate conditions under which foreign teachers’ intrinsic ideals translate into enduring commitment.

Hence, the evidence thus appears to be consistent with an alignment plus enactment account of retention intention: values provided motivational depth, whilst behavioral disposition could be used to operationalize that depth in ways that institutions can see and reference. Efficient retention mechanisms should therefore include both the symbolic affirmation of common values (mission statements, moral charters) and structures that encourage and acknowledge cooperative actions (peer-mentoring systems, joint plans for a curriculum).

Research Objective 2

Shifting focus to teaching efficacy, both professional values and behavior inclination become significant antecedents, but as before, behavior inclination is the more dominant factor. Bandura’s Self-Efficacy Theory provides a framework to understand why. Mastery experiences and observational learning are the two major channels for efficacy beliefs—teachers who engage often in adaptive strategies, feedback exchange, and observe others’ success (all behavioral tendency components) will gain specific mastery cues and social persuasion, which in turn will enhance their efficacy judgments.

Empirical parallels abound. Dinarvand & Golzari (2022) showed that Iranian flipped-classroom teachers experienced increases in their self-efficacy exactly due to increased, hands-on experimentation leading to the visible successes of their students. Professional values, in contrast, have a more indirect impact on efficacy – mainly through educators’ sense of moral purpose. Instructors who perceive teaching as an ethical responsibility tend to transform cultural or lingual barriers into mastery or effectiveness experiences and, therefore, persist. Li & He (2022) noted midwifery students’ professional values predicted vocational self-efficacy; a comparable rationale may apply to foreign faculty for whom

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equal, student-focused teaching is a non-negotiable.

And, most importantly, the context of Guangxi further enhances the importance of the inclination of behavior. In an environment where institutional support for international staff can be uneven, self-initiated behaviors—asking peers for advice, experimenting with culturally sensitive pedagogy—act as personal efficacy scaffolds. And universities that ‘build in’ such behaviors in the form of professional-learning communities or guided peer observation sessions are likely to get the biggest teaching-efficacy bang for their international-cohort buck.

Research Objective 3

The results of the mediation analysis reveal that teaching efficacy mediates a strong relationship between professional identity and intention to stay, although the indirect path through behavioral attitude is significantly larger than the indirect path through value. In terms of theoretical implications, the present study also brings together Bandura’s concept of perceived behavioral control with the TPB, suggesting that other-national teachers remain partly not only because of the extent of the fit perceived fit between themselves and the other-national institution, but because that perceived fit has led to an enhanced belief in their ability to affect their environment (which is also perceived to affect them), which in turn leads to greater confidence in their ability to continue successfully to perform in a certain capacity.

Theoretically, the pattern refines existing models in two ways. First, it shows that enacted identity traits (behavioral inclination) generate efficacy beliefs more efficiently than ideational traits (values); second, it demonstrates that efficacy must surpass a certain threshold before values translate into retention intent. Teachers who cherish student-centered ethics yet feel ineffective will not commit long-term; conversely, teachers who act professionally build efficacy quickly, and their intention to stay follows almost automatically.

Comparable findings highlight this mechanism. Ou & Gu (2022) reported that expatriate language teachers in China whose classroom strategies evolved through peer mentoring gained efficacy and expressed stronger commitment, whereas value-driven but isolated teachers often contemplated early exit. Zhang & Hyland (2022) similarly documented that expatriates’ retention hinged on a synergy between enacted professionalism and rising efficacy.

In practice, this mediation awareness implies a twofold

retention approach. (1) it fosters identity-aligned actions - structure opportunities for collaborative lesson study, team-teaching, and intercultural exchange in ways that can encourage behavioral predisposition to be stimulated and reinforced. The next step is to reinforce efficacy quickly – give feedback in a timely manner, present successful examples, and provide targeted PD programs that deliver early successes that turn these individual behaviors into sturdy self-efficacy. These interventions are probably also more cost-effective than incentivizing people with just money, as they tinker with the psychological engine—teaching efficacy—that turns identity into sustained organizational commitment.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the expanding literature on teacher retention and identity by integrating Self-Efficacy Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior within the context of foreign educators in China. By isolating professional values and professional behavioral inclination as distinct predictors, the research deepens our understanding of how internal beliefs and externally observable behaviors contribute to teaching efficacy and employment commitment. The findings affirm the relevance of teaching efficacy as a mediating mechanism, bridging identity and behavioral intention, which strengthens prior theoretical claims in the educational psychology literature (Bandura, 1997; Ajzen, 1991).

Furthermore, this study extends existing theory by applying these frameworks in a non-Western, cross-cultural setting, specifically among university foreign teachers in Guangxi—a region underrepresented in current empirical research. By doing so, the study advances scholarly discourse around how professional identity and self-efficacy operate under culturally complex and institutionally transitional conditions, offering a basis for future comparative studies across geographic and institutional contexts.

Practical Implications

The findings hold important implications for university administrators, policymakers, and HR professionals seeking to improve the retention of foreign academic staff. First, institutions should invest in professional development programs that reinforce both ethical values and professional conduct—such as reflective teaching practices, intercultural collaboration, and adaptive classroom strategies. These

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programs can help foreign teachers strengthen both their professional identity and their teaching efficacy.

Second, strategies to build and sustain teaching efficacy should be a key component of faculty support systems. Mentorship programs, peer observation, and structured feedback mechanisms can foster a sense of competence and belonging. Given that efficacy strongly predicts retention intention, such efforts are likely to yield long-term benefits in reducing foreign teacher turnover.

Lastly, retention policies should be designed with an understanding that identity and efficacy are interrelated. Rather than relying solely on external incentives (e.g., salary or housing benefits), institutions should create environments that affirm teachers' values, recognize professional behavior, and nurture teaching confidence. This holistic approach can enhance the commitment of foreign teachers to remain and grow within the institution.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined how professional identity—specifically, professional values and professional behavioral inclination—influences retention intention among university foreign teachers in Guangxi, China, with teaching efficacy as a mediating variable. The results affirmed that both dimensions of professional identity significantly predicted teaching efficacy and retention intention. Among them, behavioral inclination had a stronger influence, suggesting that proactive engagement in professional conduct plays a more critical role than values alone. Furthermore, teaching efficacy not only directly impacted retention intention but also served as a significant mediator, reinforcing the theoretical pathway proposed by Self-Efficacy Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior.

The findings underscore the importance of fostering both identity development and instructional confidence in foreign teachers. Institutions aiming to enhance teacher retention should prioritize strategies that promote ethical alignment, collaborative behavior, and instructional competence. Doing so can lead to greater professional satisfaction and a stronger commitment to remain in post.

Future research could build upon this work by including longitudinal data to capture changes in identity and efficacy over time, or by expanding the study to compare foreign and local teachers across different provinces or educational systems.

In practice, universities should consider developing structured onboarding, mentoring, and professional growth programs tailored to the specific challenges and needs of foreign faculty. By addressing both internal and contextual drivers of teacher retention, institutions can move toward a more sustainable and inclusive model of international academic staffing.

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