

Article

Examining the Relationships between Student Teacher Professional Identity Tensions and Motivation for Teaching: Mediating Role of Emotional Labor Strategies in China

Wenjie He ¹, Guoxiu Tian ¹, Qiong Li ^{2,*}, Laura B. Liu ³ and Jingtian Zhou ⁴¹ College of Teacher Education, Capital Normal University, Beijing 100048, China² Center for Teacher Education Research, Key Research Institute of the Ministry of Education, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China³ Division of Education, Indiana University—Purdue University Columbus, Columbus, IN 47203, USA⁴ Faculty of Education, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong 999077, China

* Correspondence: qiongli@bnu.edu.cn

Abstract: Learning to be a teacher through teaching practicum is viewed as a highly complex process in which multiple dilemmas and tensions emerge. These tensions may influence student teachers' motivation for teaching. However, previous studies on teacher motivation have mainly focused on social status and welfare, seldom taking their emotion regulation into account. Sampling 752 student teachers from 15 teacher education institutes in China, this study examined the relationships between student teachers' emotional labor strategies, professional identity tensions, and motivation for teaching during their practicum. The results indicated that emotional labor strategies were found to be important resources for student teachers to cope with the challenges brought by the tensions of professional identities in teaching practicum. In particular, deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions enhanced student teachers' intrinsic motivation to become a teacher. The results indicated that student teachers should perform emotional labor strategically, which may motivate them to be a teacher intrinsically.

Keywords: professional identity tensions; emotional labor strategies; motivation for teaching; student teachers



Citation: He, W.; Tian, G.; Li, Q.; Liu, L.B.; Zhou, J. Examining the Relationships between Student Teacher Professional Identity Tensions and Motivation for Teaching: Mediating Role of Emotional Labor Strategies in China. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 12727. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141912727>

Academic Editor: Antonio P. Gutierrez de Blume

Received: 22 August 2022

Accepted: 1 October 2022

Published: 6 October 2022

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1. Introduction

1.1. Teacher Identity, Emotion and Motivation

Learning to teach through the student teaching practicum experience is viewed as a highly complex process, which involves cognitive and social development, and identity development [1]. Research increasingly emphasizes the importance of teacher identity in the field of teacher education [2]. The process of learning to teach is not only a process of professionalization, but also a process of continuous construction of oneself [3]. Student teachers undergo shifts in their professional learning and professional identity during practicum [4]. As they experience dilemmas concerning classroom management and frictions with individual students, they try to find balance between their roles as a person and a professional teacher, between “feeling like a peer” and “wanting to take responsibility as a teacher” and “between wanting to care for students and being expected to be tough” [5,6]. These struggles are defined as professional identity tensions (PITs) [3] that are impossible to avoid during practicum and may have a great impact on student teachers' emotions, including feelings of stress and uncertainty [7]. Korthagen et al. (2004) assert that many student teachers perceive the transition from teacher education coursework to student teaching as an emotional, even disturbing period [8]. During this period, teacher candidates' concerns can lead to negative emotions that may influence their choice to teach or not [9]. Previous research has demonstrated the inextricable relationships between experiencing

tensions and becoming a teacher [10,11], especially during the transition from being a student teacher to a classroom teacher [12]. Teaching is an emotional job [13]. Nuijten and Korthagen (2022) document teacher education practices that support teacher candidates in navigating professional stress and difficult emotions productively [14].

While a large body of research focuses on the cognitive and pedagogical aspects of learning to teach, the psycho-social aspects—such as emotional mechanisms for coping with stress—have not been given adequate attention, particularly in the Chinese context. Liu, Conner, and Li's (2021) study involving teacher candidates in China and the U.S. highlights the significance of attending to teacher disposition, in addition to professional teaching standards and social context [15]. For pre-service teachers, choosing to become a teacher is a process of continuous development of professional identity, including coping with tensions. In addition, these tensions indicate the emotional demands of their job that require student teachers to learn to manage their emotions properly in practice. Otherwise, they might limit student teachers' learning effectiveness and enthusiasm for the profession, and eventually the motivation to teach [10,16]. Apparently, these studies have raised our attention to the importance of professional identity tensions and emotion regulation in teachers' work. However, studies conducted so far have focused mainly on beginning teachers (in their first few years as a professional teacher) and employed small-scale qualitative methods [17–19]. To date, even studies on professional identity tensions rarely explored relevant coping strategies that teachers may employ, particularly emotion-based strategies; for example, what emotional strategies do student teachers employ when faced with professional identity tensions during their practicum? Furthermore, how do these identity tensions and emotional coping strategies affect student teachers' career choices? Thus, the link between student teachers' professional identity tensions, emotion regulation strategies, and motivation to teach merits deeper inquiry.

1.2. Chinese Teacher Education Context

China's national teacher honor system, established in 1949, has been a productive external motivator to help teachers continue growing as professionals [20]. This honor system aims to motivate teachers by "symbolically" honoring the field of teaching and recognizing achievements of specific teachers [21]. At the same time, China's process of globalization has brought many professions into shared dialogue with international peers, which has added to professional discourses around teaching and the aims of education and teacher education [22]. As a nation, China continues to bridge historical Confucian traditions with modern evolutions [23], forging a unique global Chinese identity [24]. As China's role continues to grow as a global participant and as a global leader, it is beneficial for professionals across fields in China, including teachers, to cultivate professional motivations not only shaped by policies and recognition, but also shaped by one's professional field and standards, sociocultural context and personal values. Emotions play a key role in how individuals make personal meaning of lived experiences, and these interpretations can enhance or hinder interest, motivation, and passion for one's work. Moreover, awareness of emotions and the role they play in professional settings changes across cultures, including individual- and collective-oriented societies [20]. Thus, it is helpful to understand how teachers regulate and respond to emotions, to understand better how this emotion work shapes teacher motivation, specifically in the context of China.

1.3. Study Overview

This present study examines relational dynamics among the constructs of teacher identity, emotions, and motivation, and how these relate to one another. This study recognizes that Chinese-based research on teacher motivation needs to give greater attention toward individual teacher emotion and its impact on motivation. Such analysis generated in a Chinese context has the potential to add new knowledge to global studies on teacher motivation, due to the largely collective sociocultural context in which Chinese teachers are teaching. This study is initiated with the hypothesis that teacher identity impacts how

teachers regulate and respond to emotions, which influences teacher motivation, including a teacher's decision to stay with or leave the field. Specifically, this study hypothesizes that teachers able to recognize and harness emotions effectively in navigating identity tensions with a balanced approach will experience greater motivation to remain in the field.

The participants of this study are final-year student teachers. Student teachers in China spend a relatively large amount of time in practice schools during teacher education. In their last year of teacher education, they carry out their daily work of being teachers. This study aims to address the research gap by investigating the relationships among student teacher professional identity tensions, emotion regulation strategies and their motivation for teaching in the practicum. The specific research questions are following:

1. What is the relationship between student teachers' professional identity tensions, emotional labor strategies and their motivation for teaching?
2. How do dimensions of emotional labor strategies mediate the effects of professional identity tensions and their motivation for teaching?

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Conceptualizing Student Teachers' Professional Identity Tensions

Feiman-Nemser (2008) emphasized that learning to teach is learning to think, know, feel, and act like a teacher. The identity of student teachers is an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple positions that comprise individuals' missions and core competencies [8] in such way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout learning in their teacher education program [25]. Teacher identity has been recognized as playing a vital role when future teachers experience the transition from initial teacher education into the teaching profession [4,26,27]. Research also evidences the vulnerability of professional identities for student teachers during practicum [25]. For instance, student teachers often encounter problems with transferring teaching theory into practice, mismatch between their innovative teaching styles and mentors' traditional beliefs, and related internal struggles in this new professional role. These tensions may require student teachers to choose from equally undesirable alternatives, such as maintaining the status quo or navigating mistakes in attempt to apply a new theory.

In this study, we define professional identity tensions as the internal struggle of a student teacher between the situation-as-is and the situation-as-preferred [28]. Professional identity tensions in a broad sense refer to feelings of dissonance between expectations about the teaching profession and actual experiences during fieldwork [29]. Understanding professional identity tensions involves examining the overlapping personal-professional development of teachers [22], specifically in the student teaching context. Liu and Ye (2019) write that "personal and professional development are inseparable processes" that lead to alternation experiences of "connection and fragmentation" [30]. Previous research shows that tensions—or fragmentation—between one's personal and professional worlds can lead to negative, uncomfortable emotional experiences, including insecurity and exhaustion [12] that decrease a teacher's professional motivations and desires to stay in the field of teaching. If teachers are not prepared to navigate these negative emotional experiences with professional support and training, they are at a greater risk of delayed graduation or dropping out of their teacher training all together [3].

Relationships with students are one of the most prominent sources of the tensions for student teachers, who are expected to become active members in schools [31], and to interact with students in "the right way" [3]. For example, caring is considered one of the most important qualities of teachers, which means student teachers need to face tensions in creating a caring yet formal classroom environment [32]. Student teachers may feel that taking control of the class would sacrifice the close relationship they wish to have with students, which composes the tension of "wanting to care for students" versus "being expected to be tough" (CS vs. BT). Similarly, as student teachers' age may be close to that of the students [33], they might find it difficult to keep a sensible distance and maintain a professional image while trying to get along well with students. In other words, the tension

of “feeling like a peer” versus “wanting to take responsibility as a teacher” (LP vs. AT) also troubles student teachers.

The above two pairs of tensions are especially prominent in teaching and teacher education in the Chinese context. Historically, under the influence of Confucianism, the image of a good teacher in China is someone who possesses deep subject matter knowledge, is strict with students’ academic learning and character cultivation, and acts as a role model by pursuing self-perfection through constant learning [34]. This image actually grew out of the examination orientation and the high-stake testing culture of the Chinese education system that have lasted for a millennium [35]. Chinese teachers are unanimously concerned about students’ performance in exams, and helping students achieve success in the College Entrance Exams (Gaokao), and thus upward mobility, is the common goal [36]. Hence, despite the humble income, Chinese teachers enjoy a relatively high social status and are widely respected.

However, this traditional teacher–student relationship has been challenged in the past few decades. Since the initiation of the New Curriculum Reform at the beginning of the 21st century, policymakers and scholars have been advocating a more student-centered pedagogy, which required teachers to cater to students’ individual differences and all-round development (MOE, 2001). Consequently, teachers are supposed to shift from teacher-centered, exam-oriented transmissive instruction to the co-construction of knowledge with students in their classroom teaching. On the one hand, the assessment criteria that still stress test scores put pressure on teachers, leaving them little choice but to “teach to the test”, and be strict with students’ performance; on the other hand, the reform as well as their professional conscience ask teachers to “teach to the genuine development of students” in a democratic, interactive manner [37]. Therefore, balancing between maintaining teachers’ authority and forming a more equal, peer-like relationship with students poses a serious dilemma for Chinese teachers.

When encountering such tensions in their practicum, special skills of emotional resolve and resilience are required for student teachers [38]. They need to learn to handle changing emotions ranging from enthusiasm to disappointment, embarrassment to relief, and joy to confusion on a daily basis [39]. Dirks (2008) encourages a continual “re-storying” of self through a “construction and reconstruction” process [40] helpful for new teachers navigating personal–professional tensions that may create internal fragmentation [30]. Similarly, Gee (2012) encourages professionals to become “bi-Discoursal” in learning to engage in conflicting personal–professional discourses that “exist and mean in juxtaposition to each other” [41]. If teachers are not provided with skills to navigate complex personal–professional identity-related challenges and tensions in teacher education, then it may be difficult for teachers to choose and remain in the field of teaching [32].

2.2. Professional Identity Tensions and Emotional Labor Strategies

Professional identity tensions are often accompanied with emotional dissonance [29], or the discrepancy between felt and expressed emotions, which can have a negative impact on emotional health [42,43]. Many studies have shown that becoming a teacher is an emotional experience [44,45]. Emotions are intimately involved throughout student teachers’ teaching and learning process in the practicum [46]. Yet, many authentic emotions cannot be directly expressed due to the work context, the teacher’s role, or the teacher education program rules, among other professional factors. The psychological work it takes to express contextually, institutionally accepted emotions is defined as emotional labor, including enhancing, faking, or suppressing emotions to modify emotional expression [42,43]. Teaching entails a great deal of emotional labor [47], including those involved in navigating professional identity tensions [48].

Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labor as “the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” and asserted that “emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value” [49]. Emotional labor is one of the most important predictors of professional burnout [50], a crucial problem for teachers, whose burnout rates

are high in comparison to other professions [51]. In this context, emotion regulation is one of the most important tasks of educators in order to maintain their professional functioning and effectiveness, as well as their subjective sense of efficacy and psychological wellbeing [52,53]. An emotional labor strategy is a powerful method of emotion regulation. Emotional labor strategies include surface acting (SA) and deep acting (DA) to regulate feelings and emotional expressions [42]. Specifically, surface acting involves faking unfelt emotions or hiding inner feelings, while by deep acting, individuals try to experience the desired emotion [49]. Moreover, some researchers proposed a third type of emotional labor strategy: the expression of naturally felt emotions (ENFE) [50,54,55]. This strategy involves automatic emotion regulation and includes the possibility of individuals naturally expressing emotions consistent with the norms of a particular professional context [43].

The emotions of student teachers are regarded as individual feelings that convey internal messages. Professional identity tensions are considered to be internal struggles between how a student teacher sees him/herself as a person and as a professional, which are more complex to cope with and challenge a student teacher's feelings, values, beliefs, or perceptions [28]. Professional identity tensions, as an important part of profession formation, are an endogenous force for further development to deal with the disharmony at the beginning. As mentioned in the above part, under the influence of Chinese Confucian culture and exam-oriented education, severe consequences for student teachers was brought by CS vs. BT and LP vs. AT. Student teachers will have a strong sense of separation, leading to their confusion in dealing with the teacher–student relationship in the practicum, and at the same time, they will feel lost, depressed and even give up. Research and the practice of teacher education show that tensions can cause emotion fluctuations or emotion labor. However, professional identity tensions appear to be a positive 'tool' for student teachers' learning, as it will develop a commitment to teaching because of the intense emotions that they need to cope with, and may make student teachers use more effective emotional labor strategies to achieve their professional goals, especially the teaching choice of student teachers [12]. The mechanism of SA is that student teachers artificially separate their real feelings from the external emotional state, which goes through a series of dissembling, dressing up and decorating processes, making student teachers realize that teaching is a consuming job. DAs treat students as someone deserving of authentic expression, and the positive feedback from the student may increase a sense of personal efficacy, so student teachers prone to DA may stick to their posts as teachers. DA and ENFE can be regarded as work-efficient strategies because of their positive impact on resource acquisition, such as facilitating teacher efficacy [56]. So these suggest that emotional labor strategies play an important mediating role between professional identity tensions and teaching choice. Based on previous research, our study considered developing student teachers' ability to employ emotional labor strategies in response to professional identity tensions in order to enable student teachers to adopt such strategies in the context of the teaching profession. Pillen (2013) also suggests that student teachers can respond to the tensions of professional identity development with specific emotional coping strategies. To conclude, it is critical for student teachers to find appropriate strategies for emotion management as emotion regulation is essential for effective teaching [33]. This suggests the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Student teachers with professional identity tensions use different emotional labor strategies (i.e., SA, DA and ENFE).*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Emotional labor strategies (i.e., SA, DA and ENFE) mediates the relationship between professional identity tensions and motivations for teaching.*

2.3. Teachers' Emotional Labor Strategies and Motivations for Teaching

Learning to become a teacher is an emotional experience [39]. Practicum is a critical period for student teachers to understand the emotional aspects of teaching and develop their motivation to teach [57]. Previous studies indicate that positive emotional experiences in

practicum, such as a sense of achievement and satisfaction, or positive outcome expectation resulted from student learning, could increase student teachers' self-efficacy and therefore interest in the teaching job [57]. That is to say, emotions have motivational and regulatory functions and can continuously influence teachers' cognitive and action [58] abilities. Student teachers' emotions are intimately connected to their well-being, identity, and emotion regulation in teaching, which is connected to their motivation and commitment to the profession [59]. This is particularly valuable to consider for teacher education in a Chinese context, as sociocultural context shapes how teachers experience well-being. Liu, Song, and Pei (2018) conclude that teacher well-being is shaped by living in an individual- or collective-oriented sociocultural context [20]. Specifically, teachers working in individual-oriented contexts may enjoy greater autonomy and intrinsic motivation, but may benefit from more collegial, institutional support. Conversely, teachers in more collective-oriented contexts may experience daily collegial and institutional support, but may benefit from more opportunities to exercise autonomy and hence, experience intrinsic motivation [20]. As emotional regulation engages individual reflection, this skill may be valuable to emphasize in collective sociocultural contexts.

Teachers' ability to effectively regulate emotions is closely related to student learning [60,61] and teacher efficacy [56]. At the same time, student teachers' perceived teaching ability and intrinsic motivation are found to be positively correlated [62]. Some preservice teachers claim that effective emotion regulation facilitates their ability to achieve effective relationships with students as well as promote the choice to be a teacher [47,63]. Therefore, we assume a linkage between student teachers' emotional labor and their motivation to choose teaching. However, it is important to note that different emotional labor strategies may leave different impacts on teachers' wellbeing and motivations. For example, SA has been described as "acting in bad faith" and DA as "acting in good faith" [64]. SA may involve faking positive emotions and/or suppressing negative authentic emotions. Hochschild (1983) explained the related concern that inauthentic behavior from SA may lead to feelings detached from one's own true feelings and from those of others, resulting in a relationship based on depersonalization. In comparison, DA can minimize emotional dissonance, exhaustion, and tensions, while viewing the customer (student) as someone deserving authentic expression. Some research suggests the expression of naturally felt emotions (ENFE) indicates experience and skill in emotion regulation, including expression of contextually accepted emotions required by teaching. Yin (2017) found that teachers' reported use of DA and ENFE contributed to a greater sense of personal efficacy at work, which may increase intrinsic motivation in the profession. In contrast, SA may create a sense of guilt and dissatisfaction with work efforts, leading to attrition [56]. In a word, we could infer that DA and ENFE allow teachers to experience more authentic emotions, which may contribute to their motivations for teaching.

Two most common kinds of motivations to choose teaching—intrinsic and extrinsic motivation—are adopted in this study. Specifically, intrinsic motivation means that a teacher genuinely appreciates the nature of teaching, such as dealing with children and organizing a classroom; extrinsic motivation means that a teacher chooses teaching for the job-related benefits or incentives, such as holidays, stable payment and its transferability across regions [65]. Furthermore, we included the decision not to continue teaching, which is influenced by negative emotions [66]. Student teachers under pressure and unable to deal with negative emotions may quit teaching before or during their first year [67]. Understanding professional tensions through an emotional lens offers the possibility for interpreting student teacher tensions in the light of what it means to be and to become a teacher [3]. Based on these evidences, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *DA and ENFE are positively related to student teachers' motivations for teaching. SA is negatively related to their motivations for teaching.*

2.4. The Present Study

The purpose of this paper is to explore the tensions between two groups of student teachers' professional identities: "wanting to care for students" (CS) versus "being expected to be tough" (BT), and "feeling like a peer" (LP) versus "wanting to take responsibility as a teacher" (AT). This study further examines the relationship between these tensions, emotional labor strategies and motivation for teaching, specifically intrinsic motivation for teaching (IMFT), extrinsic motivation for teaching (EMFT) and choosing not to be a teacher (NTT). Participants in this study include 752 student teachers across 15 teacher education programs in colleges and universities throughout China.

This study specifically focuses on the practicum experience, which stands between the world of work and the world of the academy. Practicum provides student teachers with an opportunity to apply knowledge and skills in a real-world setting, to develop competencies through participation in a range of experiences, and allow student teachers to consider their commitment to a career of teaching. Learning from practicum encompasses the efficacy of linking experiences across contexts, and serves to present a variety of tensions as teachers navigate professional contexts, roles, and identities [3,18,68]. Furthermore, besides knowledge and skills, practicum also requires student teachers to devote a great deal of emotional labor to field experiences, which has been proved to be related to motivation for teaching [69–71].

Although student teachers' learning in the practicum has received attention from numerous policy makers, researchers, and practitioners in the past, the field still needs more research on how practicums affect their identity formation, emotions, and choices for teaching. To better understand how student teachers make career choices in the practicum, the authors argue that there is a need for scholarship to examine the extent to which the tensions student teachers encounter in the workplace are linked to the emotional experiences gained in context. However, research on student teachers' emotional labor in China is still in dire need of more scholarly filler. With this in mind, this study intends to address these issues by investigating the relationship between two typical identity tensions: CS vs. BT and LP vs. AT, emotional labor strategies and their different motivations for teaching during their practicum. Specifically, this study examines: (1) student teacher professional identity tensions (CS vs. BT and LP vs. AT) as influencing emotional labor strategies; (2) emotional labor strategies as mediating tensions from CS vs. BT and LP vs. AT; and (3) motivations to teach (or not), including intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Based on a review of literature, this study investigates two research questions aiming at understanding how professional identity tensions and emotional labor strategies in the practicum influence student teachers' choices to be a teacher or not.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Context

This study was conducted in the context of student teachers' practicum course. Participants were enrolled in a required core course titled "Jiaoyushixi" (Practicum), and we collected data at the end of their practicum by distributing online questionnaires to them by sending a Survey Star link in December 2020. It took approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. In the guidance part of the questionnaire, we explained the purpose of the research and assured participants that the data would only be available to the research team and would be for research use only. The data were collected anonymously. All of the participants volunteered and could cease participation at any time if they want.

The participants in this study were 1000 student teachers from 15 public universities or colleges (including normal universities, comprehensive universities, and comprehensive colleges) located in the eastern, western, and middle regions of China. This study eventually used data from 752 participants, as the data from 248 participants were removed due to more than 30% missing responses. There were 69 males (9.2%), 683 females (90.8%), 550 majors focused on teaching (73.1%), 170 majors not focused on teaching (22.6%), and 32 participants with missing responses (4.3%). Of the 752 participants, 386 were

undergraduates (51.3%) and 366 were postgraduates (48.7%). The average age of the participants was 23.18 years (SD = 1.84 years).

3.2. Instruments

A questionnaire with three scales was employed in the present study. All items in the questionnaire were scored on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The authors translated the scales from English into Chinese, and translated them back to ensure that the participants comprehended the questions. We also invited a few student teachers for a preview to refine the sentences until they were understandable. The questionnaire's first scale were drawn from Hanna et al.'s (2019) Student Teacher Professional Identity Tensions Scale, including the following factors: "wanting to care for students" versus "being expected to be tough" (CS vs. BT, three items); "feeling treated like a peer" versus "wanting to take responsibility" (LP vs. AT, three items) [29].

A 9-item Teacher Emotional Labor Strategy Scale (TELSS) adapted by Yin (2012) was used to assess three types of teacher emotional labor strategies: (1) surface acting (SA) with three items (e.g., "I fake the emotions I show when dealing with students in the practicum"); (2) deep acting (DA) with three items (e.g., "I try to actually experience the emotions that I must show to students in the practicum"); and (3) expression of naturally felt emotions (ENFE) with three items (e.g., "The emotions I show students were genuine in the practicum").

Finally, Motivations For Teaching, which was mainly based on the Factors Influencing Teaching Choice Scale (FIT-Choice Scale) [65]. These motivations included intrinsic motivation for teaching (IMFT) with four items, extrinsic motivation for teaching (EMFT) with three items, and not to be a teacher (NTT) with three items. A preface to all motivation items in the scale was "I chose to become a teacher because ... " (e.g., "... I love teaching" or "I will have summer/winter holiday"). Not to be a teacher (NTT) items included statements such as, "If I had other career choices after graduation, I would not choose to be a teacher" and "I won't be a teacher all my life".

3.3. Data Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the construct validity of the measurement model. Factor loadings and several model-fit indices were employed, including comparative fit index (CFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and chi-square (χ^2). Model fit was deemed acceptable with CFI > 0.90, SRMR < 0.008, and RMSEA < 0.08 [72].

Structural equation modeling (SEM) by AMOS 23.0 was used to define the measurement model and analyze the structural parameters between constructs. An advantage of SEM over earlier multi-step procedures used for mediation analysis lies in its ability to measure relationships among mediating constructs in a single analytical model. AMOS 23.0 enables examination of the significance of indirect effects of multiple mediators. In mediation analysis, recent scholarship has turned to the bootstrapping method recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008) to verify the nature of relationships within a model. The bootstrapping approach is suitable for samples with a non-normal distribution, and is capable of testing directly whether the product of the regression coefficient between the independent and mediating variable and the regression coefficient between the mediating and dependent variable are significantly different from zero. Moreover, as a resampling estimation technique, bootstrapping method yields more accurate confidence intervals (CI) when assessing indirect effects [73]. In this study, we used bootstrapping to resample the data 5000 times. In bootstrap analysis, the point estimates of total effect, indirect effect, and direct effect represent the means computed over the 5000 bootstrap samples and provide an indication of effect size. The standard error shown in the analyses, therefore, represents the standard deviation of the 5000 estimates [74].

4. Results

The results are presented in two primary sections. First, we examine the measurement model to confirm the viability of our approach to measuring the four variables of interest. Then, we present the substantive results with respect to the four research questions.

4.1. Measurement Model

We assessed the measurement model in a three-step process. First, we calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficients to evaluate the internal consistency of the main variables and subscales. As shown in Table 1, the alpha coefficients exceeded the minimum desired level for all of the measured variables (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Moreover, the data to model fit was acceptable for all four main variables:

Table 1. Variables, descriptive statistics and reliability.

Variable	No. of Items	M	SD	Cronbach's α
Tension of wanting to care for students versus being expected to be tough (CS vs. BT)	3	3.979	1.298	0.648
Tension of feeling like a peer versus wanting to take responsibility as a teacher (LP vs. AT)	3	3.940	1.289	0.877
Surface acting (SA)	3	3.605	1.350	0.914
Expression of naturally felt emotions (ENFE)	3	4.799	0.749	0.900
Deep acting (DA)	3	4.633	0.809	0.801
Intrinsic motivations for teaching (IMFT)	4	4.767	0.753	0.675
Extrinsic motivations for teaching (EMFT)	3	4.209	0.843	0.674
Not choosing to be a teacher (NTT)	3	2.429	0.927	0.861

Student teacher professional identity tensions ($\chi^2/df = 2.879$; RMSEA = 0.071 [< 0.08], CFI = 0.910 [> 0.90], and TLI = 0.900 [> 0.90]). We chose two tensions (CS vs. BT and LP vs. AT) about the student–teacher interaction among these tensions.

Student teachers' emotional labor strategies ($\chi^2/df = 2.269$; RMSEA = 0.058 [< 0.08], CFI = 0.990 [> 0.90], and TLI = 0.984 [> 0.90]);

Motivation for teaching, including IMFT and EMFT ($\chi^2/df = 1.882$; RMSEA = 0.063 [< 0.08], CFI = 0.971 [> 0.90], and TLI = 0.953 [> 0.90]); Not Choosing to Be A Teacher (NTT) scale's final composite reliability coefficient and average variance extracted were 0.917 and 0.786, indicating the single-factor model of NTT had an acceptable data fit.

As the variables in the study were self-reported, Harman's single-factor test [75] was used to examine whether the results were plagued by a common method bias. In addition to CFA, which rejected the single-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 28.833$; RMSEA = 0.193, CFI = 0.288, and TLI = 0.223), an exploratory factor analysis using SPSS 22.0 was also conducted to run this test. For the exploratory factor analysis, the unrotated factor solution showed that a single factor could account for only 24.050% of the total variance ($< 40.0\%$). Therefore, the single-factor model was rejected by both the confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses. This indicated that common method variance did not impair the results.

Finally, we tested the data fit for the full model. All of the model-fit indices specified earlier were deemed acceptable ($\chi^2/df = 4.776$, $p < 0.01$, RMSEA = 0.071 [< 0.08], CFI = 0.909 [> 0.89], IFI = 0.910 [> 0.89] and TLI = 0.895 [> 0.89]). Thus, we concluded that the measurement model met the desired standards of reliability and validity.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of the latent variables. Table 2 presents the correlations between the eight latent variables. The correlation matrix showed that the correlations between CS vs. BT and IMFT, EMFT, and NTT were not significant ($r = -0.061, 0.035, -0.053$ n.s.). The correlations between LP vs. AT and IMFT, EMFT, and NTT were also not significant ($r = -0.040, 0.023, -0.069$, n.s.). The correlation between SA and EMFT was not significant ($r = 0.025$, n.s.) either. SA negatively correlated with

IMFT ($r = -0.090, p < 0.05$) and NTT ($r = -0.109, p < 0.01$) significantly. In addition, the DA significantly correlated with all of the other factors.

Table 2. Correlation matrix among the latent variables.

	CS vs. BT	LP vs. AT	SA	ENFE	DA	IMFT	EMFT	NTT
CS vs. BT	1							
LP vs. AT	0.590 **	1						
SA	0.333 **	0.371 **	1					
ENFE	0.079 *	0.106 **	0.009	1				
DA	0.220 **	0.260 **	0.390 **	0.474 **	1			
IMFT	-0.061	-0.040	-0.090 *	0.325 **	0.236 **	1		
EMFT	0.035	0.023	0.025	0.159 **	0.132 **	0.255 **	1	
NTT	-0.053	-0.069	-0.109 **	-0.394 **	-0.301 **	-0.530 **	-0.273 **	1

Notes: * significance is at $p < 0.05$; ** significance is at $p < 0.01$.

4.3. Structural Equation Model

A structural equation model is based on the hypothesized model to test the relationships between student teacher reported use of Emotional Labor Strategies (ELs) and CS vs. BT, LP vs. AT, and their IMFT/EMFT/NTT. In this model, the correlations between tensions and perceived motivation for teaching, and among three ELS were released for estimation. The structural equation model results showed that this model reached an acceptable, though not excellent, data fit ($\chi^2/df = 4.776, p < 0.01, RMSEA = 0.071 [< 0.08], CFI = 0.909 [> 0.89], IFI = 0.910 [> 0.89]$ and $TLI = 0.895 [> 0.89]$). We concluded that the measurement model met desired standards of reliability and validity. Figure 1 shows the details of the structural equation model results.

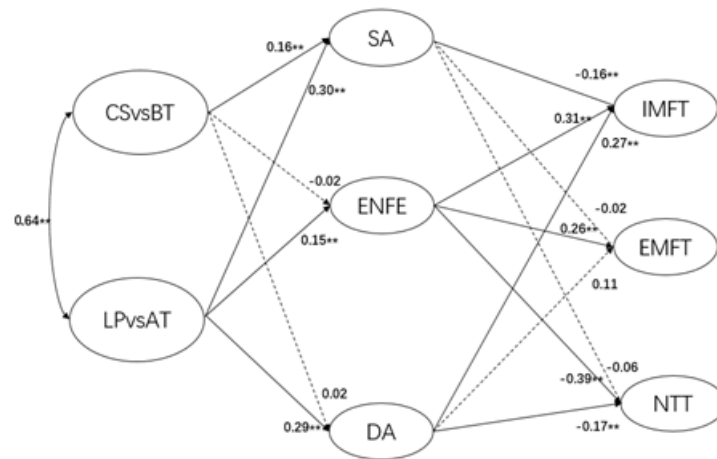


Figure 1. The structural equation model results of the relationships among professional identity tensions, emotional labor strategies and motivation for teaching ($n = 752$). ** significance is at $p < 0.01$. IMFT: Intrinsic motivation for teaching; EMFT: Extrinsic motivation for teaching; NTT: Not to be a teacher.

To answer research questions, as we mainly aimed to explore the trilateral relationship among CS vs. BT, LP vs. AT, SA, ENFE, DA and IMFT/EMFT/NTT, the mediation test was emphasized. The analytical results are described in detail below. CS vs. BT was positively associated with SA ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.01$), while no significant relationship was found between CS vs. BT and ENFE ($\beta = -0.02, n.s.$) or DA ($\beta = 0.02, n.s.$). LP vs. AT was positively associated with SA ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.01$), ENFE ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.01$), and DA ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$). These results support H1.

We employed bootstrapping to further verify the results of the structural equation model analysis. We obtained 5000 bootstrapped estimates of the variable paths between CS

vs. BT and LP vs. AT, ELSs, and IMFT/EMFT/NTT of student teachers. A 95th percentile confidence interval for each path was obtained by finding bootstrap estimates of the mediated paths for the 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles of the distribution for the 2000 samples. Then, using the bias adjustment described by MacKinnon (2008), we constructed a bias corrected confidence interval for each of the variable paths [73]. The standardized parameter estimates shown in Figure 1 provide indications of significance and effect sizes associated with the full mediation model. These data support several conclusions. SA had indirect effects on IMFT ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.01$) and CS vs. BT and LP vs. AT significantly. There is no significant indirect effect between CS vs. BT and EMFT, and NTT. ENFE was positively associated with IMFT ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.01$) and EMFT ($\beta = 0.26, p < 0.01$), and negatively associated with NTT ($\beta = -0.39, p < 0.01$) on LP vs. AT. DA was positively associated with the IMFT ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.01$) and negatively associated with the NTT ($\beta = -0.17, p < 0.01$) on LP vs AT. These results support H2, and H3.

5. Discussion

5.1. Effects of Student Teacher Emotional Labor Strategies on Motivation for Teaching

The most important findings of this study are the close relationships between the perceptions of the professional role and motives for choosing to be a teacher, manifesting the special nature of teaching work. Teaching is one of the most emotionally loaded occupations [76]. Teachers' work is filled with emotions [47,66]. Compared to previous research focusing on contextual factors, this study took a further step by showing the different mediating effects of three emotional labor strategies, exploring the effects of student teachers' reported use of emotional labor strategies on their career choices, which may correlate to their sense of agency and internal vs. external motivations [20]. This study found that navigating emotions productively in work cultivated a sense of professional agency and served as an internal motivation for teachers in their daily practice. This more broadly resulted in teachers choosing to stay committed to the field of teaching.

The results of structural equation modeling suggest that tension may be a significant predictor of deep acting, expression of natural emotion, and intrinsic motivation to teach. These findings may suggest that "deep acting" and "expression of natural emotion" may be important mediators between tension and intrinsic motivation to teach, having a negative effect on "not choosing to be a teacher". This suggests that tension experienced during classroom interactions may promote extrinsic motivation and deep acting for teaching, while emotional support for the teacher increases motivation for teaching. Furthermore, the results of this study support the claims of other studies that coping strategies mediate psychological outcomes.

The research also shows that tensions have a positive side, when confronting uncontrollable interactional tensions or events requiring extra managing efforts, coping actions are enacted [77]. In our study, tensions were likely to be conceptualized as the stimulus, while deep acting and extrinsic motivations for teaching might be included in the resources of the job, but this is not the path for surface acting. Research indicated that surface acting decreased teachers' positive emotions and increased their negative emotions, triggering a downward spiral effect, yet using deep acting only increased positive emotions, and did not decrease negative emotions [78]. This result also supports Yin's (2017) conclusion that the use of deep acting and expression of naturally felt emotions plays a beneficial role in teaching, whereas SA plays a negative role in teaching [56]. Furthermore, coping strategies (i.e., DA, ENFE) have motivational potential and lead to high work engagement, low cynicism, and excellent performance, as they might play either an intrinsic motivational role because they foster employee growth, learning and development, or an extrinsic motivational role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals, according to the effort-recovery model [79]. Therefore, these regulated emotional properties could stimulate adaptive behaviors [80], which could offer many resources to foster student teachers' willingness to dedicate their efforts to the work task, and at the same time reduce the chances for deciding not to be a teacher. From these research results, we may suggest

engaging student teachers in deep learning of emotional labor techniques, enabling them to be more aware of their emotional state and use more integrated and genuine emotion regulation strategies.

5.2. Tensions in Student-Teaching and Emotional Labor Strategies

Moving from a university teacher education program as a student teacher to the community of a school as a new teacher implies multiple tensions as adaptations and adjustments to identity are necessitated [4]. In this study, we found that student teachers had controversial feelings about how to behave in order to manage a class effectively (e.g., being caring versus being tough and maintaining control to earn student respect). Student teachers are more likely to experience conflicts between the reality of teaching as a profession and their personal views, beliefs, or desires as teachers interacting with students [81]. It can be seen from the teaching practice that student teachers often find that “their attempts to care may conflict with their hope of assuming an authoritative professional stance”. We found student teachers struggling with this dichotomy: “I want to be gentle but I have to be strict.” However, once the student teachers were faced with the dilemmas described here—dilemmas about caring and professional identity and dilemmas about the engaging as a professional or as a person, the negative emotions emerge. Accordingly, their initial understandings of identity were challenged in the practicum, and this could be crucial for developing their occupational choices. Even more tensions could also have intense or longer-term impacts on student teacher wellbeing [5]. However, studies also argue that identity tensions are not always negative in nature, and may serve, in specific situations, as a starting point for reflection and professional development [82]. Conflicting development inevitably requires coping strategies. Coping involves examining and managing tensions.

Coping strategies depend on the kinds of tensions and the kind of person a student teacher is, yet emotional strategies as possible coping methods might help student teachers start working on tensions. Thus, we support Hanna et al.’s (2019) claim that each tension reflects a particular teaching activity, including instructional, classroom, and emotional aspects [29]. The results of our study at least suggest that such programs need to take individual differences among student teachers into account. To work on tensions, teacher induction might also focus, besides classroom management and dealing with pupils, on how to distinguish the emotional experiences from the tensions. Teacher education programs need to better support student teachers for the emotional aspects of teaching as well [83,84]. As the practicum is a time of professional instability and transition, teacher educators including university supervisors and cooperating teachers need to teach, explain, and model this process for how to develop emotional strategies to navigate classroom interactions [85,86]. It is also important that the building of these relationships is taught. In fact, teacher educators are in a critical position to take an active role in supporting student teachers as they create their professional identities.

5.3. Limitations and Further Research

From the perspective of emotions, this study explored the influence of identity tensions from practicum and strategies adopted by student teachers on motivations for teaching. Our findings are limited by several factors associated with the research design and method. To begin with, we did not employ a nationally representative sample of schools. This means that our findings cannot be interpreted as reflecting all teacher education programs in China. Further analyses of our own data are necessary to understand possible differences between university and college student teachers, and between bachelor’s and master’s degree student teachers.

In addition, this research employed a cross-sectional survey design. Although this was deemed suitable for attaining an initial view of how tensions interact with teacher learning in China, it suffered from two important limitations. First, the cross-sectional survey design describes “associations” not “causality” in relationships among the eight variables. The number of student teachers and universities should be increased in further studies. A design

including student teachers of different subjects would provide a more detailed picture. As in previous research, our two outcome measures were assessed by student teacher self-reported data. Future research might benefit from including teacher educators' and cooperating teachers' ratings of student teacher behavior, as well as objective indicators of tensions, emotions and motivations (e.g., intentions to be a teacher, and psychosomatic and physical symptoms) to avoid confounding between teacher reports on their personality and emotions, or the characteristics of the teacher education programs. Second, the survey approach, while offering a broad perspective on tensions and career choice in China, does not provide a detailed, up-close view of these dynamics. This is especially true for emotion, as it is important to unpack how the practice context shapes the enactment of ELSs and the motivations to be a teacher. A deeper understanding of these interactions would require qualitative research. It would be worthwhile to investigate such trends further in future research, and they are relevant for developing teacher induction programs since schools are increasingly seeking ways of organizing their induction programs, especially in the second year and beyond. We would also recommend some case studies to more closely examine the issues especially in relation to pre-service teachers' characteristics in relation to the students being taught and the supervising teacher.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, W.H., G.T., and Q.L.; methodology, W.H.; validation, W.H.; formal analysis, W.H. and Q.L.; investigation, resources, and data curation, W.H. and Q.L.; writing—original draft preparation, W.H.; writing—review and editing, W.H., J.Z., and L.B.L.; supervision, G.T., Q.L., and L.B.L.; funding acquisition, Q.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the International Joint Research Project of Huiyan International College, Faculty of Education, Beijing Normal University (Grant Number: ICER201901) and Key Research Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences in Universities, Ministry of Education, China (Grant Number: 19JJD880001).

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Ethics Committee of the College of Teacher Education Capital Normal University.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the first author. The data are not publicly available due to confidentiality and research ethics.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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