Identity Integration Dilemmas and Strategies for Enterprise Practice among Vocational Teachers

Fang Wu[1], Mohd Khata Bin Jabor[2], Mohd Fa'iz Bin Ahmad[3], Sixiao Hu[4]

Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia
Email: mkhata@utm.my, mfaiz@utm.my
Corresponding Author Email: wufang@graduate.utm.my

Abstract
This article employs a quantitative research method to investigate the identity integration challenges faced by vocational teachers during enterprise practice in Hebei Province, China. The study involved 120 teachers from 25 higher vocational colleges in Hebei province. Data were collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. The results indicate that teachers face issues such as self-identity dissonance and poor collaboration among multiple parties during enterprise practice. Therefore, it is essential for teachers engaged in enterprise practice to cultivate positive psychological capital and promote the integration of their self-identity. Additionally, building a practice community consisting of a "teacher community + school + enterprise" is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of group collaborative practice.
Keywords: Vocational Teachers, Enterprise Practice, Identity Integration

Introduction
Against the backdrop of globalization and rapid technological advancements, vocational education has gradually become a key driver of economic development. Vocational teachers are not only responsible for teaching but must also stay aligned with practical applications in rapidly evolving industrial environments. However, many teachers experience identity confusion and role conflicts when participating in enterprise practices, which adversely affects the quality of these practices. Particularly as vocational education reform accelerates in China, addressing the challenge of helping teachers transition smoothly between their roles in schools and enterprises has become an urgent issue.

Since the General Office of the State Council proposed in 2017 to strengthen the integration of industry and education teaching staff, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with multiple departments, has released the lists of the first and second batches of national vocational teacher enterprise practice bases. Furthermore, the "Vocational Teacher Quality

Improvement Plan (2021-2025)" introduced new requirements to enhance teachers' in-depth practice in industries and enterprises. Since then, enterprise practice has become an important and effective measure to promote teachers' professional development and improve vocational teachers' practical teaching abilities. However, research has found that vocational teachers experience identity confusion due to role conflicts between schools and enterprises during enterprise practice. This results in teachers struggling with identity integration within enterprises, ultimately leading to suboptimal practice quality (Tu & Shi, 2016).

This study aims to uncover the identity integration dilemmas faced by vocational teachers during enterprise practices and to explore effective strategies for addressing these challenges, thereby fostering teachers' professional growth and improving the quality of enterprise practices.

Literature Review
Identity integration is a multidimensional concept. Park and Burgess (1924) describe integration as a process of mutual penetration and fusion, where groups "gradually form shared memories, emotions, and attitudes through shared experiences and history with other groups, ultimately merging into a common cultural life." Building on this, Berry (1997) incorporates psychological factors into social integration theory, suggesting that factors influencing group integration are divided into individual-level and group-level factors. Individual-level factors are further subdivided into pre-integration and during-integration stages, while group-level factors consider elements from both the place of origin and the place of integration, including personal characteristics, expectations, economic conditions, political environment, social attitudes, and support systems.

In the context of vocational teachers' enterprise practice, the process of identity integration involves both internal factors, such as individual and group psychology, and external factors, including colleges, enterprises, and government, as well as the coordination mechanisms between these institutions and their environments. At the individual level, it reflects teachers' psychological identity and sense of belonging, while at the macro level, it reflects the degree of group integration and coordination mechanisms, forming an identity integration model linked through the integration process.

Some studies have proposed countermeasures based on Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory (Formenti & West, 2018), while others have suggested strategies from the perspectives of workplace learning theory, constructivist theory, and psychological cognitive theory. However, there remains a theoretical gap worth exploring regarding how teachers can efficiently transition from their school identity to integration into the enterprise environment for effective practice. It is crucial to identify the issues teachers face during this integration process and to create practical environments and collaborative mechanisms to address the identity alienation dilemma in enterprise practice.

Self-identity does not emerge automatically; it is a reflective psychological construction based on personal experiences, influenced by individual differences and the social environment. This concept includes both the looking-glass self and the social self. Cooley (1983) proposed the looking-glass self theory to describe how self-identity or social identity depends on how

individuals believe they are perceived by others. Others' reactions provide us with the most direct feedback about ourselves; without others to reflect back to us, individuals cannot develop self-awareness.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study
The objectives of the study were as follows:
- Discuss the identity challenges faced by vocational teachers during enterprise practice.
- Propose strategies for the integration of vocational teachers' enterprise practice

Methodology
Questionnaire Design
Based on the questionnaire compiled by Zhang (2024), the Survey on Vocational Identity and Enterprise Participation Willingness of Teachers in Vocational Education Enterprise Practice was developed. The questionnaire consists of three main parts: basic information about teachers in enterprise practice, teachers' identity, and their willingness to participate in enterprises. The basic information section includes aspects such as gender, age, and educational background.

Data Collection
This study adopted a quantitative research method. Data were collected using the Wenjuanxing app from September 24, 2024, to November 2, 2024. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed, with 120 valid responses, resulting in an effective response rate of 80%. All respondents participated in enterprise practice organized by their colleges.
In terms of gender, 55 were male, and 65 were female. Regarding age distribution, 5 respondents were under 30 years old, 65 were between 31 and 40 years old, 42 were between 41 and 50 years old, and 8 were over 50 years old. For professional titles, 4 had no title, 1 held a junior title, 90 held an intermediate title, and 25 held a senior title. Regarding educational background, 20 had a bachelor's degree, 90 had a master's degree, and 10 had a Ph.D. The respondents' demographic distribution was consistent with the overall distribution of teachers participating in enterprise practice at the college, with no significant deviations, thus meeting the survey requirements.

Resluts
Analysis of The Identity Dilemmas in Teachers' Enterprise Practice
Challenges in Multi-stakeholder Coordination
First, vocational teachers exhibit relatively low willingness to engage in enterprise practice. Among the respondents, only 16.36% expressed a positive response when asked if they were willing to participate in enterprise practice. Social integration theory (MacLure, 1993) emphasizes cultural acceptance and behavioral adjustment within the integration environment. Cultural acceptance refers to the extent to which an individual understands and recognizes the language, culture, and values of the integration environment, including cultural knowledge, language proficiency, and various values. Behavioral adjustment means that individuals not only ideologically identify with but also follow the rules and norms of the integration environment. Teachers' awareness of their development needs involves attention to their growth requirements, a clear career development path, the ability to express self-perceptions, self-cognition, and self-evaluation, and a conscious assessment of the fulfillment of these needs (Park & Burgess, 1924).

Second, teachers face difficulties balancing the contradictions between teaching and enterprise work. They are simultaneously situated in the "school field" and the "enterprise field," two heterogeneous spaces. With limited energy and heavy daily teaching tasks, it is challenging for them to devote sufficient time to enterprise practice activities. In the 25 surveyed vocational colleges, over half (13 schools) had less than one-third of their professional course teachers participating in enterprise practice. The school with the highest number of participating teachers had 403 participants, accounting for 60.7% of its total full-time teachers (664), while the school with the fewest participants had 65, accounting for 15.3% of its total full-time teachers (425). Some teachers, when participating in projects or activities, only engage in the formality of the activities without focusing on the content or effectiveness of the cooperation. This leads to ineffective participation, such as superficial observation visits, casual discussions, and enterprise practice conducted merely to obtain a stamped certificate. Cooperative projects often stall after the signing of an intention agreement.

Third, participating in enterprise practice during holidays adds extra burdens to teachers, making it difficult to gain their approval. According to the survey, 84.29% of vocational teachers indicated that enterprise practice is typically scheduled during winter and summer breaks, causing significant distress. Teachers face numerous "hidden burdens" in their work, which differ from other jobs. It's not just about completing physical tasks but also involves educating and influencing a group of people, requiring complex decision-making and reflection. The high complexity, long-term nature, and innovative requirements of their work, coupled with high-intensity daily work pressure and additional training during breaks, leave teachers with no time for necessary physical and mental recuperation.

Finally, the lack of experience in the enterprise work environment creates role identity obstacles for teachers. Survey results show that 51.34% of teachers believe that the work experience accumulated during their pre-service studies and career growth is not, or is difficult to, contribute to the enterprise practice process. Additionally, 18.48% of respondents believe that their prior experience might even negatively impact enterprise production, and 18.52% feel they are not adapted to the enterprise environment and system. Integration theory emphasizes the structure of individuals within society, with the integration process being a continuous identity interaction between individuals and the social environment. Enterprise practice requires teachers to fully participate in real production practice and solve actual enterprise problems. If teachers only accumulate fragmented work experience intermittently, it will not only affect the progress and quality of enterprise work but also make it difficult for them to gain sufficient value and meaning. As a result, they may become "outsiders" and "marginalized individuals," falling into an identity alienation dilemma.

Challenges in Multi-stakeholder Coordination
First, the cross-disciplinary nature of vocational education means that teachers' enterprise practice involves horizontal coordination across multiple departments and vertical management at various levels. Horizontally, this requires the integration of the education, human resources, development and reform, taxation, and finance departments. Vertically, it necessitates coordination between central and local governments. Such large-scale, cross-disciplinary activities especially require a sound government supervision and management system, a well-established governance mechanism, and coordination among stakeholders.

Without these elements, persistent issues such as "multi-headed governance" and "gradual attenuation" can arise. The survey indicates that schools did not provide sufficient support for participating in school-enterprise cooperation activities. Among the factors restricting teachers' participation, "heavy teaching tasks" and "insufficient funding" were unanimously identified as the most significant and challenging obstacles, accounting for 76.34% and 51.17%, respectively. In-depth interviews conducted by Hao (2021) with 21 professional teachers from six vocational colleges in Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province further confirmed the practical difficulties teachers face in enterprise practice. Multiple studies (Dai & Shi, 2015; Wang et al., 2015; Yan et al., 2018) have highlighted issues at various levels: at the government level, there are incomplete legal mechanisms, lack of independent operating agencies, insufficient policy interpretation, and poor feedback on implementation; at the school level, there is a lack of practical programs, rotation plans, formalized supervision and evaluation, and short practice cycles; and at the enterprise level, there is a lack of willingness to actively accept teachers and misalignment in practice methods.

Second, conflicts of interest between schools and enterprises are difficult to reconcile, affecting the quality of teachers' enterprise practice. When investigating the factors that affect teachers' participation in school-enterprise cooperation, teachers identified three main factors: "enterprise personnel not understanding the rules of education and teaching" (71.24%), "enterprises focusing too much on short-term benefits" (65.17%), and "neglecting the educational responsibilities of schools." School teachers and enterprise personnel represent different interest groups with different demands, following different rules in the education and economic fields. This leads to difficulties in reaching a consensus and smoothly advancing cooperative projects when conflicts arise. Schools and enterprises have not yet formed a community of interests. Enterprises are unlikely to forego profit pursuits to assume educational responsibilities and are even less likely to involve teachers in high-tech positions due to the risk of affecting production activities.

Finally, policy support still needs to be strengthened. Research shows that social support for the professional identity of enterprise practice teachers is generally low, especially regarding welfare and social status. Professional identity significantly impacts the effectiveness of teachers' enterprise practice. The survey shows that 92 teachers reported insufficient policy support, 56 teachers believed that policy promotion was inadequate, and 22 teachers felt that the business goals of enterprises —"to make profits and pay taxes"—mean that industry-education integration activities, including teacher enterprise practice, should not result in losses for enterprises. Since the government has allocated full educational funds to schools, enterprises should not be expected to "bear responsibilities without benefits". Additionally, the implementation of policies for teachers' enterprise practice needs improvement in areas such as information disclosure mechanisms, supervision and management systems, and intermediary service mechanisms.

Strategies for Teachers to Integrate into the Enterprise Practice Environment
Awakening Positive Psychological Capital to Promote Teachers' Individual Self-Identity
In The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life, Palmer and Neuenschwander (1998) said, "To be an advancing teacher, I must cultivate a self-awareness that both relies on and does not rely on the responses of others." The self-awareness of teachers, including their attitudes, beliefs, and temperament, is the premise of self-identity

and the cornerstone for establishing and maintaining confidence and self-esteem. Only by correctly understanding and positively identifying with their identity and value can teachers better adapt to the environment. Adhering to self-identity is fundamental to becoming a good teacher. Luthans et al. (2004) considers positive psychological capital as a psychological resource that promotes individual growth and improves workplace performance. Awakening the positive psychological capital of teachers involved in enterprise practice helps them positively recognize and reasonably position their professional roles. This foundation enhances their professional identity, transforming them from passive compromisers and hesitant wanderers into proactive actors. Teachers need to possess a professional character, which can only be developed through experience and practice. By following a "personal experience — reflection — practice" cycle in enterprise practice, teachers can hone their professional character, immerse themselves in the enterprise environment, and, like new apprentices, learn through practice, reflection, and further practice to improve the effectiveness of enterprise practice.

Integrating teachers into the enterprise practice environment does not mean forcing them to completely abandon their original identity or fully transform into enterprise employees, which is neither entirely achievable nor necessary. Instead, having a unique practice-oriented identity and role better ensures their rights and integration into the practice environment. Thus, teachers integrating into the enterprise practice environment involves bringing their previous teaching knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and awareness into alignment with industry standards, merging daily practice content with engineering realities, integrating the practice process with work processes, and blending the practice setting with real enterprise scenarios. The practice teaching team should also merge with the enterprise engineering team, transforming "entering enterprise practice" into "integrating into enterprise practice". This requires schools and enterprises conducting teacher enterprise practice activities to innovate effective mechanisms to motivate teachers to participate in enterprise practice, plan practice directions based on local industrial development, and design practice content based on teachers' professional and technical levels. They should also incorporate the immersive enterprise practice concept into teaching, research, and the enterprise practice process.

Form a "Teacher community + School + Enterprise" Practice Community to Enhance the Effectiveness of Collaborative Practice
Wenger (1999) views communities of practice as a special type of community with a shared history of learning, characterized by three dimensions: joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. As individual practitioners, teachers acquire knowledge and construct their professional identity within the context of a community of practice. The formation and development of a teacher community can promote cooperation and mutual support among teachers, enabling them to collectively explore educational challenges and innovate teaching methods. Collaboration with schools and enterprises can provide additional resources and support for the teacher community, broaden the scope of teaching practices, and enrich teaching content and methods.

Schools, serving as platforms for teaching practice, can facilitate communication and cooperation among teachers by providing necessary venues and resources. Partnering with enterprises introduces real-world application scenarios and professional knowledge, enhancing the effectiveness and practicality of teaching practices. By constructing a "teacher

community + school + enterprise" practice community (Jin & Wang, 2021), deep collaboration among teachers, schools, and enterprises can be achieved, thereby enhancing the integration and sharing of educational resources. This collaboration promotes innovation and the upgrading of teaching models. Such a community can effectively foster mutual learning and professional growth among teachers, stimulate teamwork potential, improve teaching quality and educational outcomes, and ultimately contribute to the goals of educational reform and development.

Establishing teacher enterprise practice mobility stations can provide a more convenient platform and more opportunities for cooperation among teachers, schools, and enterprises. Through these mobility stations, information sharing, resource integration, and cooperative exchanges can be facilitated. Specifically, this initiative can:

Promote Communication and Cooperation: Teachers can engage in face-to-face communication with enterprise representatives through the mobility stations, gaining insights into the latest needs and development trends of enterprises, as well as acquiring real-time industry information and knowledge. Simultaneously, enterprises can communicate with teachers to understand the needs and development directions of the education field, providing appropriate support and resources to teachers.

Share Resources and Practice Opportunities: By establishing mobility stations, teachers can have opportunities for enterprise visits, field trips, and professional practice, gaining first hand experience of real working environments and the professional skills required. Enterprises can offer practice opportunities and resource support, collaborating with teachers to explore innovations and developments in education and teaching.

Enhance Educational Outcomes: Teacher enterprise practice mobility stations can provide flexible and diverse teaching resources and practice opportunities, helping teachers better integrate practical experience and professional skills into their teaching. This improves teaching quality, cultivates students' practical abilities, and enhances their professional skills.

Conclusion
This study investigates the current state of identity recognition among vocational teachers in Hebei Province engaged in enterprise practice, highlighting the challenges and issues they face. Subsequently, it proposes measures for improvement. The main conclusions are as follows:

Regarding the current state of identity recognition in enterprise practice among vocational teachers in China, some progress has been made in building the vocational teacher workforce. However, issues persist, such as self-identity discrepancies in enterprise practice and ineffective multi-stakeholder collaboration among government, schools, enterprises, and communities.

To address challenges in developing a "dual-profession" teacher workforce among vocational teachers in Hebei Province, it is essential to foster positive psychological capital to promote individual teacher self-identity. Additionally, establishing a "teacher community + school + enterprise" practice community can enhance the effectiveness of collaborative practice.

By analyzing the current state and challenges of identity integration among vocational teachers engaged in enterprise practices in Hebei Province, this study offers the following significant contributions to the theory and practice of vocational education:

Theoretical Innovation: By integrating social integration theory and psychological capital theory, the study constructs an analytical framework for understanding teacher identity integration, providing a theoretical foundation for future research.
Practical Guidance: The study proposes a "teacher community + school + enterprise" practice community model, offering concrete improvement strategies for policymakers and school administrators.
Policy Implications: The findings highlight deficiencies in existing policy support, offering insights and recommendations for enhancing vocational education policies.

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