Novice Teachers’ Voices on Professional Agency and Professional Identity in Finland and China

Suhao Peng
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Abstract

Research in novice teachers has been wide and rich because they are experiencing a special period in their career life after spending their childhood in school and freshly graduating from teacher education. At the workplace, novice teachers might be specially treated because they are the newcomers, but they may want to realize some professional ideals. Research in novice teacher’s professional agency and professional identity needs to be enriched. Professional agency can be understood as initiatives taken at the workplace, and professional identity can be a “self” as a professional. Both professional agency and professional identity are complex when socio-cultural contexts and subjective factors are intertwined. However, they are related and interdependent—professional agency externalizes and negotiates professional identity, whereas professional identity internalizes and influences professional agency. By comparing ten novice teachers from China and Finland, the overall aim of this thesis is to investigate the degree of professional agency as well as professional identity from a developmental perspective so that the socio-cultural contexts, especially the education systems in Finland and China, and subjective factors can be understood.

In this thesis, five novice teachers from China and five novice teachers from Finland were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. By adopting thematic analysis, the author has found that how those novice teachers’ voices on professional agency and professional identity are similar or different. The result shows that Finnish novice teachers enjoy a relatively higher degree of professional agency at the workplace, and they seem to be more well-prepared by according to the testimonies in the interviews. Early-childhood teachers’ wellbeing in Finland and China need to be considered in the future educational reforms and development.

Keywords
Professional agency, professional identity, Finland, China, novice teachers, teacher education.
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The SCSC approach  the subject-centered socio-cultural approach
PISA  the Programme for International Student Assessment
GDP  Gross Domestic Product
OECD  Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Previous Researches

Teachers’ professional learning and development are not only important for school and teacher’s development, but also for student-centered and meaningful learning, and professional agency can facilitate and promote teachers’ professional learning, especially, to help novice teachers become experienced teachers (Gurría, 2012; TPA Research Group, 2012). However, educational policies and school contexts may weaken teachers’ power and autonomy of controlling their own work and professional decision-making, which has become a tension between the contextual structures and the professional agency (Biesta, et al., 2015). Therefore, “… teachers' professional agency regained increased interest among policy makers, educational organizations and researchers” (Hökkä & Etelapelto, 2014, Vähäsantananen, 2015; as cited in Leiden University, 2018). Besides, professional agency can be exercised to negotiate and externalize professional identity, and, meanwhile, professional identity can internalize professional agency, which means they are interrelated and interdependent (Beauchamp & Thomas; 2011, p. 7; Hall et al., 2012, p. 104). Thus, by analyzing professional agency and professional identity, we can deepen our understanding in ‘how teachers experience and practice their pedagogic innovation, lifelong learning and development, freedom, well-being and happiness at the workplace’ (Eteläpelto et al., 2014; as cited in Peng, 2018, p. 4). It has been shown that the first five-year teaching can be considered as a novice or early-career stage because of ‘…uncertainty and a fast learning pace, during which teachers construct their professional practice’ (Berliner, 1986; as cited in Heikonen et al., 2017, p. 255). In this thesis, the author tries to explore novice teachers’ professional agency and professional identity by comparing two groups of teachers at their early-career stage respectively in Finland and China.

Although research in novice teachers has been rich and wide, studies from an international and comparative perspective are still scarce in the field. Peng (2018) in his literature review has found that the previous studies answer different research questions and were conducted in different countries or organizations with different groups of novice teachers as their participants regarding their teaching subjects, school types, etc. (p. 31). Moreover, the author (Peng, 2018) has also noticed that the commonalities of the key findings of those studies—how life experience, personal values and choices, pre-service teacher education and school-based or social contexts can really impact novice teachers’ professional agency and professional identity at the workplace, and how the teacher education, school leaders, experienced teachers, induction programmes play significant roles during this special period from being a student to being a teacher (p. 31). Shortly speaking, the real work contexts have “matches” or “unmatches”, “supports” or “constrains”, which may furtherly influence their ideals of “what I should/can do” and “who I am” as a teacher at the workplace. In terms of research methodologies, the majority of the previous studies is qualitative per se, with cross-sectional or case study design but comparative design is rare, and structured-interview is the major data collection method (Peng, 2018, p. 22-29).
Eteläpelto et al. (2014) conclude in their book chapter that ‘[a]lthough we now have some empirical evidence for how professional identities and agency are related to workplace learning, much remains to be discovered. In particular we lack developmental studies on practice-based interventions… which would focus on the intertwining relationships between identity negotiations and the practice of agency’ (p. 664-665). Apart from the scarcity in the field, research entirely focusing on both professional agency and professional identity in teaching profession, especially with comparative design, seems to be scarce according to the author’s literature review report (Peng, 2018, p. 24-29). However, two studies are worthy to be noticed. Vähäsantanan et al. (2008) have conducted a study by adopting comparative design to compare two work organizations, and the authors have found that there is, in teaching profession in the Finnish context, a positive correlation between freedom of professional agency and commitment of professional identity. In addition, Eteläpelto et al. (2015) have discussed how Finnish novice primary school teachers perceive their professional agency, professional identity and the factors behind them. The former is valuable because of its comparative design, whereas the latter is valuable because of the relevance. Obviously, an international comparative study is lacking in the field. In order to fill this research blank, this thesis is international and comparative in nature.

1.2 Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

The primary aims and objectives of this thesis are to try to probe into novice teachers’ voices on professional agency and professional identity at their early career stage after freshly graduating from teacher education, and those selected participants for data collection are: 1) five qualified novice teachers in China; 2) five qualified novice teachers in Finland. The selection criteria and the basic information of the participants are listed in Section 4.2. By conducting structured interviews and comparing those selected teachers from China and Finland, this thesis aims to:

· Explore their perceptions on professional agency and professional identity by analyzing their testimonies based on their life and career course.
· Identify the factors influencing their professional agency and professional identity.
· By comparison, find out the reasons for the similarities and differences of their voices in terms of the socio-cultural contexts, teacher education and teacher profession.

In order to achieve the objectives, this thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

· In terms of professional agency, how do those teachers comment on their freedom to take actions, make decisions or take stance at the workplace?
· What factors support or restrain their professional agency?
· In terms of professional identity, how do those teachers make sense of teacher identity from a developmental perspective?
· Can those voices between professional agency and professional identity be related?
By comparing Finland and China through the lens of the subject-centered socio-cultural approach, how and why are their voices similar or different?

1.3 Significance of the Study

As mentioned above, the first significance of this thesis is to deepen our understanding of professional agency and professional identity by comparing two groups of novice teachers respectively in Finland and China, which means it embraces the elements of comparison. By this means, this thesis can also contribute to understand teachers’ professional development and well-being, which can furtherly impact on school development and the education system.

Although there is a plenty of studies in teachers’ professional agency or professional identity, yet it is barely found a study embracing and intertwining both two terms into the discussions of novice teachers (Peng, 2018, p. 32). In this sense, this thesis will try to comparatively investigate two groups of teachers at their special career stage as novices in two different educational and social-cultural contexts in order to better our understanding how professional agency can interrelate to professional identity.

1.4 Limitations and Delimitations

This thesis should be written up within twenty weeks on a full-time basis and needs to reach to conclusion by means of international comparison. Therefore, it is inevitable that the author needs to take feasibility into consideration because of lack funding and time. In order to maximize the feasibility, the small sample size of participants limits the transferability of the research findings. In addition to the participants, Bryman (2016) also recommends focusing on the sampling of the context (p. 418). However, the intranational contexts are hardly all included because it is not accessible to the schools in Finland and China without funding and contact. In order to delimit, the author has collected some essential personal information of those participants, which is listed in Table 2, and maximize the diversity of the participants regarding their teacher education, school location, teaching subject and grade, etc. Most the participants were contacted by the author’s friends or acquaintances as young teachers now or before with different backgrounds. One participant was successfully contacted through internet search.

Moreover, there are some limitations during the data collection process. Since semi-structured interview is the only data collection method, there is no pilot interview to refine the interview guide. In addition, it is not possible to avoid some issues of the language—the English proficiency of the interviewer and the interviewees, loss of memory and social desirability bias (Bryman, 2016). In order to overcome these issues, the author has found some previous studies, such as Eteläpelto et al. (2015) and Cardoso et al. (2014), which contains some examples of interview questions and can help the author design the interview guide. English dictionary can be used during the interviews, and it is possible to repeat questions or answers until they can be heard and comprehended. However, the loss of
memory and social desirability bias cannot be detected, and it should be solved by analyzing a larger sample size and other research designs, such as longitudinal design.
Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

In this chapter, the author will briefly introduce how different disciplines, scholars or traditions conceptualize and approach to professional agency and professional identity. Finally, the author will try to draw up the relationship between professional agency and professional identity within the subject-centered social-cultural approach.

2.1 Agency and Professional Agency

2.1.1 The Notion of Agency

The notion of agency is broad and has a multi-disciplinary background because it is widely involved and adopted in psychology, arthrography, gender studies and, recently, education, and it has been popular in practice-based professional learning during the past two decades (Eteläpelto, et al., 2013, p. 46; Billett et al., 2017, p. 1). Even though it is complex, Goller and Paloniemi (2017) summarize agency as ‘…the concept of agency is about individuals’ capacity to act’, and ‘…human beings are agents of power and change’ so as to be capable of ‘…making choices and acting on these choices in order to exert control over their lives and the environments they are living in…’ as ‘…single individuals and groups of individuals…’ (as cited in Billett et al., 2017, p. 1). In this sense, the philosophical term of agency is not completely new, Eteläpelto (2017), Eteläpelto et al. (2013) and Vähäsantanen (2015) point out the instability and uncertainty due to its controversial approaches to conceptualization. For instance, Eteläpelto et al. (2013) argue that “[w]ithin educational practice, the concept of agency has long been established, although it has not always been explicitly stated in connection with the development of educational and learning practices” (p. 46). Moreover, Eteläpelto et al. (2013) have widely reviewed the literature in the field of agency, and they conclude that the diversity of its notion is fundamentally situated in its ontological considerations suggested by different scholars, which philosophically involves “…the study of being: what is, what exists; hence…applied to what agency is, or might be.” (Vähäsantanen, 2013, p. 47-48). In other words, this conflict concerns about if agency should be a component of individuals’ subjectivity or not, or it is something between subjectivity or objectivity with a certain balance. In this regard, in the first place, the conceptualization of agency will be discussed in the following text.

When we look at the conceptualization of agency, Goller and Paloniemi (2017) conclude that the conflict of conceptualizing agency can be described from two dimensions— “…(a) agency understood in terms of personal capacity versus agency as behavior; (b) agency analysed primarily as an individual phenomenon versus agency at a collective level (i.e. exercised by groups of individuals)” (as cited in Billett et al., 2017,
p. 11). However, Goller and Paloniemi do not provide a further discussion about those dimensions because they warn that ‘placing chapters within these dimensions involves considerable simplification’ (Billett et al., 2017, p. 11). In the meantime, Eteläpelto et al. (2013) categorize those conceptualization approaches to *agency* into four types as ‘(i) social science discussion, (ii) post-structural discussion, (iii) socio-cultural learning research, and (iv) identity and life-course notions of agency’ in terms of their academic domains, and they propose a subject-centered socio-cultural (SCSC) approach for their conceptualization of *agency* because they consider that it is the ‘…most relevant for informing future research on professional learning, and for developing professional agency at work’ (p. 47). In the following table, the distinctions and the ontological discussions of *agency* by different schools or traditions are listed by Eteläpelto et al. (2013).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Scholar or tradition</th>
<th>Ontology and manifestations</th>
<th>Relationships between the individual and the social context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social science</td>
<td>Giddens</td>
<td>Agency as individuals’ intentional and rational actions, viewed as having social consequences</td>
<td>Inseparability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Temporality and identities not addressed</td>
<td>Analytical primacy from individual to social (micro to macro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archer</td>
<td>Natural, practical and social reality, and discursive, practical, and embodied relations with the world</td>
<td>Social and individual analytically separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agentic actions as intentional and goal-directed processes</td>
<td>Internal conversation and emotional elaboration seen as mediating processes between the individual and the social context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Historically changing social circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal identity and temporality taken into account</td>
<td>Inseparability: reducing individuals to discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-structural</td>
<td>Strong post-structural</td>
<td>Collective discourses: nothing outside texts</td>
<td>Material, cultural, economic, and social forces analytically separated from individuals’ self-experiences, identities, and subjectivities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agency as rewriting hegemonic power discourses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Temporality and identities not addressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermediate post-structural</td>
<td>Agency as people’s lived experience of their social relations and their capacity for self-reflection and action</td>
<td>Inseparability of individual and social: reduction of individual to social processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of self, human embodiments, and socially and culturally relational subjects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Temporality not addressed, identity and subjectivity strongly addressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural</td>
<td>Object-oriented</td>
<td>Process-ontology; rejection of individual and collective agency, subjugated by objects and tools of work</td>
<td>Inseparability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Temporality not addressed, identity and subjectivity rejected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental subject-oriented</td>
<td>Individuals as agentic actors in relation to the social world</td>
<td>Analytically separated (inclusively); interdependence and mutually constitutive relations between individual and social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Temporally constructed engagements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Intentionality and subjectivity manifested as participation, decisions as to what problems are worth solving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual temporality (development) include life history and prior experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life course and identity</td>
<td>Life course and identity</td>
<td>Individuals’ ways of constructing their life courses through choices and actions</td>
<td>Separated (exclusively); social and economic circumstances and living conditions seen as opportunities and constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Temporality considered in terms of individual life courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identities thoroughly addressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: this table is quoted from Eteläpelto et al. (2013, p. 60).
The table above can represent the complexity and controversy of the conceptualization approaches towards the notion of agency. However, it is unwise to take all the listed approaches into consideration and utilization. Vähasiltanen (2013) in her thesis explains that the humanist tradition neglects the role of a social context in affecting one’s choices of behavior, whereas some other extreme structural traditions ‘…such as the structuralistic and early Foucauldian perspective, offer a quite subjugated view of self by emphasizing the structure and structural factors over people’. Thus, only three approaches are between those two extreme forms— ‘…the socio-cultural approach…social sciences…and post-structural notions…’ (p. 22). In short, Vähasiltanen discusses the rationale to embrace both subjectivity and objectivity as two necessary components for the conceptualization of agency.

Even though Vähasiltanen has made a rational judgment and comment on the existing approaches towards agency, yet the questions about “what the balance between subjective individuals and objective structures is” and “what the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity is” are not clearly answered. In order to make the answers clear, Eteläpelto et al. (2013) proposes ‘a subject-centered socio-cultural approach to agency’ (the SCSC approach) towards the conceptualization of agency and, furtherly, professional agency (p. 60). The discussion of the SCSC approach is provided in the following section.

2.1.2 Professional Agency: A Subject-Centered Socio-Cultural Approach

The SCSC approach proposed by Eteläpelto et al. (2013) contains the following major features: 1) in terms of individuals’ subjectivity, the SCSC approach considers professional agency as a lifelong and developmental trajectory instead of a static point because ‘…if our aim is to understand how individual subjects renegotiate their work identities when they move from one working context to another, or when they navigate their pathways across workplace reforms, we need a developmental and life-course perspective’; 2) in terms of the socio-cultural context involving ‘…power relations and discourses…the material conditions and cultures of social interaction in work communities’, those external factors can resource or constrain professional agency; 3) individuals’ subjectivity temporally interdepends on the socio-cultural context; 4) thus, professional agency within the SCSC approach is about ‘…how the subject learns through processes of actively creating subjectivity’ at workplace (p. 60-61).

Besides, professional agency falls under the umbrella term of agency, and it should connect to the workplace. In some studies, such as King & Nomikou (2017) and Zhang & Shen (2012), agency seems to be assimilated as Bandura’s human agency from an individual and psychological perspective consisting of intentionality, forethought, self-regulation, self-reflectiveness. By contrast, Eteläpelto et al. (2014) claim that the keyword professional should be related to ‘…professional employee in relation of their work which is unlike hobbies’, and professional ‘…is often connected to high-status vocations that demand the kind of highly-valued expertise gained though higher education…’, such as lawyer and doctor, and ‘…teachers and nurses may be seen more as “semi-professionals” or “broadline professionals”’ (p. 648-649). Thus, professional agency should be manifested by a professional at the workplace instead of anyone in everyday life. Furthermore, within the framework of the SCSC approach, Eteläpelto et al. (2013) define professional agency as:
‘(1) Professional agency is practised (and manifested) when professional subjects and/or communities exert influence, make choices, and take stances in ways that affect their work and/or their professional identities; (2) Professional agency is always exercised for certain purposes and within certain (historically formed) socio-cultural and material circumstances, and it is constrained and resourced by these circumstances; (3) The practice of professional agency is closely intertwined with professional subjects’ work-related identities comprising their professional and ethical commitments, ideals, motivations, interests, and goals; (4) Professional subjects’ unique (work) experiences, knowledge, and competencies function as individual developmental affordances and individual resources for the practice of professional agency at work; (5) In the investigation of professional agency, individuals and social entities are analytically separate but mutually constitutive of each other; (6) Professional subjects have discursive, practical, and natural (embodied) relations to their work; these are temporally constructed within the conditions of the work; (7) Professional agency is needed especially for developing one’s work and work communities, and for taking creative initiatives. It is also needed for professional learning and for the renegotiation of work-related identities in (changing) work practices’ (p. 62).

To simplify, the SCSC approach identifies professional agency as ‘(a) influencing at work, (b) contributing to work practices, and (c) the negotiation of professional identity’ (Vähäsantanen et al. 2016a, b; as cited in Billett et al., 2017, p. 186-187). As mentioned before, the socio-cultural conditions at the workplace and professional subjectivities are constitutive and interdependent as two separates and contain the temporality from a developmental perspective. Furthermore, the SCSC approach seems to be post-modern because it rejects the binarity separating the external socio-cultural context and the internal self, and prioritizes subjectivity over objectivity (Bryman, 2016, p. 377). Hence, the definition of professional agency can be drafted as:
2.2 Identity and Professional Identity

Similar to the discussion of agency above, ontological conflicts also exist in the conceptualization of identity. Commonly speaking, identity involves one basic question about “who I am” or “what a self is”. However, some perspectives disagree with that static answer. Lanas (2017) adopts a post-structuralist approach which is ‘…always a practice of “becoming” …’, towards self and professional identity, and thus self is a verb answering the question about “who I can become” within the available titles and recognitions in ‘…the socio-cultural-historical context….’. Furtherly, novice teachers’ professional identity ‘…is not something that some individuals simply are (or are not) but something that they do’ (p. 69-70). Similarly, Trent (2013) adopts ‘identity-in-practice’ and ‘identity-in-discourse’ which emphasize that how one’s working practice and the discourse in the society and the workplace play the role in the negotiation of professional identity (p. 263-265). Those studies imply that how identity or professional identity are complex, and it is also necessary to take the socio-cultural context into account.

The notion of identity is complex when ‘…self, discourse, narrative, structure, agency, reflection, emotional aspect…’ intertwine, and identity should be discussed from personal and the collective dimensions (Cardoso et al., 2014, p. 83-84). More specifically, Eteläpelto et al. (2014) define professional identity as ‘an identity of a professional employee in relation of their work which is unlike hobbies’, which is subtly different from occupational, vocational and work identities intertwined with early

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1 (1) Personal dimension: a) a personal aspect, concerning the internalization of social positions and their meanings as part of the structure of the self; and b) a social aspect, related to the impact of cultural meanings and social situations in the identification of an individual with a group.

2 (1) Occupational identity: an identity of a range of an occupational field, such as agriculture and education;

2 (2) Vocational identity: a more personal aspect of identity in various vocational fields, which involves personal commitments and, perhaps, a mission of taking care of or educating other people;

2 (3) Work identity: similar as professional identity but more general, and it tends to involve more concrete or everyday work (Eteläpelto et al., 2014, p. 647-648).
humanist, structuralist, modernist and post-structuralist traditions\(^3\) (p. 647-648). Besides, Chen (2017) the notion of teacher professionalism should not only be defined within the criteria merely related to a certain academic degree, instead, compared with other professions or jobs, the most important aspect of teacher professionalism does not emphasize the a teacher’s academic background—‘1) a professional teacher should grasp the knowledge that he teaches, and know how to teach and deliver the knowledge effectively and efficiently; 2) a professional teacher should not only be highly virtuous, but also know how to cultivate moral citizens for the future society’ (2017, p. 97).

The construction and negotiation of professional identity is a continuing and dynamic in one’s life, which involves the following stages:

(i) level of preoccupation, which is divided into two phases (preparatory and exploratory) and takes place during childhood and adolescence, when the anticipatory socialization\(^4\) plays a major role; (ii) learning stage… which corresponds to the phase in which the construction of professional identity is at its highest level, and in which the individual is identified with the chosen profession; (iii) professional stage, which closes the gap between theory and practice, and corresponds to the phase of accumulation of experience and strengthening of professional identity, in which the individual uses the anticipatory reflection\(^5\) to reinterpret the experiences of the past, and from this reinterpretation quotes the future action; (iv) post-professional stage, which represents the changes of professional identity after the reform (Cardoso et al., 2014, p. 84).

As mentioned before, identity is both a noun and a verb that intertwines individuals’ life experiences with socio-cultural contexts. In the figure below, Eteläpelto et al. (2014) summarize how negotiations of professional identity involves individual and contextual factors at the workplace (p. 655-656). The relationship between the social and individual aspects of professional identity is ‘…reciprocal: professional identity negotiations influence transformations of work practices, and transformation of work practices (practices embedded in the socio-cultural and material contexts of the workplace) push individuals to negotiate their work identities’ (Eteläpelto et al., 2014, p. 665).

\(^3\) (1) Self in early humanist tradition: an absolute, autonomous self that separate from the society; (2) Self in structuralist tradition: a self subjugated to the material and social structures; (3) Self in modernity tradition: an entrepreneurial and reflective self in the social structures, which can maintain the identities but possibly transform the structure; (4) Self in post-structural tradition: an agentic self that: (a) can oppose, avoid or resist social suggestions by creating a social position being consistent to the individual subjectivity or identity; (b) can renegotiate the individual’s identity and influence social practices (Eteläpelto et al., 2014, p. 649-650).

\(^4\) Anticipatory socialization: a process of personal projection on a future career by identifying members of a reference group.

\(^5\) Anticipatory reflection: a process of looking to the future with the knowledge of the past through the point of view of the present; the recall of past experience allows us to anticipate future experiences.
Connections Between Professional Agency and Professional Identity

Both (professional) agency and (professional) identity trap into a controversial discussion regarding their ontological considerations. According to the discussions above, it is obvious to know that professional identity is one of the important factors interconnecting with professional agency, and both professional agency and professional identity can be conceptualized and analyzed through the lens of the SCSC approach.

On one hand, the exercise of professional agency is not within a vacuum environment, ‘…but rather in relation to concretes aspects of professional identities and duties’ (Eteläpelto et al., 2014, p. 665). On the other hand, ‘…it is teachers’ actions that produce the transformations and maintenance of professional identities, rather than sociocultural practices and norms’, which means that professional agency (re)negotiates professional identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons,
To simplify and generally speaking, ‘[t]he emergence of agency as a way to externalize an identity’, whereas identity ‘…is also mediated by actors’ agency and power to negotiate’ (Beauchamp & Thomas; 2011, p. 7; Hall et al., 2012, p. 104).

Within the SCSC approach, an overall relationship between professional agency and professional identity can be figured as follows:

![Figure 3 An overall relationship between professional agency and professional identity.](image)

Chapter 3 Contextual Setting of the Study

Since 1980s, the global trend in educational development and policy-making reflects neo-liberalism, which can be characterized as: 1) increasing competition among schools; 2) free school-choice by parents; 3) standardization and outcome-driven policy reforms in education; 4) emphasis on core subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, and science; 5) exam-based accountabilities for teachers and schools, which targets decentralization of administration and students’ achievements based on standardized tests (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 142-147). In some international survey studies, both China and Finland have high social status of teachers and highly-performed students in terms of the latest results of Global Teacher Status Index by Varkey GEMS Foundation (2013) and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) by OECD (2016c). In order to understand how teachers in China and Finland work in their socio-cultural contexts, a general introduction of the education system, teachers and teacher education in China and Finland will be discussed in the following texts.

3.1 Finnish Educational Context

The Republic of Finland (Finland), which is situated in Northern Europe, is one of the most developed, equal and welfare state in the world (Sahlberg, 2015; p. 139-140). This fact can be proved by the latest statistics from the United Nations—1) the Human Development Index in Finland is 0.895, which ranks 23 in the world and is considered as ‘Very High Human Development’; 2) the expected years of schooling is 17 years, and 100% of the population over 25 years old graduated from at least some secondary education; 3) the gross enrolment ratios in primary (101%), secondary (145%) and tertiary (89%) education are high with nearly zero drop-out rate in primary education (0.4%) and very minimized inequality in education (2%); 4) government expenditure on education occupies 7.1% of the GDP, and the GDP per capita is 38,643 US dollars among the 5.5-million population 5) gender inequality does nearly not exist (the Gender Development Index is 1, which means there is no gender inequality) (UNDP, n.d.a).

However, Finland was poor and uncompetitive before the educational reforms happened in the second half of the 20th century. Sahlberg (2015) in his book introduces how the educational reforms has shaken up the country—1) holding a master’s degree has been a must for all teachers in Finland (except kindergarten/pre-school teachers) since 1970s; 2) comprehensive schools established, which emerged primary schools and lower secondary, and the knowledge, teaching, learning and curriculum was rethought and designed in 1980s; 3) between 1970s and 1990s, the education system has been decentralized gradually, which means the National Core Curriculum has assigned a lot of responsibilities and autonomies to municipalities, schools and teachers; 4) after 2000, educational reforms tend to emphasize on the administration and efficiency of basic education structure in order to maintain the
sustainability (Sahlberg, 2015, pp. 42-48). As a result, by professionalizing teaching staff, decentralizing the management system and rethinking the philosophy of education, Finland has stood out in the PISA test for more than a decade, and Finnish society has become prosperous as well as a model of education system in the world (Anderson, 2013, p. 373; EduSkills OECD, 2012). In this section, an overall picture of the education system and teacher education in Finland will be drawn in the following text.

3.1.1 Education System and Educational Management in Finland

Everyone in the Finnish society must have equal access to cost-free, high-quality education ‘…irrespective of their ethnic origin, age, wealth or where they live’, and there is ‘[n]o dead-end in the education system’ and, moreover, the education system considers ‘[e]arly childhood and basic education as part of life-long learning’ (EduSkills OECD, 2012; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017). Apart from the values of high-quality lifelong education for all, the Finnish education system can also reflect “…the nation’s wholesale commitment to remain internationally competitive by bucking the conventional neoliberal logic of privatization” (Anderson, 2013, p. 373). As a result, there is no ranking among schools even though they have the national evaluations of learning outcomes (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017, p. 13-14).

The National Core Curriculum guides the development of local curriculum at the municipal level and the teaching at the classroom level—the local curriculum fills in the content of ‘…the values, underlying principles as well as general educational and teaching objectives…’, syllabus, distribution of teaching hours according to the local conditions, and teachers are free to choose their teaching methods, textbooks and other teaching materials (European Commision, 2015). The new national curriculum introduced since autumn 2016 emphasizes the central and active role of students, and it categorizes the core learning goals and competences as: ‘1. Thinking and learning to learn; 2. Cultural literacy, communication and expression; 3. Managing daily life, taking care of oneself and others; 4. Multiliteracy; 5. ICT-skills; 6. Entrepreneurial and work life skills; 7. Participation and building sustainable future’ (European Commision, 2015).

Most Finnish educational institutions are free and public, and every pupil should have equal rights to receive educational supports which, especially, integrate special needs education into the mainstream school system from primary to upper-secondary schools. The education system can be roughly divided into early-childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education, among which the primary and lower-secondary education are compulsory (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2017). The education system can be illustrated as follow:
Figure 4 Education System in Finland.
Note: quoted from Ministry of Education and Culture (2017).
Responsibility, trust and decentralization are three keywords in the Finnish educational management and leadership at all levels, even though, as mentioned before, the National Core Curriculum and the national evaluations of learning outcomes exist in the system. Educational autonomy is pervasive across the whole system—‘[e]ducation providers are responsible for practical teaching arrangements as well as the effectiveness and quality of their education… Local authorities determine how much autonomy is passed on to schools’; teachers enjoy pedagogical freedom in terms of choices of teaching methods, materials and textbooks; higher institutions decides their education, research and administration (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017, p. 11-13). The quality assurance of all educational providers strongly emphasizes on self-evaluation at the school level—the primary aims of the national evaluations of learning outcomes is for a development purpose in order to check ‘…how well the objectives have been reached as set in the core curricula and qualification…requirements… the results are not used for ranking the schools’ by annually testing samples of pupils in pre-primary and basic education; higher institutions are responsible for their assessments of operations and outcomes, and national boarders are responsible for advising and supports (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017, p. 13-14). In the illustration below, the main responsibilities in the educational management system from national to classroom levels are summarized:

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**Figure 5 Educational Management System in Finland.**

3.1.2 Teaching Staff and Teacher Education in Finland

Teaching profession is attractive for young Finns and highly praised in the society, and ‘[t]hus, the teacher education institutions can select those applicants most suitable for the teaching profession’ (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017, p. 24). The annual admission rate is relative low (1) 10% in class teacher education; 2) 10%-50% in subject teacher education, which depends on the subject; 3) 30% in vocational teacher education), and the candidates’ personalities, interpersonal, networking and partnership skills are examined before and during their teacher education (Sahlberg, 2015, pp. 103-107; Lavonen, Korhonen, & Juuti, 2015; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017, p. 24). ‘Teachers in basic and general upper secondary education are required to hold a Master’s degree’, including class teachers, subject teachers, special education teachers and guidance counselors, and all the vocational teachers and university teachers/lecturers need to complete pedagogical studies (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017, p. 24-26). The teaching personnel in Finland are highly educated, which is drafted, except special education teachers, guidance counselors and university teachers/lecturers, in the following figure:

**Most teachers are required a master’s degree**

![Figure 6 Qualifications for teachers in early-childhood, primary and upper-secondary education in Finland.](image)


“Teacher training can be either concurrent, with pedagogical training integrated into the Master’s programme, or consecutive, with the pedagogical training completed after the initial degree…for example in vocational teacher education”, and teacher education is research-oriented (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.; Lavonen, Korhonen, & Juuti, 2015). The core curriculum in pedagogical training include ‘…general courses in education, educational research, subject pedagogy courses and teaching practice’, which help student ‘…become aware of the different dimensions of the teaching profession…combine educational theories their subject knowledge as well as their personal histories’, grasp ‘…theories of learning…’, ‘…learn to collaborate in different networks and partnerships and obtain a readiness…’ (Lavonen, Korhonen, & Juuti, 2015).
In terms of teaching practice, Eteläpelto et al. (2015) and Lanas (2017) claim that a total of 16 weeks of teaching practice under small-group supervisions in teacher training schools is required before graduation. In-service training and continuing professional development are required for teachers in Finland. The in-service training is welcomed by teachers because ‘Finnish teachers consider in-service training to be a privilege and therefore participate actively’ (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.). The in-service training is funded and managed in multiple ways—the country funds the national training programme as educational providers’ first choice, while educational providers can apply for funds for other in-service training programmes, and teaching staff are salaried during the training session (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017, p. 26).

In Finnish education system, it is reasonable to say that “teacher are leaders, and leaders are teachers”. Most schools are led by teachers since “[p]rincipals are generally required a higher academic degree and teaching qualifications…appropriate work experience and a certificate in educational administration…University rectors must hold a doctorate or a professorship…” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017, p. 26). Teachers enjoy great respects and trust in the society and are highly-trained and professional in terms of their competences in ‘…teachers’ knowledge base, their willingness to collaboration and partnership and, moreover, to life-long-learning’, and thus, as mentioned before, they are highly autonomous in classroom (Lavonen, Korhonen, & Juuti, 2015; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017, p. 11-13). High degree of autonomy makes teachers play a role as a leader in classrooms. However, teachers’ autonomy tends to diminish in recent years because of the global trend in neo-liberalism of policy-making and tightening New Public Management (Eteläpelto et al., 2015, p. 661).

3.2 Chinese Educational Context

The People’s Republic of China (China), which has the largest education system around the globe, is one of the rapidest developing and the most populous country in the world—1) the number of population is over 1.36 billion; 2) the yearly GDP growth was over 10% between 2000 and 2009, which has slightly slowed down in recent years, and the GDP per capita in 2015 is 7925 US dollars; 3) the World Bank defines China as an upper-middle-income country; 4) China is a diverse country in terms of ethnicities and governance systems under the control by the central government; 5) OECD considers the sample region of Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu and Guangdong in China as one of the high educational performers according to the result of PISA 2015 in the sampling area (OECD, 2016a, p. 1). Besides, some latest statistics from UNDP can be notably mentioned—1) the Human Development Index in China is 0.738, which ranks 90 among nearly 200 countries and regions in the world but has improved rapidly from 0.5 since 1990; 2) the expected years of schooling (13.5), the gross enrolment ratio in primary (104%), secondary (94%) and tertiary (39%) education and the population with at least some secondary education (75%) tells that China has generally universalized primary and secondary education but not in higher education; 3) the Gini coefficient (42.2) and
inequality in income (29.5%) can indicate that the income inequality is moderately high; 4) gender inequality (the Gender Development Index is 0.954) is nearly eliminated (n.d.b).

In short, China is on the highway of development but facing the challenges of unsustainability and inequality, China has achieved a lot for its largest education system in the world but still has a long way to go. In the following text, a general discussion of Chinese education system, educational management, teachers and teacher education will be given.

3.2.1 Education System and Educational Management in China

The latest released data from National Bureau of Statistics of China (2016) indicates that the education system in China is immense, for example, the number of enrolled pupil in primary education is nearly 100 million in 2015. Apart from its immensity, this system is mostly public but more and more diverse—the ‘[e]Education is state-run, with little involvement of private providers in the school sector, and increasingly decentralised…’ and around 80% of the educational providers is funded by the government (OECD, 2016b, p. 9-16). The government has increased the public expenditure in education to 4% of its GDP since 2012 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2016). In this sense, even though most of the schools is funded by the government, a certain amount of fees (for example, compulsory education is only free of tuition fees) is charged but a national loan, scholarship and financial aid system targeting financially disadvantage students, especially those in rural areas, exists at all levels of education (OECD, 2016b, p. 22). In recent years, the educational efforts and reforms place the emphasis on equity and quality including the following issues concerning with ‘…rural, remote, impoverished and ethnic areas; primary education in rural areas, vocational education and pre-school education; financially underprivileged students; the development of high-quality teaching/groups of teachers’ (OECD, 2016a, p. 2). The education system is divided into pre-school, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and higher education, and the compulsory education is nine-year and provided by primary and lower secondary schools. The basic education covers pre-school, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary education (Yu, 2013, p. 5). The education system is drafted below:
For thousands of years, different centralized tests and examinations from the national government have played a central role in education in China, which has become exaggerated after the implementation of ‘only-child policy’ because children must work hard and compete in the standardized examinations in order to further their education provided by a limited number of schools, especially the prestigious key schools appointed by the government, for the large population (Andersson & Nordström, 2014, p. 20-21). In this sense, even though the national control on education has been quite tight for long, yet it tends to gradually become more and more flexible and decentralized. Since 1988, the central government has begun to shrink the central role of the national curriculum by leaving more room to localize the curriculum and encouraging local authorities, institutions and schools to develop their own textbooks which, still, need to be approved by the national or provincial governments and based on the national curriculum (OECD, 2016b, p. 21). The current curriculum in basic education is based on The Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline since 2001, and it was renewed in 2011 (OECD, 2016b, p. 23). In order to respond to the

Figure 7 Education system in China.
Note: adopted from Hawkins et al. (2009) and OECD (2016b, p. 10).
increasing needs of all-round-developed citizens in the future, some research articles and reports, including OECD (2016a), OECD (2016b) and Andersson & Nordström (2014), indicate that the curriculum reform, which is standardized in nature, prioritizes ‘…learning process and students’ attitudes towards learning in addition to the content to be taught; encouraging active and creative problem solving, interactive and co-operative learning, and less… passive rote learning; students’ growth and formative assessment, teacher training and teachers’ professional development’, and focuses on ‘…the moral, intellectual and physical development of students in order to cultivate moral virtues, discipline, culture and ideals’. However, it is criticized that the curriculum reform cannot change the exam-oriented culture in schools and additionally imposes more workload on teachers and students, and there is still a long way to go to change the exam-oriented culture (Andersson & Nordström, 2014, p. 20-22).

Bush (2011) highlights that the management and leadership model in China’s education system is bureaucratic model, which is a formal leadership model characterized as its: 1) hierarchy of authority as structure; 2) goal-orientation; 3) clear division of labor and duties; 4) rules and regulations as power amid impersonal relationships; 6) meritocracy (p. 78). OECD (2016b) classifies the educational management system into four levels, which is illustrated as follows:
3.2.2 Teaching Staff and Teacher Education in China

The world’s largest education system has an extensive teaching team. For example, the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2016) reports that China has approximately fifteen million teachers working on a full-time basis in the system in 2015. Teaching profession enjoys the highest social status compared with other countries, and it is respected, attractive and popular in the society, especially in big cities even though this profession is moderately paid (OECD, 2016b, p.17; Varkey GEMS Foundation, 2013). The reason why teaching profession is attractive can be concluded as: 1) the establishment of the National Teachers’ Day and Teachers Law clarifying teachers’ social status and obligations; 2) the stability and benefits of teaching profession recognized by the society; 3) a long history that teachers should be respected, and teachers are vital in knowledge...
transmission, education and one’s future (OECD, 2016b, p.17; Varkey GEMS Foundation, 2013; Yu, 2013, p. 17). However, a large-scale survey study shows that the main motivations of choosing teacher education by nearly 2000 teacher students in China are ‘the stability of teaching career’ (54.38%) and ‘the advice from parents or teachers’ (35.67%), and the option of ‘love teaching’ is chosen by only 35.52% of the participants (Yu, 2013, p. 46).

Unlike Finland, teacher education in China is not a must for teacher qualification, and teacher selection is based on exams. In the recent years, all the applicants must pass the Teacher’s Qualification Examination, which is a national exam, after they receive diplomas from universities or normal colleges (OECD, 2016a, p. 2). In the past, this exam can be skipped by those who graduate from teacher education, which is not allowed nowadays (OECD, 2016b, p. 17). Applicants must pass the exam, including a written exam (professional ethics, comprehensive quality, content knowledge and pedagogic skills) and an interview (basic competencies and teaching practices), and they must submit a criminal record, a reference letter of morality assessment as well as a health certificate (OECD, 2016b, p. 17-18). Teacher qualification can be roughly categorized into teacher qualification for pre-schools, primary schools, junior-high schools, senior-high schools, vocational schools and higher institutions, and most teachers in China are subject teachers (OECD, 2016b, p. 17-18; Yu, 2013, p. 15). Each qualification makes teachers eligible to teach at the respective level except that junior-high-school certificates also qualify to teach in primary schools, and senior-high-school certificates qualify to teach from primary to senior-high levels (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, n.d.). In terms of the minimum educational background, pre-school and primary-school teaching qualifications require at least normal training from a secondary normal school, junior-high-school teaching qualifications require at least an associate degree, and senior-high-school and higher-education teaching qualifications require a bachelor’s degree (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, n.d.). Teaching profession is no longer a ‘iron rice bowl’, which means that the employment is not permanent as before—teachers in public schools must fulfill the requirements in ‘…ethics assessment…annual assessment…professional development…psychological and physical health…and…other requirements prescribed by local governments’ every five years by re-registering their qualification certificates in order to keep their teaching positions (OECD, 2016a, p.2; OECD, 2016b, p. 18-19).

Pre-service teacher education is mainly provided by universities, especially those normal universities administrated by the Ministry of Education or by the provincial governments (Yu, 2013, p. 21-24). “The teacher education is controlled by the government and has been approximately the same since 1976” (Andersson & Nordström, 2014, p. 17). Thus, the curriculum of teacher education, consisting of general education, pedagogical training and knowledge as well as subject knowledge, are almost the same at those higher institutions (Yu, 2013, p. 28-34). Subject knowledge is emphasized as the first priority whereas pedagogical training and knowledge is the secondary emphasis in terms of learning hours and credits (Yu, 2013, p. 28-34). However, the content of pre-service teacher training varies from institution to institution, from programme to programme—Zhejiang Normal University, for example, requires students to finish a nine-week teaching practice, which relatively longer than other normal universities in China; Beijing Normal University aims to cultivate research-based teachers; a teacher claims that
Inner Mongolia Normal University did not provide teaching practice during his teacher education (Yu, 2013, p. 27-36; Andersson & Nordström, 2014, p. 33).

At the workplace, teaching staff must attend professional development and are ranked by the promotion system. ‘According to the new training policy, each teacher in public primary and secondary schools must take no less than 360 class hours of training every five years’, and it is a must for the re-registration of teaching qualification (OECD, 2016b, p. 17). Similarly, the government also provides some other free but mandatory training programmes, such as the National Teacher Training Programme for Teachers in Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary Schools in 2010, especially for new teachers, new principals and teaching staff in rural areas (OECD, 2016b, p. 17-18). The promotion system categorizes teachers in basic education into professor senior teacher, senior teacher, first-level teacher, second-level teacher and third-level teacher by assessing their publications, foreign language skills and awards, but publications and foreign language skills are exempted for teachers in rural areas (OECD, 2016b, p. 20-21). The promotion process is competitive, and it influences a teacher’s salary (OECD, 2016b, p. 20-22).
Chapter 4 Research Methodology

4.1 Research Strategy and Research Design

In order to achieve the objectives of this research that the author aims to explore how the selected novice teachers make sense of their professional agency and professional identity, under the circumstance mentioned in the previous chapter that the definition of professional agency is still inexact and unstable, the author chooses qualitative approach as research strategy in this thesis. Unlike quantitative researches, qualitative researches place the emphasis on ‘…words rather than qualification in collection and analysis of data’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 374). Without a hypothesis, an inductive approach requires to conclude a theory from data and findings (Bryman, 2016, p. 23). Even though this thesis contains theoretical framework, it does not mean that it is deductive (theory is firstly used to form a hypothesis leading to data collection, analysis and revision of theory) because ‘…theory is often used as a background to qualitative investigations’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 21). As for epistemology and ontology, Bryman (2016) describes it is usual that qualitative research is interpretivist as its epistemological position and constructionist as its ontological position (p. 375). Epistemologically speaking, this thesis follows the principle of interpretivism that emphasizes on “…the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants…” (Bryman, 2016, p. 375). Besides, this thesis is constructivist as its ontological position, which means that “…social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals, rather than phenomena ‘out there’ and separate from those involved in its construction” (Bryman, 2016, p. 375). In short, the findings of this thesis will be derived from how those novice teachers make sense of their professional agency and professional identity at their workplace, and they construct the meanings and notions of their voices on professional agency and professional identity at their workplace.

Research design means ‘…the framework for the collection and analysis of data’ that ‘…reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of the research process’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 40). In order to answer the research questions, especially to find out the similarities and differences based on the voices from the Finnish and Chinese novice teachers, the author will adopt comparative design as research design in the thesis. Bryman (2016) describes comparative design as means ‘…to seek explanations for similarities and differences or to gain a greater awareness and a deeper understanding of social reality in different national contexts’ when ‘…at least two contrasting cases… are compared in relation to two or more meaningfully contrasting cases or situations’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 64-65). In this thesis, there are two contrasting cases, including a group of Chinese novice teachers and a group of Finnish novice teachers, and the comparison can be found in Chapter 6.
As for research quality, Bryman (2016) describes trustworthiness as an alternative for qualitative researches, which includes credibility\(^6\), transferability\(^7\), dependability\(^8\) and confirmability\(^9\) (p. 44). If a qualitative research is credible, it means that the research is conducted according to the good research practices, and the findings are agreed by the involved participants or by the peers who are familiar with the research fields (Bryman, 2016, p. 384). In order to ensure credibility, the author tries to carry out the research as much authentically and bias-free as possible, and all the documents are archived and transparent for the participants and readers. Transferability is limited in qualitative research because it does not aim to reach a generalized conclusion by examining a small sample size (Bryman, 2016, p. 384). Transferability is quite limited because of the small sample size, but it is ensured by the description of the research context, including the information about the participants, data collection and analysis process, which is described in the rest of the text in Chapter 4. Dependability should be ensured by transparency or ‘audit trail’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 384). All the documents concerning with the information of the participants, interview recordings, transcriptions, data analysis have been anonymized and shared on the readers’ request in order to ensure the dependability. Even though the complete objectivity is impossible, Bryman (2016) recommends that personal values or theoretical inclinations should not sway the research findings (p. 386). During the research process, the author will try to conclude the findings based on data and evidences instead of personal preference in order to maximize the confirmability.

4.2 Sampling, Data Collection and Analysis

The rationale of defining “novice teachers” is not the same in other studies. In the author’s literature review, the author found that some researchers defined “novice teachers” merely in terms of their work experience ranging ‘…from student teacher (a university student who practice in schools before graduation) to at most 7 years teaching experience’ (Peng, 2018, p. 23). It is mentioned before that the initial five-year teaching can be characterized as a novice period because of ‘…uncertainty and a fast learning pace, during which teachers construct their professional practice’ (Berliner, 1986; as cited in Heikonen et al., 2017, p. 255). In the Finnish context, on one hand, Eteläpelto et al. (2015) in their study selected 13 primary school teachers who had worked in their schools from one to five years after completing their teacher education. On the other hand, Eteläpelto et al. (2015) and Lanas (2017) mention the teacher education in Finland comprises 16 weeks of teaching practice under supervisions (Peng, 2018, p. 24). In the Chinese context, Zhang & Shen (2012) highlight that the teachers having the maximum of two year of teaching experience after teacher education can be seen as novice teachers in their study (as cited in Peng, 2018, p. 24). Meanwhile, Salleh & Tan (2013) highlight that the hierarchical teacher promotion system (the promotion system is introduced in Section 3.2.2) in Shanghai, China, prescribes that the third-grade teachers are novice teachers, and they have to attend the mentorship

\(^6\) Credibility: “…how believable are the findings?” (Bryman, 2016, p. 44)

\(^7\) Transferability: “…do the findings apply to other contexts?” (Bryman, 2016, p. 44)

\(^8\) Dependability: “…are the findings likely to apply at other times?” (Bryman, 2016, p. 44)

\(^9\) Conformability: “…has the investigator allowed his or her values to intrude to a high degree?” (Bryman, 2016, p. 44)
programme in Shanghai. In terms of probation, Niemi (2013) states that there is no inspectorate or probation for teachers in Finland, whereas the Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China states that ‘[t]hose with qualifications for teachers who are for the first time appointed as teachers shall undergo a probation period’, which should be approved by the local governments at or above the county level (The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, n.d.). Although teachers in China should undergo probation periods, the duration is not specified. Besides, university teachers should be excluded because they are called ‘academics’ in some studies, and not every of them holds teaching degrees (Peng, 2018, p. 23).

Since it is hard to quantify the duration of novice period, and it is impossible to generalize every novice teacher. Çakmak (2013) reminds us that ‘[t]he first years of teaching can also be regarded as a challenging and testing time as teachers may face numerous problems… that each novice teacher faces might be different since individual experiences vary’ (p. 55). Moir (1999) has summarized that novice teachers should usually have to experience five phases—anticipation\textsuperscript{10}, survival\textsuperscript{11}, disillusionment\textsuperscript{12}, rejuvenation\textsuperscript{13}, and reflection\textsuperscript{14} (as cited in Curry et al., 2016, p. 45). In sum, the duration of novice period varies from one teacher to another one, which depends on their life and work experience, and, thus, the identity of “novice teachers” should be self-identified by teachers themselves.

Based on the argument above, in order to ensure the comparability, the author formulates the following criteria to select the interviewees, even though it is difficult to quantify the duration of their novice period. All the participants should:

- have graduated from teacher education in their home countries;
- be officially recruited as qualified teacher in public early-childhood, primary or secondary schools;
- have less than 3 years’ teaching experience after graduation from teacher education;
- be able and feel comfortable to speak English (for the Finnish teachers).

In accordance with the criteria above, the author mainly adopted snow sampling as sampling technique. Bryman (2016) describes snowball sampling that it starts with a small sample of people relevant to the research questions, and they can help looking for the other

\textsuperscript{10} “The anticipation phase occurs during the practical experience of teacher preparation (i.e., student teaching), and novices have an idealized view of the teaching role and are highly committed to their career. The anticipation phase generally lasts through the beginning weeks of the school year until novices really acclimate to the daily routine of being a teacher” (Curry et al., 2016, p. 45).

\textsuperscript{11} “In the survival phase, novices spend a disproportionate amount of time related to curriculum planning and begin to feel overwhelmed by the demands of their work load (Moir, 1999). This stage generally lasts from a few weeks into the first semester until about 2 months” (Curry et al., 2016, p. 45).

\textsuperscript{12} “During the disillusionment phase, novice teachers’ stress increases as they are expected to teach, meet with parents, and receive their first instructional feedback from school administrators” (Moir, 1999; as cited in Curry et al., 2016, p. 45).

\textsuperscript{13} “The rejuvenation phase, according to Moir (1999), generally occurs after the winter break when the novice teacher has had time to personally refresh through spending time in pleasurable activities (e.g., social events, rest) and returns to the school environment refocused” (Curry et al., 2016, p. 45).

\textsuperscript{14} “The final phase, reflection, includes a personal assessment by the novice of the year’s challenges, his/her strengths, and accomplishments. More importantly, during this phase, novices begin visioning their futures and the changes they will make to improve their own and students’ success” (Curry et al., 2016, p. 45).
participants with the relevant experiences or characteristics (p. 415). the author has found ten participants, five novice teachers in China and five in Finland. Due to the limitation of this thesis, almost all the participants were found in the author’s secondary contacts with the help from some of the author’s schoolmates, classmates or friends who graduated from teacher education in recent years, except Teacher 8 who was found by contacting her principal on the internet. All the participants are female, qualified teachers and between 22 to 27 years old. Their personal information was collected online via Survey Monkey, and their personal information can be presented in the following table:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nick name</th>
<th>Highest teaching degree</th>
<th>Graduation year</th>
<th>Length of teaching experience</th>
<th>Teaching subject(s)</th>
<th>School type and location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree in Early-Childhood Education</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>English; no subject for kindergarten teaching</td>
<td>Public kindergarten in Yangzhou, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree in Early-Childhood Education</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1 year and 6 months</td>
<td>No subject for kindergarten teaching</td>
<td>Public kindergarten in Dongying, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics and Applied Mathematics (Normal)</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Public lower-secondary school in Foshan, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree in English (Normal)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1 year and 4 months</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Public primary school in Siping, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>Master's Degree in Subject Teaching (English)</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Public lower-secondary school in Foshan, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 6</td>
<td>Master's degree in Teaching English and Spanish</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>English and Spanish</td>
<td>Public primary and secondary school in Jyväskylä, Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 7</td>
<td>Master's Degree in Education</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Public primary and secondary school in Rantasalmi, Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 8</td>
<td>Master’s Degree in English and minored in Nordic Languages and Education</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>English and Swedish</td>
<td>Public primary and lower secondary school in Helsinki, Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 9</td>
<td>Master's Degree in Education</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>3 years and 7 months (including 1-year teaching before graduation)</td>
<td>Finnish, mathematics, biology, art, PE, craft, music</td>
<td>Public primary school in Tampere, Finland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 10</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree in Early-Childhood Education</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>1 year and 4 months</td>
<td>No subject for kindergarten and pre-school teaching</td>
<td>Public kindergarten and pre-school in Espoo, Finland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Due to the research objectives, questions and feasibility, the author has adopted semi-structured interview as data collection method. A semi-structured interview should contain a list of questions or topic as interview guide, and it also allow the interviewer to ask some other further questions picked up from the interviewee’s replies (Bryman, 2016, p. 468; Silverman, 2011, p. 131-135). Moreover, Bryman recommends that the questions or topics in the interview guide should not be so specific and leave a certain flexibility for the interviewee to answer (p. 469-470). In order to answer the research questions, the author has designed an interview guide, which can be seen at Appendix 1 and 2. The interview guide is based on the theoretical framework in Chapter 2 and some example questions in a previous study by Eteläpelto (2015).

All the interviews were conducted on the internet via WeChat, Facebook Messenger or Skype during February and March 2018. The duration of each interview varies from 30 to 55 minutes and were recorded by mobile phone or Apowersoft on laptop. Before each interview, the author sent an informed consent form to each interviewee as well as a survey form on Survey Monkey online in order to collect their personal information including the information in Table 2. For the confidentiality reason, some personal information, including full-name, school name and institution of teacher education, should be excluded in the thesis. The interview language is Chinese for the Chinese participants, and English for the Finnish participants. Since Chinese language is the author’s and the Chinese participants’ mother tongue, the conversations with those Chinese participants were unhindered. Some Finnish participants could not fully express themselves because their mother tongue is Finnish, but it was not often, and they were free to pause and look up some vocabulary in dictionaries. According to Appendix 1 and 2, all the interviews can be divided into three parts—a lead-in introducing the author’s personal experience as a new teacher before, the research background and asking their challenges during the beginning period; professional agency; professional identity. All the interviews were finalized with an open-ended question “do you have any other questions, thoughts or comments?” in order to motivate the interviewees to provide more information. However, Teacher 3 was the first interviewee, and the author did not ask the question “does your school have any criteria or policy to identity who novice/beginning teachers are?” because of lack of interview experience. Since Teacher 3 and Teacher 5 were working in the same school at that moment, the answer to the question can be shared.

Thematic analysis is the analytical tool in this thesis. Thematic analysis is a dynamic process searching for themes that relates to the research focus (often research questions) by categorizing and coding (Bryman, 2016, p. 584). Thematic analysis usually consists of the following procedure—1) ‘[r]Read through at least a sample of material to be analysed’; 2) ‘[b]Begin coding the materials’ at the level of ‘open coding or initial coding’; 3) ‘[e]Elaborate many of the codes into themes’; 4) ‘[e]Evaluate the higher-order codes or themes’; 5) ‘[e]Examine possible links and connections between concepts and/or how the concepts vary in terms of features of the cases’; 5) ‘[w]Write up the insights from the previous stages.’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 588). After collecting all the data, the author began to transcribe all the recordings into ten Word files. With the support of NVivo software, the author categorizes the imported data into “Chinese teachers” and “Finnish teachers” as two comparable groups. In each group, the author sets “professional agency” and “professional agency” as two open coding in order to identify the data related to the theoretical framework. All the initially coded data will be coded into different sub themes, which is followed by the last procedure of evaluating and refining the codes. The coded themes and subthemes can
be found in Appendix 3. In chapter 5, all codes of professional agency are categorized into “resources” and “restrictions” in order to compare in Chapter 6.

4.3 Ethical Consideration

In the first place, a researcher should be moral and ethical as a professional researcher. According to the Swedish Research Council’s Expert Group (2011), a researcher should obey the following codes of morality: 1) communalism (researchers can contribute to generate new knowledge as a basic right), 2) universalism (academic works should be scientifically assessed), 3) disinterestedness (generating new knowledge should be the only motivation of doing research) and 4) organized skepticism (research findings should be based on scientific reasoning and objective evidences) (The Swedish Research Council’s Expert Group on Ethics, 2011, p. 16-17). Therefore, this thesis will be objective, scientific and academically honest.

In addition, the data collection process is consisted of interpersonal activities, so the principles of ‘harmless’, ‘informed consent for participation’, ‘confidentiality’ and ‘no deception’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 125). During the process of data collection and thesis writing, all the research participants should be informed of the research background, purpose, methodology, ethical considerations in the informed consent form, and they can participate on voluntary basis. Consent forms should be signed by all the participants before interviews. Privacy should be protected during interview when it is not allowed by interviewees, and the confidentiality for data should be considered in the whole process. Any verbal harm is not allowed during interviews, all the participants are free to stop conversations.
Chapter 5 Data Analysis and Key Findings

In this chapter, the author will analyze the collected data in connection with the theoretical framework in Chapter 2 and the contextual settings in Chapter 3. By identifying the factors supporting or restricting those teachers’ professional agency, the author refers to the definition of professional agency promoted by Eteläpelto et al. (2015) as a base to code the raw data. Similarly, the author adopts the notion of professional identity discussed by Eteläpelto et al. (2014) and Cardoso et al. (2014) so as to analyze those teachers’ professional identity from a developmental perspective. Through the lenses of the SCSC approach, the author also examines how professional agency and professional identity can be related.

To sum up, in this chapter, the author prioritizes the theoretical framework in Chapter 2 as an analytical tool. The further discussion of the key findings in this chapter, which contains more involvement of Chapter 3 and the research questions, will be available in Chapter 6.

5.1 The Chinese Participants

After re-reading all the interview transcriptions, the author tries to do thematic analysis according to the theoretical framework and key concepts, especially the SCSC approach, discussed in Chapter 2. By adopting NVivo software (see Section 4.2 and Appendix 3), the author categorizes the collected data into the following codes—1) professional agency (power relations and hierarchy, professional identity, material, financial and human resources, work community and age gap, work cultures); 2) professional identity (before teacher education, during teacher education, at the work place). Furthermore, after the first-round coding, the author reclassifies “professional agency” into two another groups, restrictions and resources, in order to examine how much professional agency can those selected Chinese teachers practice at the workplace. The data and analysis are presented as follows.

5.1.1 Professional Agency of the Novice Teachers in China—A Complex Process

5.1.1.1 Restrictions of Practicing Professional Agency

During the interview and data analysis period, the author has clearly found that the selected Chinese participants could not hold to complain or express their dissatisfaction
when discussing their professional agency at the workplace, i.e., many of their testimonies is about how they experience the restrictions for their professional agency. After the coding period, the author has re-read all the coded data and found that the restrictions or structures hindering their professional agency concern the following four themes—power relations and hierarchy, work community and age gap, material, financial and human resources and the society.

**Power Relations and Hierarchy**

Among those five interviewees, all of them (5/5) claimed how the promotion system (see Section 3.2.2), the regional bureau of education or their school leaders prescribed them as novice teachers. In other words, they are identified as novice teachers formally or informally, and the title of novice/beginning teachers is not self-identified by those teachers as active agents:

**Teacher 1:** “In Hanjiang District, Yangzhou City, novice teachers are those who have been working for less than two years. As a kindergarten teacher (in my school), novice teachers are those who are younger than 30 years old.”

**Teacher 2:** “Generally speaking, those who are working in their first few years, or five years, are novice teachers. Don’t you know that we have the promotion system? Before we are entitled as first-level teachers, we are still novice or young teachers... Anyhow, the newcomers in their first there years are novice teachers.”

**Teacher 4:** “Normally speaking, we (novice teachers) are those who are working in our first three to five years.”

**Teacher 5:** “We think that those who are newly-hired are novice teachers.”

Compared with the discussion of the notion of novice teachers in Section 4.2, the Chinese interviewees (Teacher 3 was not asked the question of “who are novice teachers in your school?” during the interview, but she had been working in the same school with Teacher 5 for one semester) said that there was a certain structure prescribed by their schools, regional bureau of education or the education system: Teacher 1 and Teacher 4 described the regional bureau of education or their schools considered those young and inexperienced teachers are novices; Teacher 2 added the promotion system played a major role; Teacher 5 said the notion of novice depended on the recruitment by the school. However, Teacher 1 is still treated as a novice teacher by her school leaders and the regional bureau of education because of her young age even though she had noticed that she could work independently, when comparing with her past work experience:
**Teacher 1:** “This is my third year as a teacher—I was entirely mentored by other teachers in my first year, and then began to independently work as a class teacher (Banzhuren) during my second year. Now, I can say that I can work entirely on my own.”

As a result, all of them (5/5) are experiencing or have experienced some special treatments imposed by the school leaders as they are entitled as “new comers” in their schools, which furtherly enhance their imposed identity as novice teachers. Their testimonies can be summarized as: 1) Teacher 1, Teacher 3, Teacher 4 and Teacher 5 said that all the newcomers in their schools were assigned some experienced teachers as mentors for them, and they all agreed that mentorship was usually supportive; 2) Teacher 1 has to write her lesson planning by hand instead of using computer, which makes her uncomfortable and her only hope is to wait till she become 30 years old; 3) Teacher 3 and Teacher 5 are also provided with some mandatory courses and trainings by their school or the regional bureau of education, which, they thought, were not really helpful compared with the mentorship, especially when they do not have free time, when the topic of those trainings are not necessary for them or when the quality of those trainings is not good enough; 4) Teacher 2 currently needs to do some extra work after work imposed by her school leaders, which made her feel mad before but now she has become positive because she said it was because her school leaders trusted her; 5) Teacher 3 and Teacher 5 have to work both as a subject teacher (see Section 3.2.2) and class teacher (Banzhuren) because the teachers in their school are aging, which makes them feel overloaded, challenged and active to learn more expertise or ask for help during their work but lack of time to learn after work.

Despite of identity negotiation and the special treatment, all of those teachers (5/5) said that they were not that empowered or qualified to take some initiatives to make an impact on their schools or even their colleagues surrounding them because of hierarchy, seniority and age. However, they can co-work and learn from each other with their close colleagues because young teachers are enthusiastic, creative and more proficient in new technology and advanced professional knowledge, and those senior teachers can teach them their rich experiences. In this sense, power relations can not only refer to the relations between teachers and their leaders but can also be merely applied to teachers in the same group regarding their age, work experience and seniority. In some previous studies, Wang (2015) and Wang et al. (2007) analyze and confirm how some senior and experienced teachers in Chinese schools impose their ideas on young teachers, especially in the schools in the rural area. Wang et al. (2007) concludes that the fundamental reason for this hierarchy does not depend on qualifications of teachers but the school context and culture (p. 8). This is evident in their testimonies, for example:

**Teacher 1:** “… How can we novice teachers influence our schools? That’s too much in terms of scope… In China, an experienced teacher who has been working for more than 30 years dare not to say, ‘I can affect the whole school.’ … I feel positive and active to

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15 Class teacher (Banzhuren): A Banzhuren in Chinese school is a teacher, usually also as a subject teacher, in a class who are responsible for student management in a class and lead other subject teachers teaching in the same class (Wang, 2015, p. 916).
express my opinions, so I can get well along with the school leaders, which can naturally and furtherly affect the decision-making of my team. However, most of the novice teachers choose to be silent because they don’t think they are qualified enough to do so…”

Teacher 2: “My influence on them (colleagues and the school) … I don’t think I can do it now… We as new teachers… I think that this kind of seniority-based relationship among colleagues in schools in our country (China) is obvious and serious. Although we young teachers express our opinions or say something to the leaders, they (school leaders) will not accept… I can do it (influence on) my colleagues who work with me in my class—the old teachers like we young teachers’ creativeness… They can accept some of my opinions, but I cannot do that beyond this team or impact on my school.”

The power relations can also influence those teachers’ daily teaching practices, i.e., their choices of teaching methods. In this case, the school leaders impose their opinions on those teacher’s daily teaching, which makes the teachers passive instead of being active agents when they are planning and teaching their lessons.

In the following testimonials provided by Teacher 3, Teacher 4 and Teacher 5, it is clear to see how a teacher can be an active agent (such as Teacher 3) and intend to take some actions, when he or she thinks the structure is helpful for future improvements, or a passive recipient (such as Teacher 4 and Teacher 5) during this process, when he or she acts as an opponent to the structure because of their professional knowledge and practice at the workplace:

Teacher 3: “In terms of teaching, I always follow the teaching methods which is taught by my school. I always observe other teachers’ lessons, and I will integrate my opinions into their teaching methods when I teach in my classes... Our school has some structures. For example, they (the school leaders) assign us (class teachers) a topic for weekly class meeting... I think we class teachers can choose a topic according to the situations in our classes, which can be more effective... We (class teachers) need more time to educate those misbehaved students, but our school leaders say that all students have to leave school when school is over... which I think it is a restriction for me.”

Teacher 4: “… In one semester, I can do it (use the teaching methods that I learned at the university) in the half of the semester... I am teaching Grade 6. Every time I propose all the students take turns to hold a mini speech at the beginning of each lesson in my classes, but our school leaders think that it is not that helpful. Sometimes I want to hold something
like drama in the middle or in the end of every semester, but our school leaders will persuade me not to do it because this activity cannot help improving the exam results. Then I will feel frustrated and not willing to try to do it any longer.”

Teacher 5: “The second challenge is to use tablet (such as iPad) to teach. Teachers and students have to use tablets in class because my class is a ‘MOOC class’, so we have to use internet in our lessons... This is my first time to use this teaching methods, and it is difficult and time-consuming... It seems to be not that effective, but this teaching method is adopted by our school, so I have to use it. It can slow down my teaching, but I have to face it... Cooperation with my school leaders is just so-so, not that hard but still not very easy.”

All in all, power relations and hierarchy act as an important factor hindering those teachers’ professional agency— “who novice teachers are” is defined by the certain structures at their workplace without leaving them enough space to negotiate/renegotiate, which is furtherly enhanced by some special treatments imposed by the educational managers. Moreover, those teachers may feel restricted because of power relations and hierarchy in the school context if they do not agree with the content of the structures.

Work Community and Age Gap

Respect for age is important in Chinese people’s social life (Lockett, 1988, p. 486-487). All those interviewees (5/5) claimed that it was easy to cooperate with their colleagues, but some restrictions were uttered during some interviews (3/5). Despite of the problem of hierarchy mentioned above, age gap can also hinder communication and cooperation because of generation gap or different professional knowledge and competencies.

In the following text, Teacher 1, working as a kindergarten teacher, claimed that teachers needed to do physical activities during teaching, so it was hard to cooperate with the elder experienced teachers; Teacher 4 said that the professional competencies of the elder teachers in her school varied from teacher to teacher, so she felt difficult to communicate with them, especially when she needed to discuss academic knowledge; Teacher 5 pointed out the generation gap made her felt not that easy to cooperate with the elder teachers. In short, those mentioned obstructions make those teachers feel hard to be active as a team player when they take some actions as an active agent at the workplace.

Teacher 1: “… but in other grade groups such as primary grade and middle grade (in my kindergarten), they have many aged teachers. It is impossible to ask them dance and play or do something else. The gap between young teachers and old teachers is much wider.”
**Teacher 4:** “I feel that it is difficult to do it (cooperate with my colleagues) ... because my colleagues are old. On one hand, they are experienced. However, on the other hand, it is hard to communicate with them. Nowadays, teachers in the primary schools in China vary in terms of their professional competencies. Many old teachers are not very competent or professional enough. Consequently, it is not that easy to discuss professional and academic knowledge with them sometimes.”

**Teacher 5:** “… or I can say that it is much easier to communicate with young teachers. For example, my mentor, although he/she doesn’t teach one of those major subjects, he/she is young. (So, it is not hard to communicate with my mentor.) ... However, some teachers are not that young, especially those who teach minor subjects, we don’t often cooperate or communicate unless we need to fix some problems of our students... Generally speaking, we have nice cooperation, but, I think, I can cooperate with only 20% to 30% of the teachers in my team very well.”

**Material, Financial and Human Resources**

During the interviews, Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 (2/5) described about the scarcity of material, financial or human resources constrained their teaching and professional ideals at work. This can be related to the educational context concerning with the GDP, finance in education, the teacher education and selection system in China (see Section 3.2.1).

Particularly, Teacher 1 highlighted that it was because of the large-size class with limited resources in Chinese public kindergartens as well as the scarcity of professional teaching staff for kids with special educational needs; Teacher 3 can fix the problem of limited teaching aids, but cannot change the situation of teaching with chalks, which is negative for teachers’ and students’ health.

**Teacher 1:** “In fact, I don’t have (freedom to make my own choice at the workplace). My university classmates are working in kindergartens all around China. As far as I know, there are at least 40 kids in a class in public kindergartens. However, only 3 teachers take charge of a class, and there is 1 day-care worker among those 3 teachers... It is rare to have resource support because it cannot meet the demand... In my kindergarten, for example, our kids don’t have field trip... Our school leaders may say, ‘We cannot cover all the expenses for field trips. We cannot do it because we have to bear the principal responsibility when some accidents happen to the kids. There are so many kids and it is
expensive to pay the transport.’ ... It is very difficult to do personalized teaching in public schools. Even though you know there is a special kid in your class, but you cannot do that... Most kindergarten teachers don’t have knowledge in special education...”

**Teacher 3:** “Teaching aids are quite limited in my school, but I can enrich it by myself. We are still using chalks and blackboards to teach, but I think it is not healthful for teachers and students...”

**Impact from the Society—Social Status, Mass Media and Culture**

During the interview period, some teachers (3/5) gave their comments on how their work was affected by teachers’ social status and mass media. According to their opinions, it is easy to notice that kindergarten teachers seem to have the lowest social status and worst social reputation compared with other teachers in the system, which can be linked to the examination culture and the emphasis of “intellect” in education in China mentioned in Section 3.2.1.

In the following text, Teacher 1, who is a kindergarten teacher, pointed out the low social status as kindergarten teachers, how some kindergarten teachers chose to punish kids at their workplace in such social context, which is immoral. Teacher 2, also as a kindergarten teacher, said how she coped with this challenge by actively demonstrating her professionalism as kindergarten teacher to her students and their parents. In the meantime, Teacher 5 commented on how mass media negatively impacted teachers’ social status, which affected her daily tasks at work and teacher-student relationship. The commonality is that their testimonies implies how different teachers take actions as active agents to take stance, including negotiating their professional identities in positive or negative ways.

**Teacher 1:** “Serval days before, there was a hot news about how some kindergarten teachers abused kids at their workplace. I think that the reason is that we kindergarten teachers’ social status and salary are much less and worse than other subject teachers (in primary and secondary schools). However, we have more stress and responsibilities than they have... To some extents, some low-competent kindergarten teachers resort to abuse kids... Many parents in China think that kindergarten teachers... are someone like nannies, so they don’t consider you as a teacher.”

**Teacher 2:** “... Many people think that we kindergarten teachers are those who are not good at studying and graduated from vocational colleges... I think that I or kindergarten teachers are not respected because kindergarten teachers’ professional competencies vary from one to one, and they don’t show their professionalism to parents...
in a right way. I will seize every opportunity to communicate with them... For my students... I will teach everything that I should teach…”

**Teacher 5:** “Nowadays, some social media report... how teachers discipline their students in an extreme way, so teachers’ social reputation is getting worse and worse—many people misunderstand those punishments for students, but they don’t test the authenticity of those news... I think that we teachers begin to feel afraid to discipline our students because of those news…”

Despite of misconception of kindergarten teacher and the impact of mass media in the society described above by some teachers, Teacher 2 also mentioned how the culture in the city where she worked influenced her teaching, which made her adopt the teaching methods learned at the workplace instead of following the theoretical knowledge of teaching methods learned at her university.

**Teacher 2:** “… I think that sometimes I don’t have the same educational ideas or opinions with other teachers. The knowledge that I learned at my university in Wuhan is hard to apply to my work here maybe because of the teachers, parents here and their culture in the northern China… I will follow the teaching style that is accepted and favored by those teachers (in my kindergarten) ... They have a certain kind of structure for lesson planning, and I will change my lessons according to the structure.”

5.1.1.2 **Resources of Practicing Professional Agency**

In this section, the author will analyze how those Chinese teachers make sense of their supportive resources for their professional agency. Interestingly, there are two themes (power relations and hierarchy, work community and age gap), which are analyzed as negativity for the practice of professional agency in the section before, can be resourceful as extra supports on the other side for those teachers. Besides, work culture is also supportive according to Teacher 2’s and Teacher 3’s testimonies. In the following text, those three themes are power relations and hierarchy, work community and age gap and work culture.

**Power Relations and Hierarchy**

Unlike the discussion in the previous section, educational leaders in schools and regional bureaus of education, which can be typically represent power relations and hierarchy in the school context, can be resourceful if they can assign tasks to teachers when they find teachers’ certain talents. In the following text, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 described
the importance of those leaders when they wanted to have more opportunities to promote or improve themselves at the workplace. Specifically, Teacher 1 emphasized more on performances at the workplace, whereas Teacher 2 focused more on academic qualifications. In short, their testimonies imply that if the tasks assigned by the leaders can match their certain professional competencies or potentials, power relations and hierarchy can be a catalyst for their professional agency.

Teacher 1: “In your team, if you have more harmonious relationships with your colleagues, if your leaders feel more confident of you, if you are more often to express your opinions… (school leaders) will give you more opportunities of learning and improvement…”

Teacher 2: “Recently, I’ve got a resource from the leaders in the bureau of education… I am very highly-educated (compared with other kindergarten teachers) … I was recommended by him (my school leader) to a director in the bureau of education… We are currently co-editing a book in psychology of kindergarten kids for parents.”

Work Community and Age Gap

In Section 5.1.1.1, age gap seems to be a barrier for communication with those teachers’ colleagues. Surprisingly, all those Chinese teachers (5/5) had very positive comments on their work community, especially the cooperation with fellow teachers in the same office, grade group, class or age. Also, some teachers (2/5) mentioned about supports from parents. In essence, the positivity can be related to their shared goals, different merits or demerits as well as, even, same hierarchy.

In the following text, it is clear to know how those teachers can play an active role as a team player to facilitate their daily tasks—Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 mentioned the shared ideas, respectively well-beings for kids and democracy, were a plus for daily cooperation; Teacher 2, Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 mentioned the advantages of being young because of their updated knowledge, competencies as well as enthusiasm, which is helpful for the old-timers; Teacher 3 and Teacher 5 pointed out the close cooperation with their other colleagues because of their same tasks or goals such as teaching, student management and professional knowledge sharing; Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 mentioned the network with parents, even students, can be supportive at their workplace.

Teacher 1: “My grade group compared with other grade groups, is very united. We all are very considerate for those small kids, so our team work is very wonderful and nice.”

Teacher 2: “Our cooperation is very harmonious. We discuss and decide everything together, and there is nothing autocratic… My colleagues are so nice, cooperative and
approachable. Sometimes we all teachers think that we young teachers have more updated and new ideas so there is more cooperation among us.”

Teacher 3: “If I need any help, I can just ask my mentor... He/she is always willing to give me some advice or tell me his/her past experience... The only thing that I can influence my colleagues is my enthusiasm... The other two math teachers teaching with me in the regular classes are old, and they feel tired of teaching and dealing with those difficult students... I can give them some new teaching ideas such as I can suggest them to use some interesting PowerPoint instead of using a boring Word document... We always discuss together, and they think we young people are good at learning new knowledge as well as using computer. There is no problem to cooperate with my mentor and those teachers in my office... Our leaders in the grade group entirely support our work in student management... Luckily, I also have a group of supportive parents.”

Teacher 4: “Our school leaders think that we novice teachers are competent after working for a few years, and we are not out-of-date... especially when they appoint us to work as class teachers. I think my students and parents can be resourceful in certain ways.”

Teacher 5: “I am a class teacher, and there are ten subject teachers in my class. We have close cooperation with seven of those who teach major subjects as well as young teachers.”

Work Culture

Work culture refers to shared goals or visions in the whole school which can impact all the members regardless of hierarchy, power relations, age gap, etc. Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 (2/5) also mentioned their school cultures, which leave them a large space for their work. In Teacher 2’s school, teachers and school leaders share the culture of “everything for kids’ sake”, so she has a lot of freedom in teaching. Similarly, Teacher 3 said that teachers in her school has agreed with a kind of democratic culture, so she can decide her teaching methods with some help from other teachers. In these sense, these two teachers can play an active role in teaching at their workplace, and Teacher 2 seems to be freer than Teacher 3.

Teacher 2: “The atmosphere in our kindergarten is that we all care about our kids’ well-beings... We can design our lessons based on our opinions and ideas... My colleagues and school leaders will not interfere me... because of some financial reasons and etc.”
Teacher 3: “I think our teachers are democratic, and they will not say that you must follow their teaching ideas... They will just emphasize a keyword—‘advice’...”

5.1.2 Professional Identity of the Novice Teachers in China

In this section, the author will present the data selected from the whole interview transcriptions. The data selection criteria are in accordance with the theoretical discussions in Chapter 2—the notion of identities and professional identities in different traditions. Moreover, the author tries to categorize the data from a developmental perspective in order to show how they negotiate their professional identities or teacher identities, especially at the workplace. In the following text, the data can be extracted and categorized into three thematic groups—1) before teacher education, 2) during teacher education and 3) at the workplace, among which the first two groups can explain the process of anticipatory socialization, whereas the third group deals with the process of anticipatory reflection.

Before Teacher Education—Kindergarten Teachers Have Different Voices

In this part, the author will try to analyze how those teachers perceive teaching profession and teacher before they chose to be teachers, and this stage is the preoccupation stage.

When the author asked the interviewees their motivations to be teachers, three of those interviewees (3/5) expressed their positive motivations. On the contrary, the rest two teachers, who are kindergarten teachers, expressed the negativity. When discussing their images of teachers or teaching profession, most interviewees (4/5) said their images were positive except one who did not like teachers. Their motivations and images can serve as a ground layer for their evolving development of their teacher identities.

In the following text, Teacher 3 told her life experience as a sister who always taught her younger siblings at home when she was a juvenile, which formed her image of teaching profession before her teacher education. Teacher 5 explained that teachers are important to teach knowledge and educate future generations, and she also mentioned that she liked working with kids, and it was attractive that teachers could have holidays and be a respected profession; Teacher 4 only mentioned that she would like to be a teacher because it could help students understand new knowledge and educate them. In short, their motivations generated from their life experience, interest in teaching or working with students and some special benefits (holidays) for teachers.

Teacher 3: “…Because in my hometown I was good at study, and I was the elder sister, I always taught my younger sisters and brothers… I had unconsciously formed an image of teachers, and I thought that teachers were those who could deliver knowledge and educate students...”
**Teacher 4:** “I like this profession that can enable me teach knowledge and educate people, so I chose to study teacher education.”

**Teacher 5:** “... I like to get along with kids... Teachers can, as an old saying goes, ‘preach to teach to dispel doubt also’, and they can devote their love for student... Teachers have holidays, and it is attractive for me...”

On the other hand, those two kindergarten teachers (Teacher 1 and Teacher 2) expressed their low, or even no, motivations to be kindergarten teachers. Being a kindergarten teacher was not attractive for them. They claimed that it was because of the National College Entrance Exam (Gaokao)\(^\text{16}\) that they had to study to be kindergarten teachers—Teacher 1 said her exam result could only allow her to study early-childhood education, whereas Teacher 2 complained about its selection and admission process. In this regard, there seems to have a problem concerning with the low social status of kindergarten teachers as aforementioned discussion, and the problem can also be related to the teacher education and its selection system.

**Teacher 1:** “Basically, I didn’t have any motivation because I didn’t have any other choice... my (Gaokao) result was too bad.”

**Teacher 2:** “At the beginning, I didn’t apply for this programme before I studied at university because I was transferred to this bachelor programme... I was not able to change my major at the university... I didn’t expect that I would be a kindergarten teacher.”

Despite of their motivations to pursue teacher education, the author also tried to probe into their images of teacher or teaching profession before their teacher education. In the following text as well as Teacher 3’s testimony above, all those teachers tried to recall their life experience in schools, and most of them (4/5) hold a positive viewpoint—teachers are caring, unselfish and good at teaching. Interestingly, Teacher 1, Teacher 3, Teacher 4 mentioned how teachers were important in knowledge transmission, which is tightly related to the long-history culture of teachers as well as the exam culture in education. Teacher 1 also criticized teachers because of the exam culture.

**Teacher 1:** “I thought that teachers were all hypocrites... exam-oriented... stubborn...

Except that all teachers I had were good teachers.”

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\(^{16}\)National College Entrance Exam (Gaokao): A nation-wide, standardized and summative exam determines which university or college a high school graduate should enter based on the total score and ranking (Okhorzina & Jia, 2015, p. 80-81).
Teacher 2: “I thought that teachers were too unselfish to care of their own kids and families at home... I had this feeling because all teachers I had before were very responsible.”

Teacher 4: “Before I studied at university, I thought teachers were those who can explain exercise clearly—‘preach to teach to dispel doubt’...”

Teacher 5: “Teachers can ‘preach to teach to dispel doubt’ and devote their love for students... I thought teaching profession was admirable... because I had good teachers before in my childhood.”

During Teacher Education—Positive Influence was Limited

In the following text, some of those teachers (3/5) did not feel that strong influence on their teacher identities during their teacher education period (learning stage). Teacher 1 began to have positive change because she studied in the US for a while instead of her teacher education in China. Teacher 2 experienced how kindergarten teachers were disrespected in the society. Teacher 5 did not have a strong feeling because of limited participation during teaching practice.

Teacher 1: “I didn’t change my teacher identity even I had learned my teacher education for four years... I studied in the US afterwards... it taught me ‘personalize’ and ‘professional’...”

Teacher 2: “I didn’t change my teacher identity during my bachelor’s study, but during the teaching practice... I felt that our society didn’t respect kindergarten teachers...”

Teacher 5: “I didn’t feel any difference during my teaching practice because I was just someone like teaching assistance.”

Meanwhile, two teachers (2/5) felt some differences, which contrasted their life experience about teachers and teaching before, because of teaching practice and theoretical knowledge in their teacher education. Particularly, teaching practice seems to be more influential. Both Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 felt teaching should be more professional than they had thought before. Teacher 3 had some changes in her teacher identity that teachers should not only be knowledge transmitters but also interest motivators. Those negotiation of their teacher identities falls into the aspects of professional knowledge and values.
Teacher 3: “During the teacher education, I thought that teachers shouldn’t only focus on grades... Interest should be more important... Because we mainly learned how to teach... I always wondered why I should teach knowledge in such a detailed way...”

Teacher 4: “In the first year of my teacher education, we had a course in psychology, which made me realize teacher should also focus on students’ mentality... The teaching practice was very influential for me... It made me realize how to organize my language according to students’ learning ability...”

Professional Identity at the Workplace—the Reality is a Shock

In this part, the author will try to analyze how those teachers perceive teaching profession and teacher after they have worked as teachers in their schools, and this stage is professional stage.

According to all those Chinese teachers’ testimonies, they all are regarded and imposed on their professional identities as novice teachers and young teachers by the structure emphasizing this identity by some special treatments, power relations and hierarchy, especially the influence by some legislations and the teacher promotion system. Besides, their comments on their work community and cooperation imply that they are team players or co-workers at the workplace. Apart from the discussion in previous sections, the contexts and their scopes of their work duties make them unconsciously entitle themselves with some pronouns during the interviews such as “teacher(s) in public schools”, “kindergarten teacher(s)”, “math teacher(s)”, “class teacher(s)”, etc.

It is pervasive that most those teachers (4/5) mentioned how they act as learners because of their lack of professional knowledge or practical skills.

Teacher 2: “… I feel that I am not enough in (professional) experience. I always try to improve myself during my free time.”

Teacher 3: “… I always turn to my mentor when I have some questions... I attend those training courses provided by our school.”

Teacher 4: “My resources (helping me improve) ... is our school library.”

Teacher 5: “… I am trying to adjust myself to the working style in my school.”

Even though they have adjusted themselves to be active learners at the workplace, all of those teachers (5/5) expressed how they felt surprised during their first few years work experience. Those shocks, including their professional knowledge, ideals, commitments and values, are caused by the real work and social contexts.
Teacher 1: “... What I studied (at the university) is so different from the reality.”

Teacher 2: “... The knowledge that I learned at my university in Wuhan is hard to apply to my work here maybe because of the teachers, parents here and their culture in the northern China...”

Teacher 3: “...I’ve felt a significant shock! Before I work as a teacher, I think I should take care of every student... But when I am working as a teacher now, I feel like I am so powerless... I can’t do it...”

Teacher 4: “I was very enthusiastic (about being a teacher) when I studied at my university. But now at the workplace, I feel that my enthusiasm is fading.”

Teacher 5: “I thought that teaching profession was respected before... But now, people don’t respect teachers like before, which lets me down a lot...”

5.1.3 Summary and Reflection

Through the lenses of the SCSC approach, those selected Chinese teachers’ professional agency appears to be limited and tightly restricted by the socio-cultural context, including the culture of power relations and hierarchy (occupation, seniority and age), social status and reputation as well as resources, which make them feel difficult to take initiatives according to their subjectivities. On the other hand, if there is a shared goal, vision or work culture among all the school members, their professional agency can be resourced by power relations and hierarchy (occupational position, seniority and age), work community and work culture, especially for their professional learning, teaching and student management. In short, their professional agency is mainly affected, both positively and negatively, by their professional identity, imposed or self-defined, as “novice teachers”, “teachers” and “young”. The kindergarten teachers hold the most negative voices when discussing social status. However, their resources (work community and work culture) imply their identity as “team players” or “co-workers”.

In terms of professional identity, in the first stage, some of those teachers (2/5) claimed that they did not have any motivation to step into teaching profession, and a few of them (1/5) had a negative image of teachers before she studied to be a teacher. Even though they had or did not have any adjustment of their teacher identities during their teacher education, all of those teachers (5/5) need to significantly adjust their teacher identities at the workplace.

The linkage between the professional agency and professional identity of those interviewed teachers is vague. Despite of “novice teachers”, “teachers”, “young teachers” and “team player” mentioned above are implied in their professional agency, they used different pronouns, such as new teachers, kindergarten teachers, teachers in public
schools, etc., to make sense of their opinions on professional agency and professional identity. Their shock during their first serval years of teaching as well as their eagerness of professional learning at the workplace implies their self-defined identity as novice teachers because of the gap between teacher education and work context.

Specifically, this section (5.1.1) also reveals some issues for further investigation and discussion in Chapter 6. Those issues include: 1) teachers’ autonomy at the workplace; 2) early-childhood teachers’ social status; 3) educational resources; 4) the selection of teacher students and teacher education.

5.2 The Finnish Participants

Similar as Section 5.1, the interview transcriptions of the Finnish participants are thematically extracted and coded as: 1) professional agency (freedom and trust, financial resource, structure, power relations, professional knowledge and competencies, work community and work experience); 2) professional identity (before teacher education, during teacher education, at the work place). The data can be presented as similar as Section 5.1 as follows.

5.2.1 Professional Agency of the Novice Teachers in Finland—High Level of Freedom

5.2.1.1 Restrictions of Practicing Professional Agency

Even though the Finnish counterpart views their career as teachers allows them to have much professional freedom and make a lot of choices, it does not mean that it is flawless. Working with this high level of freedom, all those Finnish teachers (5/5) claimed their insufficient professional competencies, knowledge and experience limit their practice of daily tasks. In the meantime, some other factors, including financial resources and working hours, work community, power relations and hierarchy, school regulations, can be barely found in their testimonies. In the following text, the factors restricting those Finnish teachers’ professional agency are presented.

**Insufficient Professional Knowledge and Experience**

Although the Finnish teacher education and selection seem to be strict in terms of the minimum academic requirements (see Section 3.1.2), yet those interviewed Finnish teachers (5/5) claimed that they felt uncomfortable about “how to do”, even most of them could have high level of professional freedoms, when they freshly graduated from their teacher education then stepped into the workplace, especially in the first few months. In the following text, Teacher 6, Teacher 7, Teacher 8 (3/5) attributed their difficulties to their
insufficiency of professional experience, whereas Teacher 9 and Teacher 10 (2/5) said their teacher education did not prepare them well enough. Teacher 8 is the only one (1/5) who mentioned they had to follow a textbook, but she thought that the structure provided by the textbook is supportive for her teaching. In short, the major reason of restricting their professional agency seems to be subjective—their scarcity of professional experience.

**Teacher 6:** “… two years ago, I’ve been teaching for 2 approximately, but the first time when I get the second-graders to teach them Spanish... I was so worried about how to teach them…”

**Teacher 7:** “… So we can make our own choices of our classes, and sometimes it is really challenging because there is no really a structure there and I don’t have any experience before, so there is nothing that I can go back…”

**Teacher 8:** “… the first 2 or 3 months were very difficult... It was very time consuming... The books that we used were new for me and I need to go thorough and familiar with the structure of the books... we don’t need to prepare everything from scratch. And the books are really good, and everything is from the Finnish core curriculum, so it is very helpful for our teaching.”

**Teacher 9:** “… the biggest challenge is that our Finnish teacher training school answers very well to these demands in teacher’s work because what we do in the classroom is so different from what we learn from the university... I have a quite big shock. Maybe when I had worked in 6 months as a teacher, I thought that I couldn’t do this anymore and I had to do something else... and... never be a teacher again… Maybe this year can be easier compared with the first years because I have more experience now.”

**Teacher 10:** “… I felt that the university and the reality things... like in the university we learned how to play with children... And then when we go to the reality, the kindergarten, there is so much different... I always think about it like... I didn’t learn enough for something or maybe I missed something or information, but... I’ve learned all the courses because they are mandatory.”

**Limited Financial Resources and Working Hours**

Two teachers (2/5), Teacher 8 and Teacher 9, pointed out teachers were always actively creative or responsible for pupils’ well-beings, but financial resources could be a restriction
for them to realize their ideals, especially for Teacher 9. However, Teacher 8 said this situation should be understandable because the finance and their workload was not infinite, and it was negotiable by asking school leaders for permission.

**Teacher 8:** “I could say that the only challenge is financial, but we cannot do whatever we want because there is not enough money... Teachers always have a lot of ideas, and even we are able to do the creative things if we had money... If I really want to do a big project, then I will require more salary as well and that will be very time-consuming for me... Then we need to ask for permission.”

**Teacher 9:** “Actually I feel very much that I can’t do enough for the kids because even if I did any extra but there is only 4 hours with them every day. So, 4 hours is little time to make a difference... Not with students but teachers should have more time that they can be paid for...”

**Work Community**

Nearly all those teachers said there was no problem to cooperate with other colleagues in their schools. However, one teacher (1/5), Teacher 10, complained of her partner teacher and other female teachers in her kindergarten that they were hard to cooperate and, even, immoral. Her work community sometimes makes her difficult to continue her teaching.

**Teacher 10:** “… They will teach with someone else, like how to do things in their way. And I didn’t have my own group to... like... just to make my own choice... when I suggest something, the other teacher would say, ‘no, I don’t think it is a good idea’. And I don’t have ideas that she wants... But sometimes people are mean, and they don’t think about the child but just think of their own... And it is really tough sometimes because women can be so mean... and it is tough... so I don’t want to be in that kind of world.”

**Power Relations and Hierarchy**

There is only one teacher (1/5), Teacher 10, who claimed that she had experienced some special treatment since she was somehow considered as a newcomer. Besides, she was the only one (1/5) who gave a hint that power relations and hierarchy existed in her kindergarten, which could make her work harder, especially for her own decision-making.

**Teacher 10:** “For example, when I started, I was put into a special group in the kindergarten... They will teach with someone else, like how to do things in their way. And I
didn’t have my own group to... make my own choice... We also have the teachers’ meeting, but usually it is just like... the topic is already decided. The things that we discuss is not from us, but it is from the upper, it is not the thing that we are discussing.”

5.2.1.2 Resources of Practicing Professional Agency

Unlike those Chinese teachers, the interviewed Finnish teachers discussed how they were free to choose and take initiatives at their workplace. In this section, the author will analyze and summarize how the Finnish teachers are resourced by professional freedom, trust, structures, colleagues and school leaders at the workplace.

High Level of Professional Freedom and Trust

In the first place, most of those Finnish teachers (4/5) described how they had much freedom to be active agents at their workplace, among which two of them (2/5), Teacher 6 and Teacher 9, ascribed their professional freedom to the culture of trust for teachers in Finnish society and schools. However, the teacher (1/5), Teacher 10, who expressed different voices that her professional freedom was limited, and the reasons have been discussed in the previous section. Compared with the other Finnish teachers, Teacher 10 is currently working in a kindergarten/pre-school after her graduation of her bachelor’s study in early-childhood education. In this sense, the author assumes that it is worthy to pay attention to the teachers in the early-childhood sector in Finland. The data is presented in the following text.

Teacher 6: “... we can decide how we want to do the things and in which order, and what I should leave out and what I should add. It is very free here in Finland... I am fully trusted...”

Teacher 7: “... Yeah, definitely. That’s maybe also quite surprising because there is no one flogging out for me....”

Teacher 8: “... I can plan my lessons and plan whatever I want to do. Basically, the only thing that limits is the Finnish curriculum which tells us what to teach. But other than that, I can choose whatever I feel comfortable for me.”

Teacher 9: “... Yeah, very much. Basically, I decide everything happened in my classroom... We haven’t agreed in loud but we all know we can trust each other...”
Structure—Curriculum, Textbook and School Regulation

During the interview sessions, four teachers (4/5) commented on the structure, which should be opposed to agency, that it could facilitate their daily work at schools and exercise professional agency. Those structure includes the National Core Curriculum in Finland, textbook and school regulation. More detailly, Teacher 6, Teacher 7 and Teacher 8 (3/5) said the National Core Curriculum could guide their teaching but not strictly control by leaving them space to interpret; Teacher 8 (1/5) gave her positive comments that the textbook in her school could help to reduce her workload, so she could prepare extra materials; Teacher 10 (1/5) highlighted the strength to have school regulations as a guideline, but it was a restriction for her professional freedom. Still, compared with the other teachers, the only teacher, Teacher 10, who is working as an early-childhood teacher, expressed more negativities.

Teacher 6: “... Well, of course we have the national curriculum about what we should teach... But the curriculum doesn’t tell us how we have to teach I, so we can decide how we want to do the things... It is very free here in Finland.”

Teacher 7: “...Of course, we have... the big plan (the national curriculum) that you have to do in each grade. So, we have to go by that plan, but at the same time it is not really detailed, so we can make our own choices of our classes...”

Teacher 8: “...In Finland I would say all schools in Finland have certain books that they use... our teaching is the book that we use where we can have a lot of materials and help us a lot because we don’t need to prepare everything from scratch... and everything is from the Finnish core curriculum, so it is very helpful... It is a good document. There are certain things that can be interpreted in the ways.”

Teacher 10: “... I think it (the school regulation) is a resource. It helps to go a certain way and know what I should do with the children, which way is easier. But of course, if we want to do... other things that I must do, it is restricting...”

School Leader

Unlike the Chinese teachers, most of the Finnish teachers (4/5) was not provided with any special treatments because of they were new in their schools, and they were not called “new teachers” by any other in their schools. In other words, power relations or hierarchy is hardly found. In the following text, three Finnish teachers (3/5) highly praised their school leaders because they were helpful. Notably, Teacher 6 said she could choose to have more duties by taking initiatives to her principal, and Teacher 8 emphasized more on flat
management structure in her school, which could maximize the professional learning at the workplace.

**Teacher 6:** “...I could have more (duties), I could if I wanted to, and I chose to talk with the principal... Now I feel more at ease or more conformable of my teaching... so now I feel more like to take more something new...”

**Teacher 7:** “... But I think if I have some complains or something that I want to improve, I think I can just talk to the head teachers because he is really friendly and easy to talk to... My school (leaders) feels like ‘go ahead, it (professional courses for new teachers in the city) is really good. And we will find a substitute teacher’...”

**Teacher 8:** “... And also, the principals can help me if I need. But I still think that it is a good thing that everyone is treated in the same way because I think as a new teacher I might have some certain skills or knowledge that other teachers or older teachers don’t have...”

**Work Community**

All the Finnish teachers (5/5) claimed that their colleagues were easy to co-work with. Despite of their daily tasks, Teacher 7 and Teacher 8 (2/5) added that they could be active agents to identify themselves as newcomers, or novice teachers, and then asked for extra help. However, Teacher 10 is the only one (1/5) who said it was sometimes difficult to cooperate with her colleagues because of their emotions. The data is presented as follows.

**Teacher 6:** “... Yes, especially with other language teachers. We work together quite a lot. For example, creating new ideas or sharing our ideas of what works, what doesn’t...”

**Teacher 7:** “...As I said that my co-workers are very nice, and they have been a big help. And I think without my great co-workers I will be lost... It is really nice to see that, even though only three months I have been here, we have already make a group of teachers and... I really feel that I can actually say my opinions, and people are listening....”

**Teacher 8:** “...Honestly, I do need some help sometimes, and I will just let my colleagues know that ‘I am new’...”

**Teacher 9:** “... I think I am such a person to co-work with everyone. We do quite much cooperation together... we can trust each other....”
Teacher 10: “... Usually it is easy... normal days are ok, and everything goes fine when we think of the child, and children is the main reason for us to be there. But sometimes the colleagues can be like ‘wild humans’...”

Work Experience

Since most of the Finnish teachers (4/5) was not separate from the old-timers in their schools by being assigned with special tasks, they can control how to improve their professional competencies. More specifically, Teacher 6 (1/5) said she could choose some of her future work duties which depended on her confidence and work experience.

Teacher 6: “... We just talked about it and I told him that now since I am quite a new teacher here, and I am more focusing on doing my job well--being good at teaching, being good at advising teacher students. So, I am just focusing on that. Now I feel more at ease or more conformable of my teaching... Next year... since I have been teaching for two years, I feel like I could start to do something new...”

5.2.2 Professional Identity of the Novice Teachers in Finland

In this section, the author will try to summarize and analyze how those Finnish teachers’ professional identity from a developmental perspective. Similar to the aforementioned discussions of the Chinese counterpart, the analysis probes into how those Finnish teachers negotiate and develop their professional identity before, during teacher education as well as at the work place.

Before Teacher Education—high Motivation and Positive Impression

All those Finnish teachers had high motivations to join teaching profession according to the interviews. Their motivations can be mainly categorized as: 1) life experience (Teacher 6, Teacher 7, Teacher 8 and Teacher 10; 4/5); 2) teaching subject (Teacher 8; 1/5) and 3) ideals of teaching profession (Teacher 6, Teacher 7, Teacher 9; 3/5). When three of those teachers talked about their motivations based on their ideals, they all expressed how they wanted to impact on kids, and Teacher 6 mentioned the freedom of this profession fascinated her to step into teaching profession.

Teacher 6: “... When I was a small child, my mum was actually a teacher... I think that what fascinate me about this job is that it is so free. You can decide what you do and
how you do... I have been a dancing instructor as well, and I worked with kids before... I just like it....”

Teacher 7: “I think at first it is because of my mother who is a teacher as well. I think that is the first motivation because I had already seen her being a teacher closely. And I had seen my whole life at home... And I have very liked to work with children, and (I like to) make an influence in that way... when the child is learning something or getting excited about something... I also think I really wanted to be a teacher in elementary school and high school more than in kindergarten because there are more challenges...”

Teacher 8: “When I was young, I always liked school. And then I realized that I like languages... I guess the only direction that I want to go further is teaching...”

Teacher 9: “I think that I can help some children as a teacher, give them better future. And maybe equal starting points for their lives...”

Teacher 10: “Well, when I was in high school, I was in several camps, children’s camps... I didn’t realize it such as the hobbies like scout things, leading the group there as well... I did my middle school practice in kindergarten, preschool and elementary school, and there were many good things, so I applied for the university that about education...”

In the meantime, all those Finnish teachers (5/5) had a positive image or impression about teachers before their teacher education. However, three of them (3/5), Teacher 6, Teacher 7 and Teacher 8 payed their attentions to teachers as individuals, especially those who they had met in schools, so they did not try to generalize their impressions. Besides, Teacher 8 and Teacher 10 (2/5) respectively concluded their images of teachers based on professional morality and competencies.

Teacher 6: “... I would say that there are so many kinds of teachers, and there are so many kinds of people. There is no a model. I am sure that they have some similar characteristics, maybe, but I don’t know....”

Teacher 7: “... because my mum is a teacher, so I had some picture of what a teacher is, and I had a lot of friends or people that I know who teachers are... I don’t know how to explain it. I always had a positive image of teachers...”
**Teacher 8:** “... I don’t know. I feel like teachers, especially in Finland, they are a large group of people. There is no a certain way about how a teacher is... But all in all... they are decent...”

**Teacher 9:** “Well I had these images that in my childhood the teachers I had and some teachers I have met. And... when I was in high school, I tried something that is like a teacher, and I knew a little bit about what I am going to do.”

**Teacher 10:** “… I think teachers are kinds of... people that want to raise our children, and they have good motivation. They do what they can teach and sometimes they can rescue children or see them learn things and being so excited about learning...”

Clearly, we can find that how those Finnish teachers formed their teacher identity before they received teacher education—high motivation and positive perception. At this stage, anticipatory socialization, especially in schools, plays a major role.

**During Teacher Education—Teaching Practice Strengthen Teacher Identity**

During their teacher education period, one of those Finnish teachers (1/5) did not feel any obvious change of their teacher identity, whereas there of them (3/5) claimed that the teacher education made their teacher identity more positive or stronger. However, there is one teacher (1/5), Teacher 9, who said her teacher education minded her the gap between theoretical knowledge and the reality. Surprisingly, four of them (4/5) highlighted their teaching practice played an important role of their professional identity negotiation, but one of them (1/5), Teacher 10, claimed that the teaching practice was too short to help her negotiate her teacher identity.

**Teacher 6:** “No. Nothing changed really. When I started this profession before, I think it was almost the same.”

**Teacher 7:** “... No. I think during the education the image was still positive, which became stronger... I got empowered about what it is to be a teacher, and (during) the teaching practice I could see other teachers working... I think that the practice things were more helpful than the lectures.”

**Teacher 8:** “... No I feel like it should be the same for me most of the time... When I studied we had the teacher training in schools... and I worked as substitute teacher before,
and we had the teacher training, so I had worked in schools when I was studying. I feel like...it (my teacher identity) was pretty much the same...

Teacher 9: “... I think it gave me a little bit change of realism because I thought it would be easier. We have this kind of practice at the university. Every year we have one week or month to practice in a real classroom, so I gave me a good experience. But I have to say that there is a big difference in how professors in the university speak about being a teacher, and then when you go to an actual school and listen to the teachers there, they have a quite different image of being a teacher.”

Teacher 10: “…Maybe it got stronger, especially during the practice, when I was in practice in kindergartens during my teacher education… We had so short practices, just like one month per year. And we have other schools (school-works) during the practice to do, so it was so short and so much things during one practice…”

At the Workplace—Equality and Multiple Roles

At the workplace, most of the Finnish teachers (4/5) did not state that they were identified as novice teachers or provided with some special treatments because they were newly-in-service. However, there is only one teacher (1/5), Teacher 10, who claimed that she had experienced some special treatments when she started her work as a new teacher in her kindergarten, which is discussed before. Except Teacher 10, those Finnish teachers expressed their optimistic opinions about this equal treatment in their schools, for example:

Teacher 6: “... I don’t think that I would need it (special treatments for new teachers) because this job is only learning by doing it. By teaching, you will learn how to teach. No one will tell you how to teach... and you can’t read it from a book.”

Teacher 8: “… Only the students can recognize who are the teachers that never been here before. Other than that, I think we are all at the same level with everyone...I will just let my colleagues know that ‘I am new’... and I need help with something. And also, the principals can help me if I need. But I still think that it is a good thing that everyone is treated in the same way because I think as a new teacher I might have some certain skills or knowledge that other teachers or older teachers don’t have. So, in that sense, that is a good thing to be treated equally.”
At the same time, although those four teachers had never experienced any special treatment or grouping at the first few years or months of teaching, they had faced difficulties and challenges at the beginning of several months because of lack of experience. Therefore, they acted as active learners in order to manage to step out the hidden novice period, for example:

**Teacher 9:** “... Maybe when I have worked in 6 months as a teacher, I thought that I couldn’t do this anymore and I had to do something else. I am going to study again and then I will never be teacher again. But now I think more positively. Maybe this year can be easier compared with the first years because I have more experience now...”

Despite of equal treatments among teachers, Teacher 6 and Teacher 9 (2/5) mentioned that teacher-student and student-student relationships should be equal, and how they acted as equality-promoters in their classrooms.

**Teacher 6:** “... I don’t think the hierarchy between teachers and students is... that we should work together as equal human beings because kids can teach us so much. It is not just adult does the teaching....”

**Teacher 9:** “... I think that I can help some children as a teacher, give them better future. And maybe equal starting points for their lives. And they all have the same position in the class, they are all equal. And teach them very good lesson for live!”

According to those Finnish teachers’ testimonies, the identity of “novice teachers” is seemingly minimized within the structure. Consequently, during the interviews, they preferred to call themselves as “teacher(s)”, “music teacher(s)”, “language teacher(s)”, “kindergarten teacher(s)”, “co-worker(s)”, “colleague(s)”, etc. Except Teacher 10, four teachers (4/5) pointed out that they, as teachers, were those who could be trusted both at the workplace and in the society, which is discussed before. For example, in the following quotation, Teacher 6 said that it was because teachers in Finland were professionally competent in academic knowledge and individual qualities enhanced by the system of teacher student selection and teacher education in Finland.

**Teacher 6:** “Here in Finland, the education is already so good that we trust each other. And you must have a master’s degree in order to be a teacher... It is not just about the skills or the theories that you have learned in the university... for example, in order to get in the university. Despite of your study, we have interviews, and we try to see the personality and all that if a person is suitable for the job. It is not just he or she is good on the paper...”
All those Finnish teachers (5/5) described how teachers were important for pupils’ learning and future, and the content is sometimes scattered throughout the whole interviews. For example, Teacher 9 described her role in the classroom from a pedagogic perspective:

**Teacher 9:** “I think that I can help some children as a teacher, give them better future. And maybe equal starting points for their lives… Be patient to the kids because I think it is important to be a patient and caring adult, and then tell them something that who was the president in Finland. They don’t need that information because they can find it from google, so it is more important to teach them how to be a good human being and to take care of each other…”

It is common to find the utterance about shock or identity gap between their teacher education and workplace, but it is not serious. There are another two Finnish teachers (2/5) who felt surprised about their multiple professional identities at the workplace.

**Teacher 8:** “… I feel like my study didn’t prepare me well enough. I was surprised about the workload… I feel like sometimes we have to be psychologists and then we have to be nurses… because there is a lot to do—not only about teaching but also the way that you stay in touch with the families and help the students with their mental issues…”

**Teacher 9:** “… Because being a teacher is so much more than just in the classroom, especially I have challenges when I am writing messages to the parents. That is something they (professors) didn’t teach me at the university--how to do that and how to manage… And as a teacher, I have to be a ‘police’ and sometimes therapists…”

5.2.3 Summary and Reflection

To start with, it is clear to find that the majority of those Finnish teachers (4/5) enjoys high level of professional agency which is based on trust and professional freedom and furtherly resourced by their work community, school leaders and, even, some structures as guidelines including curriculum, textbook and school regulation. Even though most of the Finnish teachers (4/5) regarded their job as a profession being full of trust and freedom, to some extents, some restrictive factors hindering their professional agency can still be found. Those teachers, who expressed their negativities when discussing their professional freedom and choices, mostly attributed the restrictions to their self-awareness of insufficiencies in professional knowledge or experiences after graduating from teacher education, especially
at the beginning of the first several months of their career life. In addition, some of them believed that their limited financial resources and working hours, which can be the secondary restriction, could be problematic and intertwined together if they would like to do extra work in order to make more improvements or realize their ideals at work. In addition, Teacher 10, as a kindergarten teacher, was the only one who sensed more restricted to fulfill her professional initiatives because of her colleagues and school leaders who considered her as a green hand. In short, in conjunction with the SCSC approach, those Finnish teachers’ professional agency is resourced by the social-cultural context at the workplace, while the restrictions mainly fall into their subjectivities and, secondarily, the social-cultural context at the workplace.

In terms of professional identity, all the Finnish teachers (5/5) tried to recall and make sense of their high motivations to be teachers and the positivity of teachers or teaching profession. During their teacher education, they (5/5) kept or strengthen the positivity, and the teaching practice plays an important role. At the workplace, most of them (4/5) have not been called as “novice teachers” or experienced any special treatments, and they promote the equal treatments in their classrooms. Also, most of them (4/5) have felt some gaps between their teacher education and the reality at the workplace. Consequently, they have begun to dynamically adjust and renegotiate their professional identity with some other pronouns such as “psychologist(s)”, “nurse(s)”, etc.

To some certain extents, some connections between the professional agency and professional identity can be found. Firstly, the high level of freedom and being trust leave them much room to practice their professional agency and, especially, enable them to negotiate their professional identity in conjunctions with their professional learning and development at the workplace. Secondly, the elimination of imposed identity of “novice teachers” forms their professional identity both as “professional learners” for themselves and “professional helpers” for their colleagues, which is supported by professional freedom, trust, work community, school leaders and even some structures. In short, the equal treatment at their workplace maximize the professional learning for all the teachers in their schools. Thirdly, they used different pronouns, such as “psychologist(s)”, “nurse(s)”, “language teacher(s)”, “music teacher(s)”, etc., to indicate their professional identity, their professional agency to negotiation their professional identity and the challenges of the negotiation process.

In Section 5.2, the author tries to examine the level of practicing professional agency, the professional identity from a developmental perspective and the relationship between them in the Finnish context. In response to Chapter 3, there are two issues, including 1) early-childhood teachers and teacher education and 2) the gap between teacher education and the workplace, which needs further discussion in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6 International Comparison and Discussion

In the field of international and comparative education, the comparison is three-dimensional. In the figure below, the framework known as the Bray and Thomas’ Cube is widely adopted in this field because the cube “…has been extensively cited, both in literature that is explicitly associated with the field of comparative education and in broader literature” (Bray et al., 2007, p. 9).

![Figure 9 A framework for comparative education analyses.](image)

*Note: quoted from Bray & Thomas (1995, p. 475; as cited in Bray et al., 2007, p. 9).*

According to the figure above, in this thesis, the *geographic/location level* is countries; the *nonlocal demographic group* is novice teachers; the *aspect of education and of society* is professional agency and professional identity. The results of comparison are presented in the following tables in accordance with Chapter 5. In addition, all those teachers are qualified teachers in their countries and meet the participant selection criteria, which can ensure the comparability.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Degree of freedom of professional agency</th>
<th>Restrictions and frequency</th>
<th>Resources and frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Chinese teachers  | Relatively low, restrictions are more than resources | • Power relations and hierarchy (5/5)  
1. Imposed professional identity of novice teacher and special treatments (5/5)  
2. Powerlessness of influencing schools (5/5)  
3. Structured work routines (3/5)  
• Work community and age gap (3/5)  
• Material, financial and human resources (2/5)  
• Society (3/5)  
1. Social status (3/5)  
2. Mass media (2/5)  
3. Cultural difference (1/5) | • Power relations and hierarchy (2/5)  
• Work community and age gap (5/5)  
• Work culture (2/5) |
| Finnish teachers  | Relatively high; resources are more than restrictions | • Professional knowledge and experience (5/5)  
1. Professional experience (3/5)  
2. Professional knowledge (2/5)  
• Financial resources and working hours (2/5)  
• Work community (1/5)  
• Power relations and hierarchy (1/5) | • Professional freedom (5/5)  
1. High degree of professional freedom (4/5)  
2. Trust (2/5)  
3. Limited professional freedom (1/5)  
• Structure (4/5)  
1. The National Core Curriculum (4/5)  
2. Textbook (1/5)  
3. School regulation (1/5)  
• School leader (3/5)  
• Work community (5/5)  
1. Experienced colleagues (2/5)  
2. Equal treatment (4/5)  
• Work experience (4/5) |
Based on the SCSC approach, the national contexts and the table above, it is obvious to conclude some findings by comparison, which is discussed below.

**Those Finnish Novice Teachers Have More Freedom to Practice Professional Agency.**

As discussed in Section 3.1.2, teachers in Finland enjoy abundant freedom at the workplace, especially in classrooms. In Table 3, four Finnish teachers have a high degree of professional freedom at their workplace, whereas it is hard to find the description of the similar freedom in the testimonies of the Chinese teachers. In this sense, it seems that Finnish teachers are more autonomous than the Chinese counterpart at the workplace. Zhang and Shen (2012) argue that teacher professionalism is positively correlated with teachers’ professional agency (p. 72-73). In another article, Zhu and Zhang (2017) conclude that the Chinese teacher education needs to make effort to improve teachers’ professional autonomy by learning from the Finnish system which can attract, select and educate the promising young people to be professional teachers before they step into their workplace. Apart from the attractiveness of teaching profession and the initial teacher education, Zhu and Zhang (2017) also recommend that the educational management system in China should lessen the inspections evaluating teachers’ professional performances because teachers can be autonomous, self-driven, independent and creative at the workplace. However, teacher autonomy still needs to rely on the initial teacher education. Even though teachers in China have become more and more academically educated since the end of 1990s, yet it does not mean that they are more and more professionalized (Chen, 2017, p. 94). As mentioned in Section 3.2.2, the teacher education, selection and qualification system in China has been reformed in recent years. However, Gu et al. (2017) criticize that this system cannot attract or select right people to be teachers because of low validity of the qualification exam and the exam culture in the society, and there is a long way to improve the system because of the immense education system as well as the national context and development, especially in the remote rural areas.

**The Social-Cultural Factors Play an Important Role as Resources and Restrictions for Those Chinese Novice Teachers.**

In the table listed above, power relations and hierarchy play a major role in resourcing and restricting those Chinese teachers’ professional agency. Hierarchy does not only exist in the education system described in Section 3.2.2 but is rooted in the society and culture. Lockett (1988) describes that “…there is significant evidence for respect for age and hierarchy as a major feature of Chinese culture’ even ‘…decisions may appear to be made from the ‘bottom-up’, there is a strong and continuing influence from above” (p. 486-487). For this reason, the education system, teacher promotion system, occupational positions, age and seniority can apparently represent the culture of hierarchy, which can be reflected by all those Chinese teachers’ testimonies. As for those Chinese teachers, who are in their young age and without a long work experience, the experienced teachers, school leaders and other educational managers can impact or even decide for the young teachers. However, those young teachers can have more
opportunities to succeed or promote when their “leaders” appreciate their certain talents or competencies.

In addition, Wang et al. (2007) and Wang (2015) have studied how teachers in Chinese schools organize their professional learning communities, and they have found that hierarchy and age can be neglected if teachers and school leaders can share the same goals. As for those Chinese teachers in this thesis, although some of them described that it was difficult to communicate with elder teachers because of generation gap, but their work communities and the age gap play a significant role in supporting their professional agency, especially in professional learning.

Some of those teachers have encountered some challenges at the workplace because of resources and social status. According to the statistics in Section 3.2.1, the challenges of material and financial resources are caused by the economic conditions and finance in education in this middle-income country with a large population. However, the global teacher index by Varkey GEMS Foundation (2013) cannot explain the declining tendency of teachers’ social status in China, which requires further researches and investigations.

Subjective Factors Act as Main Restrictions and Social-cultural Factors Act as Main Resources for Those Finnish Novice Teachers.

Unlike the culture in Chinese society, hierarchy does not stand in the center at the workplace in Finland. Even though hierarchical structures exist at the Finnish workplace, hierarchy is usually suppressed, and thus, “[a]A person’s position is usually not dependent on his/her age or gender. It is always safest to show respect to all other workers because their position in the hierarchy may not be visible” (Niiranen, 2012). In this sense, most of those interviewed Finnish teachers described how they were equally treated as other experienced teachers in their schools, and school leaders were usually supportive and friendly instead of being overwhelmingly superior or arrogant. Moreover, as mentioned in Section 3.1.1, the Finnish education management system is featured as responsibility, trust and decentralization, and teachers are trusted in the society and have much freedom to do decision-making in classrooms because of their professionalism.

In this thesis, the author has found that professional identity, which involves the scarcities in their professional knowledge or experience, plays a major role as restrictions or challenges for those Finnish teachers’ professional agency. Among those five Finnish teachers, Teacher 9 admitted that she wanted to leave teaching profession at the beginning of a few months because of this challenge. Lanas (2017) in her article concludes that mentorship and ‘purposeful structures of peer-support’ in pre-service and in-service training can significantly help Finnish novice teachers locate themselves, i.e. their professional identities, which can prevent them from quitting teaching profession. In short, the subjective factors appear to be the main restriction of practicing professional agency in the Finnish context.

Facing the challenge of professional identity, most of the Finnish interviewees stated that some structures in their schools and in the education system, their colleagues and school leaders are supportive for their work, which reflects, in Section 3.1.1, that the educational leadership and structures are steering instead of controlling. Notably, the Finnish National Core Curriculum is highly praised by those teachers because of its role
as a guideline for their decision-making. In short, the socio-cultural factors are generally supportive for those teachers.

However, there are still some challenges for some of those Finnish teachers because of the socio-cultural context. Two teachers considered that the limited financial resources and work hours could not help them realize some of their ideas or ambitions at work, but it should be understandable that they were not infinite. The only early-childhood teacher, Teacher 10, expressed much more negative feelings towards the socio-cultural factors including her work community and the hierarchy in her school, which makes her have relatively less freedom of decision-making than the other Finnish teachers working in primary or secondary schools. Here, it seems that the only early-childhood teacher enjoys less freedom of practicing professional agency at the workplace. This issue will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

**Those Early-childhood Novice Teachers in Finland and China Have Less Freedom in Practicing Professional Agency Compared with the Other Novice Teachers.**

The data and key findings show that those interviewed early-childhood teachers both in Finland and China have more negative comments on their professional agency. Compared with the other teachers in primary and secondary schools, the Finnish early-childhood teacher (Teacher 10) complained of her work community, power relations and hierarchy in her school, while the Chinese early-childhood teachers (Teacher 1 and Teacher 2) emphasized on their social status.

Since there is only one early-childhood teacher from Finland who participated in the interview, it is hard to confirm if her negative comments on her workplace are pervasive phenomena in Finland or not. Finnish National Agency for Education (2017) presents some current issues in Finnish education, which includes ‘early childhood education and care reform’ (p. 10). Meanwhile, OECD (2016d) points out that the number of children per staff and the average salary of teaching staff in Finnish early-childhood education are below the OECD average level, which need to be improved in order to ensure the teaching staff’s well-beings at their workplace. In sum, both the Finnish government and OECD have been aware of the demand of reforms and betterment in the early-childhood education in Finland.

There are two early-childhood teachers who participated in the interviews, and they both claimed that they were not respected by parents and the society because of the low academic qualification of the teaching staff and the misconception by parents. Firstly, this phenomenon can be explained by the exam-oriented culture and the favor of “intellect” in the society mentioned in Section 3.2.1. Furtherly, Gu et al. (2017) and Zhou (2011) summarize the dark side of the early-childhood education in China: 1) although early-childhood teachers are educated at bachelor, associate-degree and vocational-secondary levels, qualified and professional early-childhood teachers are rare; 2) early-childhood teacher qualification and the overall quality of the teaching staff need to be improved by professional development; 3) early-childhood teachers’ salaries, social status and treatment need to be recognized and ensured by law.
Table 4 A comparative summary of novice teachers voices on professional identity in Finland and China.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Before teacher education</th>
<th>During teacher education</th>
<th>At the workplace</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Chinese teachers | • Positive image of teachers (4/5)  
• High motivation to become teachers (3/5)  
• Negative image of teachers (1/5)  
• Low motivation to become kindergarten teachers (2/5) | • Negotiation of professional identity (2/5)  
1. Professional knowledge (1/5)  
2. Professional values (1/5) | • Imposed professional identity of novice teachers (5/5)  
• Active professional learners (4/5)  
• Teachers with certain teaching subjects or duties (5/5)  
• Co-workers with other colleagues (5/5)  
• Shock of professional identity (5/5)  
1. Professional commitments (2/5)  
2. Professional knowledge (2/5)  
3. Professional ideals (1/5) |
| Finnish teachers | • Positive image of teachers (5/5)  
• High motivation to become teachers (5/5) | • Negotiation of professional identity (4/5)  
1. More positive or stronger (3/5)  
2. More realistic (1/5)  
3. Teaching practice play a major role (4/5) | • Imposed professional identity of novice teachers (1/5)  
• Equality-promoters (2/5)  
• Teachers with certain teaching subjects or duties (3/5)  
• Co-workers with other colleagues (5/5)  
• Carers of students’ well-beings (5/5)  
• Shock of professional identity (2/5)  
1. Multiple roles and duties (2/5) |

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In the table above, the author has summarized the key findings from Chapter 5 in order to compare professional identity between the Chinese teachers and the Finnish counterpart. Moreover, the author will furtherly discuss those main findings in the following text.

**Before Teacher Education—Those Finnish Teachers Have Higher Motivations.**

Based on the key findings, the author has found that low motivation to become teachers is uttered by those two Chinese kindergarten teachers because of the university admission (Gaokao) as well as the low social status of early-childhood teachers in China. As described in Section 3.2.2, the teacher qualification exam has been reformed in recent years. Nonetheless, this exam system can still not effectively select those who are caring, responsible and motivated to be teachers even it is made up of pedagogics, psychology, interviews, etc., and it may possibly be less effective because of the exam culture in the society (Gu et al., 2017, p. 3). However, it is hard to improve in recent years because of the large population that demands many teachers, especially in the rural areas (Gu et al., 2017, p. 3-4).

On the contrary, as mentioned in Section 3.1.2, the teacher selection system in Finland is strict and can select those who are suitable for the teaching profession. Those Finnish teachers described how their life experiences motivated them to be teachers, which belongs to the process of anticipatory socialization (see Section 2.2). Their high motivation and positivity towards teaching profession and teachers pave their professional identity renegotiation during and after the teacher education.

**During Teacher Education—Those Finnish Teachers are More Active to Negotiate Professional Identity.**

The negotiation process of professional identity was not often mentioned by the Chinese teachers during the interviews, even though some teachers were not highly motivated to be teachers. In Section 3.2.2, Yu (2013) describes that only less than 40% of the undergraduate teacher students are motivated to be teachers because they love teaching. Also, Yu (2013) warns that some principals in China believe that their newly recruited teachers did not have faith of being a teacher, and normal universities and colleges need to communicate with schools more often. Gu et al. (2017) also criticize that the teacher education in China has become less professional by paying more attention to subject knowledge and shrinking teaching practice since 1980s (p. 4). Consequently, only two teachers (Teacher 3 and Teacher 4) mentioned they had renegotiated their professional identity during their teacher education—Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 attributed it to their teaching practice, and Teacher 4 additionally mentioned the theoretical knowledge. In short, in respond to Section 2.2, the Chinese teachers did not negotiate their professional identity at their learning stage through anticipatory socialization.

On the contrary, as discussed in Section 3.1.2, the Finnish teacher education contains both theoretical knowledge, especially some components concerning professional identity, and teaching practice. Those Finnish teachers’ teacher education made their
professional identity more positive, and teaching practice played an important role even though Teacher 10 mentioned that her teaching practice was too short. To conclude, the teacher education in Finland can positively affects teacher students’ professional identity before they become teachers.

At the Workplace—Those Chinese Teachers Have Imposed Professional Identity and More Active to Negotiate Professional Identity.

Those Chinese teachers did not feel any obvious negotiation of their professional identity, but they all have experienced a dramatic shock regarding their professional identity at the workplace. The culture of hierarchy in the society (post-structure) and the education management system (structure) entities them as novice teachers by different criteria, which imposes them on some special treatments at the workplace. In this sense, Zhu and Zhang (2017) conclude that the compulsory professional training and development for novice teachers in China should be finished during their teacher education, and the professional training and development appear to be not effective or efficient if they are much too standardized and impersonalized. Zhu and Zhang (2017) also propose that teacher education in China should learn a lot from Finland in order to professionalize teachers during their pre-service training, which can enable them act as independent professional agents at the workplace (p. 8).

Except the early-childhood teacher in Finland, the imposed professional identity or special treatments for those Finnish novice teachers are hardly found in the key findings, which means that those Finnish teachers can be able to step out their novice periods by themselves. Even though the Finnish teacher education system seems to be perfect as discussed in Section 3.1.2, some of those Finnish teachers still experienced some shocks because of their workload and duties that were not learned at the university.

During the interviews, all those teachers in Finland and China described their professional identity directly or indirectly depending on their work duties and work community members. The relationship between their professional agency and professional identity is vague, which is discussed in Section 5.1.3 and 5.2.3, and the main difference is that the Chinese teachers’ professional identity as novice teachers is imposed by different structures and they are not allowed to practice professional agency to change, which is hardly found in the Finnish counterpart.
Chapter 7 Concluding Remarks

In this thesis, the author tries to comparatively probe into how the interviewed novice teachers in Finland and China make sense of their professional agency and professional identity. By relying the research questions, this thesis has the following main findings:

- Generally speaking, the novice teachers, especially those working in primary and secondary schools, in Finland enjoy relatively higher degree of professional freedom for decision-making.

- Socio-cultural or structural factors play a major role in resourcing and restricting the professional agency of those Chinese novice teachers, whereas the Finnish counterpart are mainly resourced by structural factors and restrained by subjective factors.

- From a developmental perspective, those Finnish teachers are relatively more motivated to be teachers and well-prepared by their initiative teacher education.

- Due to the limitation of the thesis, the relationship between professional agency and professional identity is vague, which requires further investigations.

- Due to the different education systems and socio-cultural contexts, the difference in their voices between those Chinese and Finnish novice teachers mainly originates from different education systems, cultures of teaching and hierarchy.

The result shows that there is still a long way to go for the teacher qualification, education and management system in China because of the national context. Early-childhood teachers in Finland and China need to be focused in the future educational reforms and development. Besides, this thesis also reconfirms that how the initial teacher education, school leaders, experienced teachers, etc. play significant roles for those novices in Finland and China, which help them from being a student to be a teacher. Particularly, both in Finland and China, we need to rethink how novice teachers can be able to exercise their professional agency in order to maximize their pedagogical innovation, professional learning, wellbeing and happiness at the workplace, and how they can be supported rather than be controlled by the structures such as curriculum, textbooks, school regulations, educational policies, power relations and hierarchy, etc.

As for future researches, the author suggests that it is necessary to carry out more in-depth analyses at the meso and micro levels, especially at the organizational levels, since the education system in Finland and China are decentralized to different extents. It is wise to collect data with larger sample size in different contexts, especially samples in the rural and special-administrative areas, in order to reach to a more transferrable and representative conclusion.

In terms of research topics, the author recommends scrutinizing career and pedagogical wellbeing of early-childhood teachers in Finland, social status of early-childhood teachers in China, teacher education, management and qualification system in China.
Methodologically speaking, it is advised to conduct quantitative or mix-method researches since the SCSC approach has more widely and maturely conceptualized professional agency and professional identity than ever before. Longitudinal design and ethnographic approach are recommended since we need to examine how novice teachers practice professional agency to negotiate professional identity at the workplace, and “novice” should be self-defined because of different life and work experiences.
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Finland Perceive Their Professional Agency? *Teachers and Teaching.*


OECD. (2016c). *PISA 2015: Results in Focus.*


Appendix 1: Interview Guide (English)

_Semi-structured interview guide with examples of sub-questions:_

1. Introduction and lead-in:
   a) Background of the research topic;
   b) Did you have any difficulties or challenges during your beginning period?
      i. How do you face the challenges?
      ii. Do you have any (enough) supports?
      iii. …
   c) Does your school have any criteria or policy to identify who novice/beginning teachers are?
      i. What is your opinion towards this criteria or policy?
      ii. Are there any special treatments for you as a new teacher in your school?
      iii. …

2. Professional agency:
   a) Can you make your own choice at your workplace?
      i. What kinds of choices do you have?
      ii. Why is it free/not free?
      iii. …
   b) Can you make any influence on your colleagues or work community?
      i. Can you give some examples?
      ii. Why can/cannot?
      iii. …
   c) How is your cooperation with your colleagues?
      i. Can you give some examples about your cooperation?
      ii. Why can/cannot?
      iii. …
   d) Do you feel that you have more and more duties?
      i. How do you feel about it?
      ii. Why?
      iii. …

3. Professional identity:
   a) What is your motivation to choose teacher education?
      i. Why?
      ii. How did your parents influence you?
iii. …

b) Who are “teachers” you thought before you studied to be a teacher?
   i. Why?
   ii. Why is that in your life experience?
   iii. …

c) Did you make any changes about your opinion of “who are teachers” during your teacher education?
   i. Why (not) changed?
   ii. In which ways?
   iii. …

d) Did you make any changes about your opinion of “who are teachers” during at your work place?
   i. Why (not) changed?
   ii. In which ways?
   iii. …

e) What kinds of good teacher you really want to be?
   i. Why?
   ii. Have you taken any actions?
   iii. …

f) At your workplace, do you have anything need to improve as a teacher?
   i. Why?
   ii. Have you taken any actions or had any plan?
   iii. …

4. End of the interview:
   a) Do you have any other questions, thoughts or comments?
Appendix 2: Interview Guide (Chinese)

*Semi-structured interview guide with examples of sub-questions:*

1. 介绍与话题引入:
   a) 背景与研究话题:
   b) 在这段的新手时期，你是否遇到过困难或者挑战?
      i. 你是怎么面对和解决这些挑战或者困难的?
      ii. 你有一些其他的帮助吗?
      iii. ……”
   c) 你的学校有关于谁是新手老师的相关规定或者标准吗?
      i. 你怎么看待这项标准?
      ii. 新手老师会有特殊待遇吗?
      iii. ……”
   d) 你的学校有关于谁是新手老师的相关规定或者标准吗?
      i. 你怎么看待这项标准?
      ii. 新手老师会有特殊待遇吗?
      iii. ……”

2. 专业能动性:
   a) 在你的工作单位，你能够做出自己的选择吗?
      i. 你能做出哪些选择?
      ii. 为什么你会感到（不）自由?
      iii. ……”
   b) 你可以对你的工作单位或者团队做出影响吗?
      i. 能举一些例子吗?
      ii. 为什么（不）可以?
      iii. ……”
   c) 你和你的同事的合作怎么样?
      i. 能举一些例子吗?
      ii. 为什么（不）可以?
      iii. ……”
   d) 你有没有觉得你有越来越多的责任呢?
      i. 你感觉怎么样?
      ii. 为什么?
      iii. ……”

3. 专业身份:
a) 你想成为教师的动机是什么？
   i. 为什么？
   ii. 你的父母是怎么影响你的？
   iii. ……

b) 在你学习师范专业之前，你觉得老师是怎样的一群人？
   i. 为什么？
   ii. 为什么和你的人生经历相关？
   iii. ……

c) 你的师范专业有对你的这一认识做出改变或者调整吗？
   i. 为什么（没）有改变？
   ii. 有哪些方面呢？
   iii. ……

d) 在你工作之后，你有对你的这一认识做出改变或者调整吗？
   i. 为什么（没）有改变？
   ii. 有哪些方面呢？
   iii. ……

e) 你想成为什么样的好老师呢？
   i. 为什么？
   ii. 你有做出过一些行动吗？
   iii. ……

f) 作为老师的你，你有什么地方需要提高的吗？
   i. 为什么？
   ii. 你有做出过一些行动吗？
   iii. ……

4. 结束访谈：
   a) 你还有别的评价、观点或者想法吗？
Appendix 3: Thematic Codes

1. Chinese participants:
   a) Professional agency
      i. Social-cultural context
         1. Material, financial and human resources
         2. Power relations and hierarchy
         3. Work community and age gap
         4. Work culture
      ii. Professional identity
         1. Imposed professional identity as novice teacher
         2. Social status and reputation
         3. Professional knowledge
         4. Work history and experience
   b) Professional identity
      i. Before teacher education
      ii. During teacher education
      iii. At the workplace

2. Finnish participants:
   a) Professional agency
      i. Social-cultural context
         1. Professional freedom and trust
         2. Financial resources and workload
         3. Power relations and hierarchy
         4. Structures
            a) the National Core Curriculum
            b) Textbook
            c) School regulation
         5. Work community
      ii. Professional identity
         1. Imposed professional identity as novice teacher
         2. Equal treatment as other teachers
         3. Professional knowledge
         4. Work history and experience
iii. Professional identity
   1. Before teacher education
   2. During teacher education
   3. At the workplace
Appendix 4: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Information and Purpose: The interview for which you are being asked to participate in, is a part of a master’s degree thesis (Novice Teachers’ Voices on Professional Agency and Identity in China and Finland) focusing on the professional learning, growth and well-being for newly-in-service teachers from early-childhood to secondary education in public schools in Finland and China (Mainland). The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the philosophical terms of professional agency and professional identity in teacher education and development within a cross-national context from a comparative perspective by adopting SCSC approach (subject-centered socio-cultural approach) for conceptualization and analysis.

Your Participation: Your participation, which is voluntary, in this study will consist of an semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30–90 minutes on the internet. You will be asked a series of questions about your professional behaviour and identity within the topic. You are not required to answer all the questions. You may skip any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At any time you may notify the researcher that you would like to stop the interview and your participation in the study. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation.

Benefits and Risks: The benefit of your participation is to contribute to the understanding of professional agency and identity in the field of International and Comparative Education. Your participation will be rewarded with a gift card or something equivalent via Internet, and the amount depends on the researcher’s budget.

Confidentiality: The interview will be recorded by Apowersoft on computer and a mobile phone; however, your name will not be recorded on the tape. Your name and other personal information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the thesis. All of your information and interview responses will be confidentially saved. The researcher will not share your individual responses with anyone other than you and the research supervisor.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher (Suhao Peng; email: suhao.peng@yahoo.com) or his supervisor (supervisor: Ulf Fredriksson; email: ulf.fredriksson@edu.su.se). For more detailed regulations concerning research ethics, please refer to Research Ethics of Stockholm University (http://www.su.se/english/research/research-ethics). By signing below I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information. I am aware that I can discontinue my participation in the study at any time.

Signature of the researcher:  
Date: 10/02/2018

Signature of the participant:  
Date:

Department of Education
Stockholm University
Address: Frescativägen 54
SE-106 91 Stockholm
Sweden
www.edu.su.se
Telephone: +46 8 16 20 00
Fax: +46 8 15 31 33

Since All the participants can understand English, the informed consent form is only in English.
Appendix 5: Personal Information Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. 姓名 / first name</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>姓 / last name</td>
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<tr>
<td>性别 / gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>年龄 / age</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2. 现居地区 / residential region |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 城市 / city               |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 国家 / country            |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

| 3. 最高师范教育背景信息 / information of your highest teaching degree |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 毕业院校 / institution     |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 学位全称（如“英语（师范）文学学士学位”）/ degree title (e.g., "Master of Arts in Education with Direction of English Language Education") |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 毕业年份 / graduation year |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
4. 您的任教经历 / your teaching experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>教学科目（若无请说明）/ teaching subject(s) (if not applicable, please specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>时长（例如“1年2个月”）/ duration (e.g. “1 year and 2 months”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. 任教学校信息 / information of the school in which you are currently working

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>学校名称 / school name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>城市 / city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>国家 / country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>公立或是私立？ / public or private?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>幼儿园、小学、初中、高中或是…？ / Preschool, primary school, high school, or...?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>