

# The Research on the Influencing Factors of Educational Belief Formation Among Teachers in Private Colleges and Universities

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## Abstract

In recent years, due to the complexity of their work, teachers in private colleges and universities have become perfunctory towards their jobs, which has severely impacted the quality of education and teaching in these institutions. Improving the quality of talent cultivation in private colleges and universities requires starting with the teachers themselves. Educational beliefs have a significant explicit or implicit effect on teachers' words and actions, influencing their teaching behavior and practices. This study conducted in-depth interviews with 10 teachers from private colleges and universities and used systematic grounded theory to code, organize, and analyze the interview materials.

The findings reveal that the formation of educational beliefs in private colleges and universities is closely related to personal life history, with factors such as the personal growth environment, "significant others," and "key events" affecting the formation of these beliefs. This research helps teachers in private colleges and universities deepen their self-understanding of teaching beliefs, actively reflect on the process of forming their teaching beliefs, proactively explore significant others who have a positive impact on them, and continuously pay attention to the interpretation of the significance of "key events." This can lead to improvements in their teaching behavior and promote their professional development.

**Keywords:** Private Colleges and Universities; Educational Beliefs; Grounded Theory; Key Events

## Introduction

The increasing professional pressures and workloads faced by college and university teachers, especially those in private colleges and universities, have become a significant concern in the academic world. These challenges are not only a result of changes in the academic environment but also due to the evolving expectations of higher education institutions from their faculty members. The struggle to balance the demanding workload with personal life, alongside the need to maintain high-quality teaching and research output, contributes to a decrease in work engagement among faculty. The situation is exacerbated by the often ineffective support mechanisms within the organizational climates of these institutions, which fail to provide the necessary resources or emotional support to teachers. This lack of support, coupled with the high demands placed on teachers, leads to various negative psychological states, such as indifference towards colleagues and students, diminished interest in work, and a low sense of achievement. These states not only affect the teachers' well-being but also have a detrimental impact on the educational development of students and the overall growth of the institutions.

The role of educational beliefs in influencing the work engagement of teachers in private colleges and universities is profound and multifaceted. Teachers' educational beliefs, encompassing their acknowledgment and faith in the values, theories, and principles of private education, significantly influence their teaching behaviors and engagement levels. These beliefs are not static but evolve over time, shaped by personal experiences, interactions, and reflections on their teaching practices. However, current research on educational beliefs often lacks a dynamic perspective, focusing primarily on a static analysis of these beliefs at a given point in time. This approach overlooks the complex, ongoing process through which educational beliefs are formed and evolve. Recognizing this gap, the proposed study aims to delve deeper into the formation of educational beliefs among teachers in private colleges and universities. By employing grounded theory, the study seeks to uncover the myriad factors that influence the development of these beliefs, from personal life histories to professional experiences. Understanding these factors can enable teachers to recognize and strengthen the positive aspects that contribute to their educational beliefs, thereby influencing their teaching behaviors in a way that enhances teaching quality and professional capabilities. This research not only contributes to the theoretical understanding of the formation of educational beliefs but also offers practical insights for teachers and educational institutions to support faculty development and improve educational outcomes.

## Research Objective

1. To investigate what factors influence the formation of educational beliefs among teachers in private colleges and universities.
2. To study the model of relationships among factors affecting the formation of educational beliefs in private colleges and universities.

## Literature Review

With the development of cognitive psychology, scholars have gradually shifted from studying teachers' overt behaviors to psychological and cognitive levels, and the study of educational beliefs has gradually attracted attention, especially after the 1980s, when educational beliefs began to become an important field of research in teacher education. Regarding its concept, Kagan, D. M. (1992) believes that educational beliefs are teachers' understanding, cognition, and views on teaching objectives, teaching situations, teaching content, and teaching practices, and are part of guiding teaching decisions and content, just like teachers' values or worldviews, nested with personal and organizational environments. Educational beliefs cover teachers' teaching and life practices and are a complete and complex belief system. Regarding the formation of educational beliefs, research by scholars at home and abroad mainly focuses on the following four aspects:

1. The foundation of the formation of educational beliefs.

Hamill, R., Wilson, T. D., & Nisbett, R. E (1980) proved that previous learning experiences and constructions are the basis for teachers to form concepts of learning and teaching, as well as the germination of educational beliefs, which play an important role in a teacher's entire career. Once formed, educational beliefs are difficult to change. Pajares, M. F (1992) found that teachers had already formed their educational beliefs before receiving teacher education, and these early-formed beliefs, even if contradictory to reason, time, and teaching experience, would be preserved. Ju, Y. C. (2001) believes that before teachers take up teaching

positions, as learners in the classroom, they have internalized teachers' values, beliefs, and practices as their own teaching beliefs through years of observing teachers' teaching behaviors.

#### 2. The stages of the formation of educational beliefs.

King, P. M., & Kitchener, K. S. (1994) believe that the formation of individual beliefs is divided into four stages: acceptance, belief, quasi-reflection, and "reflective thinking." Furinghetti, F., & Pehkonen, E. (2002) propose that belief formation has three stages: the unconscious stage, the concretization and quasi-reflective stage, and the individual philosophical stage of beliefs.

#### 3. The pathways and methods of the formation of educational beliefs.

Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1994) believe that there are six pathways to the formation of educational beliefs: teachers' learning experiences, successful experiences in the teaching process, teachers' personal teaching styles and practices, teachers' personalities, educational and research principles, and specific principles of a teaching method. Xin, T., & Shen, J. L. (1999) believe that the formation of educational beliefs has two methods: one is the personal self-construction process arising from personal direct experiences, and the other is the cultural script formed through cultural adaptation, education, and cultural transmission of school education. They believe that the formation of educational beliefs is the result of the interaction between personal construction and cultural beliefs. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the influence of life experiences and social experiences on educational beliefs during the individual socialization process, as well as the social factors of the formation of educational beliefs, in order to have a more comprehensive and objective understanding of the diversity of educational beliefs or the consistency under certain educational scenarios.

#### 4. The influencing factors of the formation of educational beliefs.

Scholars mainly divide them into external factors, internal factors, and a combination of internal and external factors. For example, Jiang, Y. (2015) believes that current external factors such as materialism, secularism, and extreme individualism affect teachers' educational beliefs. Lü, G. G. (2004), through a questionnaire survey, found that among the internal influencing factors of educational beliefs, teachers' work engagement, reflective intelligence, critical thinking tendency, job satisfaction, and teacher efficacy have an important impact on educational beliefs. Richardson, V. (2002) pointed out that the formation of educational beliefs is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, such as personal life experiences, school education, and formal knowledge.

## Research Methodology

### 1. Research Methodology

The complexity and implicit nature of educational beliefs make qualitative research a feasible and appropriate method for studying educational beliefs. Grounded theory, proposed by American scholars Glaser BG and others in 1967, is a qualitative research method that bridges the gap between theoretical research and empirical studies, resulting in findings that are more reliable and verifiable. The most widely applied version of grounded theory today is the systematic approach represented by Strauss A and Corbin J. This approach typically employs a three-tier coding process: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, to uncover influencing factors and the structural relationships between them, thereby forming a theoretical model with causal relationships. This theory involves collecting materials and data, continuously comparing data, and conducting in-depth organization and analysis through

abstraction and conceptualization, inducing core concepts and categories from the data, and building theoretical models from the bottom up. Therefore, this study, through in-depth interviews to understand teachers' personal growth experiences and inner worlds, uses grounded theory to investigate the factors influencing the formation of educational beliefs in private colleges and universities, offering high explanatory power and a certain degree of appropriateness.

## 2. Population and Sampling

This research focuses on the factors influencing the formation of educational beliefs among teachers in private colleges and universities, planning to interview 10 teachers from these institutions. These teachers are from four universities located in Nanjing, Wuxi, and Nantong. Table 1 presents the participants of this study. To protect the personal information of the teachers and prevent information leakage, numbers are used to represent the names of the teachers.

**Table 1** Basic Information of Interviewed Teachers

| Teacher ID | Gender | Years of Teaching |
|------------|--------|-------------------|
| Teacher 1  | Male   | 4 years           |
| Teacher 2  | Male   | 3 years           |
| Teacher 3  | Male   | 5 years           |
| Teacher 4  | Male   | 8 years           |
| Teacher 5  | Male   | 14 years          |
| Teacher 6  | Female | 1 year            |
| Teacher 7  | Female | 2 years           |
| Teacher 8  | Female | 4 years           |
| Teacher 9  | Female | 7 years           |
| Teacher 10 | Female | 10 years          |

## 3. Data Collecting

This study primarily explores the impact of personal life histories on the formation of educational beliefs among teachers at private colleges. Thus, an interview outline was designed, covering the following aspects: (1) The individual's learning experiences; (2) Events or figures in their learning experiences that influenced their educational beliefs; (3) Teaching experiences of the teachers; (4) Events or figures in their teaching experiences that influenced their educational beliefs; (5) The influence of family background in their personal growth on their educational beliefs; (6) Other factors, beyond the ones mentioned, that influenced their educational beliefs.

During the interviews, an open approach was maintained. Based on the interview outline, follow-up questions were asked as appropriate to different interviewees, striving not to introduce the interviewer's personal opinions into the process to avoid affecting the interviewees' self-reflection and objective description. It's important to note that personal learning experiences primarily refer to educational experiences during elementary, middle, and high school, as well as university stages, whereas teaching experiences refer mainly to teaching at the university level.

After each interview, the interviewer aimed to write reflection notes as soon as possible, recording the interviewee's expressions, tone, posture, and interview setting. This approach ensures that valuable information, which was not directly expressed by the interviewees, can be accurately captured. Additionally, the interview recordings were transcribed into text, and the draft was then shared with the interviewees for verification and confirmation. After ensuring the accuracy and approval from the interviewees, personal information was anonymized before coding for presentation.

#### 4. Analysis of Data

This study conducted the coding of interview materials in three stages:

(1) Open Coding Stage: The researcher first read through all interview materials word by word, sentence by sentence, and then marked and coded them. Through repeated reading of the interview materials, the raw data were conceptualized and categorized, resulting in 57 conceptual tags. By comparing, merging, and correcting a large amount of overlapping, redundant, and individualized content, an initial formation of 24 categories was achieved.

(2) Axial Coding Stage: By establishing connections between concepts and their subcategories, higher-level categories were refined. This stage further abstracted the open coding, analyzing the logical relationships between subcategories, and eventually identified 9 subcategories: family background, living environment, personal factors, the influence of significant others, the impact of studying abroad, teaching philosophy, students' learning philosophy, teacher-student relationships, and the relationship between teaching and research (see Table 2).

**Table 2** Main Categories and Corresponding Subcategories Formed by Axial Coding

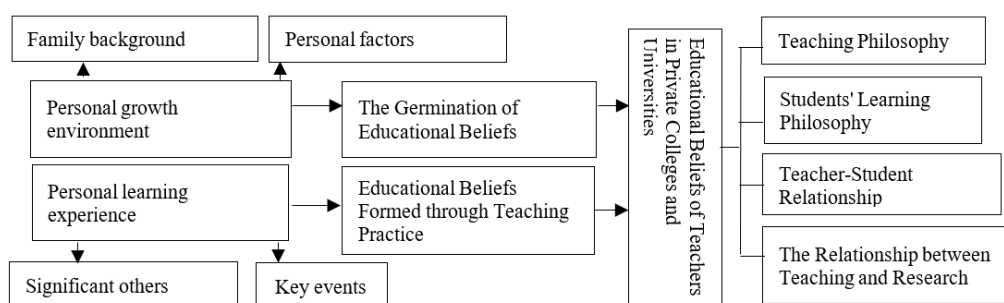
| Category Content  | Subcategory                           | Main Category      | Core Category                            |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Parents' occupations, father's level of education, family economic conditions, living environment, surrounding people's understanding of education      | Family background, living environment | Family             | Personal growth environment              |
| Personal character, personal family changes   | Personal factors                      | Individual         |  |
| Influence of high school teachers, suggestions from university teachers, lifestyle of doctoral supervisors  | Influence of significant others       | Significant others | Personal learning experience             |
| Purpose of studying abroad, new perceptions, impact on attitudes towards life, impact on work attitude, impact on teaching methods, rediscovery of self | Impact of studying abroad             | Key events         |  |
| Teaching methods of university teachers, guidance received as a new teacher, guidance style of master's supervisor                                      | Teaching philosophy                   | Teaching cognition | Educational beliefs in teaching practice |
| Category Content  | Subcategory                           | Main Category      |  |
| Parents' occupations, father's level of education, family economic conditions, living   | Family background,                    | Family             |  |

|  |                    |            |
|--|--------------------|------------|
| environment, surrounding people's understanding of education | living environment |            |
| Personal character, personal family changes                  | Personal factors   | Individual |

(3) Selective Coding Stage: Building on the axial coding, this stage involves further exploration of categories and subcategories to identify core categories from the main and subcategories. Through induction, integration, and verification, this research ultimately identified three core categories: the personal growth environment, personal learning experience, and educational beliefs in teaching practice.

(4) Saturation Test: To ensure the scientific rigor and accuracy of grounded theory research, it's necessary to continuously sample and compare formed categories, analyzing and revising them until no new conceptual categories emerge, achieving theoretical saturation. This study analyzed materials from three reserved interview subjects and, after comparative analysis, found no new theoretical categories. Therefore, the model of factors influencing the formation of educational beliefs in private colleges and universities constructed in this research has reached theoretical saturation.

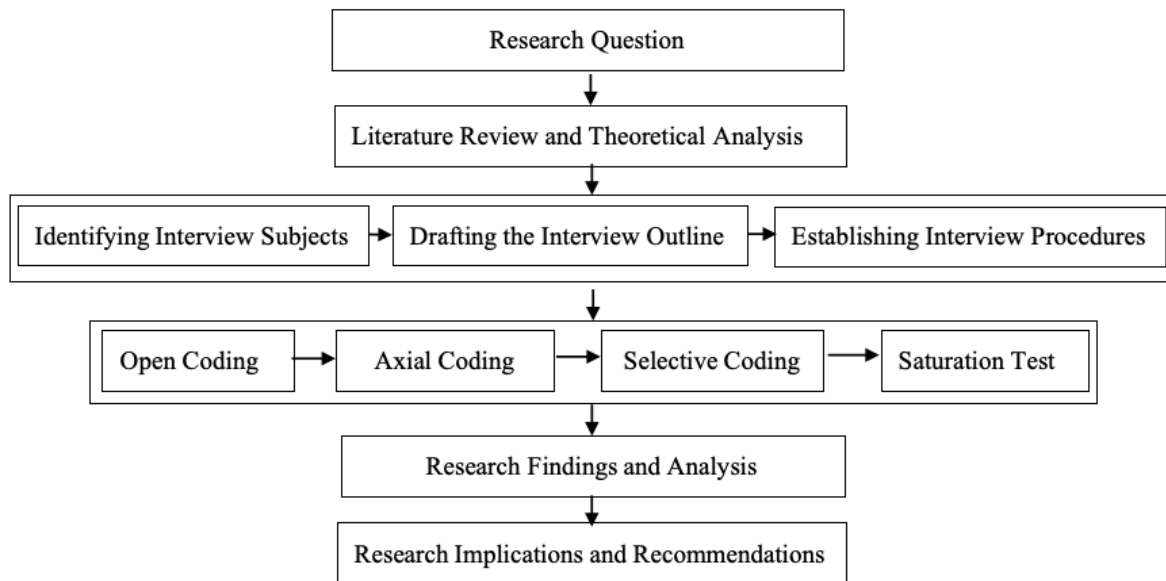
Through a comprehensive analysis of the personal life history materials of 10 private college teachers, a model of factors influencing the formation of educational beliefs in private colleges and universities was constructed (as shown in Figure 2).



**Figure 2** Model of the Factors Influencing the Formation of Educational Beliefs among Teachers in Private Colleges and Universities  
Source: From the author

## Research Conceptual Framework

This study aims to extend the analysis of educational beliefs among teachers in private colleges and universities from the perspective of their personal life histories. By applying grounded theory, it analyzes the factors influencing the formation of educational beliefs among these teachers, enabling them to fully understand the complexity of the factors that influence educational beliefs. By strengthening the role of positive influencing factors, it seeks to change their teaching behaviors, thereby improving teaching quality and enhancing professional capabilities. The research framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework  
 Source: From the author

## Research Result

The formation of educational beliefs among teachers in private colleges and universities is closely linked to their personal life histories, with elements such as the personal growth environment, "significant others," and "key events" playing a decisive role in shaping these beliefs. Family background and personal factors create the soil in which educational beliefs begin to sprout. Factors such as the educational level of parents, family economic conditions, living environment, and parental expectations for their children's education cultivate an awareness and preference for the teaching profession from an early age. Additionally, an individual's personality traits and interests also serve as crucial factors in the initial formation of educational beliefs.

In the learning experiences of the interviewed teachers, teachers act as "significant others," whose teaching styles, methods, behaviors, and life principles become models for the interviewees to emulate and learn from. The overseas study experiences mentioned in the interviews, in particular, are considered a "key event" that impacts private college and university teachers. Most believe that studying abroad not only broadened their horizons and allowed them to experience different lifestyles but also changed their previous attitudes towards life and self-perception, leading to significant changes in their teaching methods and attitudes towards students.

These personal growth backgrounds and learning experiences together forge a teacher's educational beliefs. In the specific context of university teaching practice, these beliefs further evolve into a belief system regarding teaching, student learning, teacher-student relationships, and the relationship between teaching and research. This belief system not only guides teachers' teaching behaviors but also affects the learning process of students and the interaction between teachers and students, thereby shaping the quality and characteristics of the educational environment.

## Discussion

### 1. The Impact of Family Background on the Formation of Educational Beliefs Among Teachers in Private Colleges and Universities

The formation of educational beliefs is closely related to one's upbringing and family factors. During a teacher's personal growth, the family serves as an important educational setting. The parents' level of education, family economic conditions, parents' examples and teachings, family atmosphere, and parent-child relationships can all have positive or negative effects on the formation of educational beliefs. Among the interviewees, 7 out of 10 teachers were born in rural areas, where parents typically hope their children receive education to secure stable jobs with high income. The growth environment and family background of the interviewed teachers in private colleges show that from a young age, they were immersed in concepts such as "studying, receiving education, becoming a teacher," with their parents' career expectations for their children profoundly influencing their choice of teaching profession.

### 2. Personal Factors Are Closely Related to the Formation of Educational Beliefs Among Teachers in Private Colleges and Universities

Educational beliefs are closely linked to an individual's personality, emotions, and will. Positive emotions can promote the formation of educational beliefs. When one's own or others' educational beliefs meet their moral, aesthetic, and cognitive needs, it leads to affirmative emotional tendencies like satisfaction, joy, appreciation, and admiration, which are then incorporated into their belief system. This conclusion was confirmed in this study. One interviewed teacher mentioned, "I always had a dream of going to university. But the education in our rural area was very backward. I was not content with the status quo and was very ambitious. I managed to get into a 211 university and later decided to pursue postgraduate studies. Gradually, I felt that studying to become a teacher and teaching was most suitable for me."

### 3. The Influence of Significant Others on the Formation of Educational Beliefs Among Teachers in Private Colleges and Universities

The concept of "significant others" was proposed by American sociologist Mills, referring to specific individuals who have a crucial impact on the socialization process and the formation of an individual's psychological personality. He believed that people gradually gain awareness of "self" through interactions with others. From the growth experiences of outstanding teachers and teaching masters, it is evident that their life paths were almost always influenced by significant others, who played a crucial role in their professional development and growth. In fact, the influence of these significant others on teachers' professional growth is an external manifestation, which implies a profound impact on educational beliefs. One interviewed teacher said, "I got along very well with my English teacher. I often borrowed books from her, and she lent me many foreign fairy tales. She was not much older than us, starting to teach at our school at the age of seventeen or eighteen. Sometimes she liked to chat with me. Later, she went to university, which had a big impact on me. I thought I should learn from her and also go to university." The article also found that in the process of teachers' professional development, guidance and advice from significant others also have an important impact on educational beliefs. An important part of the initial imitative learning of teachers is learning from role models, whose influence is crucial to the formation of educational beliefs, illustrating the profound impact of significant others on educational beliefs.



#### 4. The Impact of Key Events on the Formation of Educational Beliefs Among Teachers in Private Colleges and Universities

Teachers encounter significant events during their personal growth that greatly affect their educational views and behaviors. These could be a particular classroom teaching experience, a conflict with students, or a special experience. Such key events continuously prompt judgments, integrations, and revisions in the formation process of teachers' educational beliefs, touching the "deep soul" of implicit educational concepts and thereby changing their teaching behaviors. One interviewee mentioned, "After going abroad, I noticed that their students were particularly proactive in learning, while back home, we often tell students to be more proactive, which actually isn't very effective... The biggest change for me is being more willing to spend time and effort to explore ways to stimulate students' initiative in learning."

#### 5. Reconstructing Educational Beliefs in Teaching Practice

Before entering university teaching, teachers' initial views on teaching, students, and teacher-student relationships are shaped by their family environment and personal learning experiences. However, when they start university teaching activities, due to influences such as teaching experience, lesson planning, student evaluations, and research pressure, their original educational beliefs often change, leading to a reintegration and construction of new educational beliefs.

##### (1) Understanding of Teaching

The interview revealed that the concepts, thoughts, and teaching methods of teachers from elementary to high school subtly influence the interviewees. The initial beliefs were vague and uncertain, passively absorbed and accepted. When they started teaching at the university, some of the original and latent educational beliefs were activated, becoming definite and authoritative, guiding their teaching behavior.

##### (2) Students' Learning Philosophy

Students are the protagonists of teaching activities, and their attitudes towards learning and abilities directly affect teaching outcomes. In practice, especially teachers in private colleges often face issues like students' unclear learning goals, weak awareness of self-directed learning, low enthusiasm, and disinterest in the courses, causing doubts about their educational beliefs and even losing passion and confidence in teaching. One interviewed teacher said, "I think their learning goals are not very clear, and most students probably are in this situation. I was like this when I was a student too, not knowing why I was attending school, really clueless, just waiting for classes to end. I understand now what our teachers used to tell us. Most of us realize later and learn to grow from it." This teacher compared their experience as a student with that of their students, sharing their feelings with the students and combining the teachers' guidance with personal experiences to let students know their current state of learning is not isolated but a phase everyone goes through.

##### (3) Teacher-Student Relationship

The teacher-student relationship is the most basic and important interpersonal relationship in university teaching activities. Currently, students in private colleges have strong self-awareness but lack a sense of independent learning; they are malleable but have poor independence; their thoughts tend to mature, yet they are easily influenced by external factors. One teacher mentioned, "The relationship between teachers and students is like Bole and his swift horse. There are no good or bad students, only teachers who haven't been able to inspire them or discover their strengths." This shows that the relationship between teachers and students has transformed from a formal instructional relationship to a close, familial one.

#### (4) Regarding the Relationship Between Teaching and Research

Many studies believe that teaching and research mutually enhance each other, even asserting that good teaching is impossible without good research. Several interviewed teachers also believe, "Research and teaching are integrated. Teaching must implement research, and I incorporate projects and academic reports into my teaching." "Both research and teaching are important. Previously, universities focused too much on research at the expense of teaching, so now there's definitely a push for teaching. However, I don't think the status of teaching necessarily has to outweigh research, which is also quite important; there has to be a lot of people researching various things." For teachers in private colleges, they also face constraints such as school rankings, geographic location, research platforms, and academic influence, all of which affect their academic and professional development to varying degrees.

### Suggestions

The factors influencing the formation of educational beliefs among teachers in private colleges and universities are complex. Through this study, private college teachers can deepen their self-awareness and reflection on their educational beliefs, strengthen the positive and potential beliefs formed initially, adjust and correct negative beliefs, and thereby promote the continuous development of new educational beliefs and improve their professional level.

#### 1. Actively Reflect on the Formation Process of Personal Educational Beliefs

Educational beliefs, deeply rooted in teachers' values, often unconsciously guide their behavior. Teachers' actions and their views on teaching and students are dominated by these beliefs. From the interviews, it's apparent that they rarely consciously reflect on their educational beliefs from their personal growth experiences. Many university teachers, especially during their graduate studies, focus solely on research with little attention to teaching. Once they start teaching at the university, they rely on personal experience to navigate teaching, seldom understanding students' learning objectives, interests, or outcomes. The interview process, reflecting on life and educational events and experiences, helps teachers describe and depict their "educational life world," contemplating their inner experiences and reflecting on their growth journey, clarifying their educational beliefs. Thus, university teachers should value their personal growth experiences and environments, reflecting on their educational belief formation process to deepen understanding of themselves and their educational views, thereby enhancing insight into the essence of educational activities and making their behavior more rational and informed by teaching wisdom.

#### 2. Actively Identify Significant Others Who Positively Influence

Significant others deeply and enduringly impact private college teachers' learning motivations, interests, vocational consciousness, and values. The interviewees, including high school teachers and doctoral supervisors, exhibited qualities like responsibility, dedication, and academic rigor, significantly influencing their educational beliefs. This study found that private college teachers in their early growth did not actively reflect on the values conveyed by significant others such as parents, friends, and relatives; they passively accepted the subtle influences of speech, behavior, and social customs. However, significant others encountered during their learning journey stored implicit "beliefs" in episodic fragments, which, recalled during teaching practices, become patterns for imitation, thereby influencing educational beliefs. Therefore, private college teachers should recognize the significant impact of important individuals on their career, actively seek out those who positively influence, inspire their self-professional identity, and master teaching abilities while delving into their expertise.

### 3. Continuously Focus on the Interpretation of "Key Events"

In a teacher's personal growth, whether an event is key is not determined by the event's impact but by the significance the teacher personally attaches to it in their growth. The interviewed university teachers, with diverse growth experiences, pay attention to various events, reflecting on them to extract positive or negative information. Such "random" events, actively contemplated by the teacher, clarify, and mature their educational beliefs, enriching their teaching experience through active engagement and achieving breakthroughs in the teaching field. Additionally, the formation and development of educational beliefs are ongoing processes; key events at different growth stages are not isolated but can trigger a "chain reaction" in subsequent educational beliefs. Even if a key event leads to negative emotional experiences and reactions, through positive reflection on educational passion, professional skills, and personality traits, teachers can extract positive information, continuously elevating their understanding of educational beliefs.

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