The Mediating role of Professional Self-esteem on Organizational Professional Identity and Career Satisfaction

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Abstract

Although there are few studies on professional self-esteem and professional identity, professional self-esteem can be considered a crucial and influential factor in enhancing the professional identity of Saudi kindergarten teachers. The current study aimed to investigate the mediating role of professional self-esteem between professional identity and job satisfaction among Saudi early childhood teachers. A cross-sectional survey design was used. The sample of the study consists of 530 volunteer teachers. Questionnaires were used to analyze data. The results indicate that: (1) statistically significant positive correlation was detected between professional self-esteem and professional identity; (2) statistically significant positive correlation was detected between professional self-esteem and job satisfaction; and (3) professional self-esteem played a mediating role in the relationship between professional identity and job satisfaction among Saudi early childhood teachers. Professional self-esteem determined teachers' professional identity. Therefore, teachers' professional self-esteem should be considered, as failure to pay careful attention to teachers' professional self-esteem may lead to a lower level of professional identity. In this context, the current study contributes to expanding our knowledge of the literature related to early childhood teachers.

Keywords: Professional self-esteem; Professional identity; Career satisfaction; Early childhood teachers

الدور الوسيط لتقدير الذات المهني على الهوية المهنية للمنظمة والرضا الوظيفي

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ملخص

على الرغم من قلة الدراسات حول تقدير الذات المهني والهوية المهنية، إلا إنه يمكن اعتبار تقدير الذات المهني عامل حاساً ومؤثرا في تحسين الهُوية المهنية لمعلمات رياض الأطفال السعوديين. تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد تقدير الذات المهني كوسيط بين الهوية المهنية والرضا الوظيفي لمعلمات الطفولة المبكرة السعوديين. وقد استُخدِم تصميم مسح مقطعي. كما عُدّت البيانات من 530 معلمًا صالحة وضُمّنت في التحليل. ولتحليل البيانات استخدمت الاستبانات. تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أنه: (1) يوجد ارتباط إيجابي كبير بين تقدير الذات المهني والهوية المهنية؛ (2) يوجد ارتباط إيجابي كبير بين تقدير الذات المهني والرضا الوظيفي؛ (3) العلاقة بين الهوية المهنية والرضا الوظيفي لمعلمي الطفولة المبكرة السعوديين يتوسطها تقدير الذات المهني. يتمتع تقدير الذات المهني بقوة كبيرة في تحديد الهوية المهنية للمعلمين. لذلك، يجب أن يكون هناك اعتبار وثيق لتقدير الذات المهني للمعلمين، طالما أن عدم إيلاء الاعتبار الدقيق لتقدير الذات المهني للمعلمين قد يؤدي إلى انخفاض مستوى الهوية المهنية. وفي هذا السياق، يمكننا القول إن هذه الدراسة سوف تسهم في توسيع أدبيات معلمات مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقدير الذات المهني، الهوية المهنية، الرضا عن الحياة المهنية ، معلمات الطفولة المبكرة

1. Introduction:

The Ministry of Education of Saudi Aabia is keen to develop the educational system and advance all its dimensions. With the changes in the global economy, education, and politics, Vision 2030 of Saudi Aabia came with clear objectives and educational requirements necessary for the Kingdom to keep pace with these changes. Therefore, the Vision focuses on developing education with all its elements, as it is a major source of outputs that feed the rest of the fields.

Identity is not only a psychological phenomenon, but also a social one. Social and cultural background play a great role in identity. Ethnicity, language, and cultural identity influence and interact with one another (Deng, 2025). Cultural diversity and the diversity of identities can lead to conflicts in individuals' self-identification, as they may exhibit distinct behaviors or experiences. In a cultural sense, identity refers to personal characteristics including language, religion of Saudi Aabia education, status, country, family, and other cultural factors. It can also refer to the identity characteristics of the local social culture as a whole. The two are closely connected (Motallebzade & Kazemi, 2018). Different social groups may have similar identities under the same cultural background, and culture has a profound impact on how individuals view themselves and society, and it is an important yardstick for distinguishing the "self" from "others" (Ostad et al., 2019) Due to different personal factors, individuals in the same social environment also have huge differences in their attitudes towards how foreign culture affects local culture. Conflicts between local and foreign cultures are common in many situations, such as politics, economy, customs, of Saudi Aabia education, religion, etc., especially when the two cultures are mutually exclusive or in conflict (Mbuva, 2016).

Research on teacher identity has experienced tremendous changes in psychology, sociology, anthropology, cognitive science, and sociocultural perspectives. By the end of the twentieth century, against the background of in-depth research on foreign language teacher cognition and the "social turn" (Varghese et al., 2005) in foreign language teacher research, Casanave and Schecter (1997) took the lead in initiating a discussion on the nature of foreign language teacher identity. Butakor et al. (2021) in their study indicated that EI positively affected professional identity directly and indirectly through career satisfaction. Studies did not directly investigate the relationship between professional self-esteem, career satisfaction, and professional identity. Since professional self-esteem is a neglected construct in the existing literature, there is a lack of research establishing a direct relationship between professional self-esteem and career satisfaction (Kusluvan et al., 2022).

Therefore, the present study aims to address this research gap by identifying professional self-esteem as a mediator between professional identity and career satisfaction of Saudi early childhood teachers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Professional Identity(PI)

In recent years, teacher issues have received widespread attention at the levels of educational policy, educational theory, and educational practice. This may be due to the following two main reasons: First, the status and role of teachers in today's era are more important in educational reform and development,

even national development, and human progress. Second, we are facing many new issues and challenges involving teachers and education in such times. Even some teachers and education issues that have been discussed in the past still have a lot of room for us to re-understand and explore today (Awaje & Amaha, 2023). Among them, teacher identity is an issue that requires in-depth analysis from various aspects of theory, policy, and practice.

Teacher identity is a type of professional identity. The so-called professional identity(PI) usually includes two aspects: professional cognition and professional emotion. The identity of a certain profession first starts with professional recognition, including recognition of professional attributes, professional roles, professional functions, etc. Based on professional recognition, professional emotions, and professional belonging are generated and formed. From the perspective of the PI subject, it can include two aspects: professional self-identity and public identity. Professional self-identity belongs to individual identity, which refers to the self-recognition of the professional subject. It is the status of any occupation (Awaje & Amaha,2023). The public recognition of a profession is actually a kind of "recognition", that is, recognition from outside the professional subject, which usually includes government recognition, social recognition, and other aspects (Pistole & Roberts,2022),

Teacher identity is seen as a "changing formation" throughout the process. Postmodern social theory is the subject of some research on teacher identity. This idea argues that educators have various functions in the social life network and that they build their self-concept on these responsibilities. This situation, which postmodern social theory calls "multiple identities", may lead, for example, a classroom teacher to develop a professional identity by sharing within the school, interacting with children, and making connections with other educators. However, the same person can also undertake many responsibilities in society, such as working in non-governmental organizations, participating in groups, or engaging in union activities. An educator can also be a parent or musician (Lasky, 2005).

The mixture of all these different identities constitutes the identity of the individual, and this identity develops, reshapes, and changes over time as various identities interact and influence each other. While some scholars place a strong emphasis on the individual's inner world during identity construction, others focus on the background of social influence on the individual. Each person is unique and each presents their identity in different contexts (Hammerness Et al., 2005). If we list four different perspectives on identity formation, they are: the storied resource perspective (focusing on forms of identity in social and cultural contexts); dialogical perspective (dialogues linked to identity discourses in social, cultural and political contexts); psychosocial perspective (focusing on the individual's inner world); intersubjective perspective (individual and social context are equally important); and the individual (Miller, 2008).

In fact, identity consists of many components that together form the identity structure. Since no two people are the same, their duties and obligations in life are not the same. For example, a woman with a doctorate can be both a mother and a teacher at the same time. As a result, identity is actively produced and shaped by social and personal variables. For example, being a teacher, mother, or doctoral student has an impact on an individual's social and personal identities. This female teacher will discuss her experiences as a mother caring for her children, the learning environment in her classroom, and her

doctoral dissertation writing processes, based on circumstances and background. Each role she assumes will serve as a benchmark for her evaluations of her own situational framework and idealizations of her concept of self-identity (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011).

Teachers' identity images conceptualize their core characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors, both personal and professional. The idea of teacher identity is discussed from social and sociological perspectives as well as personal and psychological perspectives. While the "personal aspect" of teacher identity relates to how the individual perceives themselves as an educator, the "social aspect" relates to how others view them as educators. Social and personal factors have great importance in the formation of a teacher's identity (Alsup, 2006).

According to this conceptual and practical characterization, teacher identity is the internalization of one's sense of self as a teacher, and this feeling manifests itself in social relations and social structures. Examples of this sense of self include professional knowledge and skills, classroom behavior, professional beliefs, etc. The interaction between psychological and social aspects of teacher identity helps explain how teacher identity is formed. The process of establishing a professional identity for teachers varies depending on the teacher; for example, some educators build their identities on the experiences, characteristics, and qualifications gained from their formal education, while others base their identities on their college degrees (Walkington, 2005).

It is possible to state that the development of teacher identity as a professional identity is a multifaceted and dynamic process. Becoming a teacher is a continuous process in which one reconstructs oneself within institutional, discursive, natural, and analogous environments. Therefore, momentary interactions with students, daily interactions with colleagues, and annual changes in responsibilities have the potential to influence teacher identity. The trajectory of the concept of identity is affected by many degrees and directions due to the projections of events in the professional and personal world. From the sociological identity perspective, PI or teacher identity refers to the evaluation and classification of the teaching profession within a certain community or professional group and comparison with other professional groups (Straub, 2002).

Although there are few studies on professional self-esteem and professional identity, it is possible to consider professional self-esteem a critical and influential factor in improving the PI of Saudi Kindergarten teachers. Therefore, the present study proposes hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive correlation between PSE and PI.

Teachers' PSE is the overall evaluation of teachers by themselves, reflecting whether teachers are satisfied with themselves. That is, teachers' sense of professional and personal competence. Teachers with high self-esteem can actively and effectively cope with stressful events, gain a higher sense of job accomplishment, gain a higher sense of professional identity, and experience less emotional burnout (Awaje & Amaha, 2023). Therefore, there is a certain mutual influence between teachers' self-esteem level and their PI. Teachers with high SE can use feedback with a self-improvement mentality, successfully cope with difficult situations in education and teaching, and enhance work confidence, be able to identify with their teaching profession from the bottom of their heart, love it, and feel honored to be a teacher.

Thus, it is crucial to investigate the relationship between teachers' PI and their PSE.

2.2. Career Satisfaction

A career is a lifelong process that includes a variety of job roles. Individuals continue their leisure activities, learning, and work throughout their lives, depending on their daily life roles. In this context, 'career' can be considered as a multifaceted concept in terms of ideas of advancement or development both in the organization and personally. This concept includes ideas about skill development as well as lifelong learning (Nadarajah et al., 2012). This reveals how important personal development in academics is in terms of career satisfaction, because development and career can be interrelated and can make significant contributions to the satisfaction levels of teachers.

Satisfaction is generally defined as the state in which an individual finds himself after a certain event (Akiri, 2014). In the literature, career satisfaction is considered a dynamic structure equivalent to how an individual feels about their job. In this respect, the presence or absence of certain factors or aspects will affect the overall level of satisfaction experienced by the individual (Dinham & Scott, 1998). For example, factors such as an inefficient management mechanism in the organization, inappropriate colleagues, a lack of understanding of goals and means, and poor communication will reflect negative satisfaction. Improving these conditions in terms of the educational environment will increase the employee satisfaction level (Akiri, 2014).

In their research on university students, McIlveen et al. (2013) revealed that career optimism and career preferences have positive effects on academic major satisfaction. In their research on educators (teachers), Timms and Brough (2013) stated that career satisfaction has a strong effect on work engagement, and that job engagement and burnout contribute to changes in different aspects of the work environment. They emphasized that career satisfaction was related to all variables (vitality, dedication, absorption, burnout, and commitment). In their research on academics in Turkey, Aytekin et al. (2016) emphasized that academic productivity is positively related to all dimensions of career capital; that is, academic productivity is related to career commitment, career identity, career satisfaction, and professional knowledge and skill development variables. In their research on university students, Wilkins-Yel et al. (2018) revealed that academic satisfaction mediates the link between career adaptability and intended academic permanence. They stated that this situation shows that students with higher career adaptability (high scores) are more satisfied with their academic success, exhibit academic satisfaction, and therefore feel more committed to both being successful and remaining enrolled in the main units of the academy. In their research on academics, Kraimer et al. (2019) emphasized that not being able to get an administrative position that one hopes for or not being promoted in the early stages of one's career can lead to lower career satisfaction.

2.3. Professional Self-esteem as a Mediator

It is thought that, as in every profession, especially in education, teachers, when starting their careers, expect to be able to create positive effects in the lives and programs of their students, to establish positive relationships with students' families and school administrators, and to obtain professional development opportunities through the support provided to them regarding their roles.

High self-esteem can make people experience more positive emotions, while low self-esteem is associated with anxiety, fear, and social rejection (Schiraldi, 2001). Theoretically, the ideal way for people to achieve high self-esteem is to be successful in everything they do. As long as a person is always successful in work and social life, their self-esteem will not be threatened (Pereira et al., 2021). However, life is not always easy, and everyone experiences setbacks, failures, rejections, interpersonal conflicts, and other negative events. All of these can affect our sense of self-worth, leading to lowered levels of self-esteem (Shack et al., 2018).

Many studies have found that compared to people with low self-esteem, people with high self-esteem have no special advantages in talent, intelligence, attractiveness, or other aspects. Laboratory studies have found that there is no significant difference in the actual performance of people with high self-esteem and those with low self-esteem. The main difference between them is psychological. For example, when people with high self-esteem and those with low self-esteem were asked to unbiasedly rate the physical attractiveness of others, there were no significant differences (Cummins & Nistico, 2002). However, if subjects are asked to rate their physical attractiveness, they will find a big difference between those with high self-esteem and those with low self-esteem (Oztas, 2010). People with high self-esteem believe that they are better, have a higher evaluation of their own achievements, etc. These evaluations of people with high self-esteem are more conducive to maintaining their own self-image (Baumeister et al., 2003).

According to Maslow, self-esteem needs, which are at least as important as physical needs, remain low and motivating until they are satisfied. Adler, on the other hand, argues that the feelings of uniqueness and superiority are more inclusive than some other emotions. According to White, individuals make efforts until they acquire a sense of competence or a greater sense of competence (Bayat, 2003).

SE determines what we can and cannot do. What determines self-esteem is the way each person thinks about themselves. This concept is formed as a result of life experiences, which include failures and successes, humiliations from others, progress, and the reaction and respect others have for us, especially in childhood. Our mental image of ourselves is also formed from these experiences (Koçyiğit & Dizdar, 2024). These ideas are reality for us and form our self-esteem, and these mental images tell us what we can be successful or unsuccessful at. The self-esteem of individuals determines their performance in the workplace and success in communicating with others. Finally, self-esteem plays a significant role in interacting with others, our sense of worth, and our happiness (Schumann, 1991).

PSE is regarded as one's judgment about the value of a profession (Koçyiğit &Dizdar, 2024). PSE shows the importance and value a person attaches to their career and professional harmony (Arıcak & Dilmaç, 2003; Koçyiğit & Dizdar, 2024). PSE may vary depending on the individual's personal qualities, the type and duration of education received, and their effectiveness in the work environment (Sarıkoç & Kaplan, 2017).

SE impacts PI positively and can predict it (Wu et al., 2023). PSE is said to mediate the PI of kindergarten teachers. When the research on teachers' professional self-esteem was examined, various results were reached. In these studies, PSE and SE (Kutlu & Soğukpınar, 2015), professional performance (Roe & Gray, 1991), patience, empathy, and listening skills (Glotova & Wilhelm, 2014), internal and external job satisfaction (Baloğlu et al., 2006), self-efficacy (Öztürk, 2008), attitude towards the profession (Abbasoğlu & Öncü, 2013; Zoroğlu, 2014), academic optimism (Biroğul & Deniz, 2015), social responsibility sharing behavior (Dilmaç & Ekşi, 2012), life satisfaction (Er, 2017), all have positive significant relationships between professional competence (Gündem, 2009) and professional pleasure (Bozali & Camadan, 2018).

However, it has been determined that there are significant negative relationships between professional self-esteem and hopelessness, depression, and negative thoughts (Jan et al., 2015) and burnout (Friedman & Farber, 1992). In some studies, professional self-esteem has been affected by various factors. It was examined in terms of demographic variables. One of these demographic variables is gender. While there are results in favor of women in terms of professional self-esteem (Tabassum & Ali, 2012), there are also results in favor of men (Yıldırım et al., 2010).

In some studies, no gender-based differentiation was observed (Dursun, Çuhadar& ve Tanyeri., 2014; Kutlu & Soğukpınar, 2015). In some of the studies that took branch, another variable, into account, it was found that professional self-esteem differed according to this variable (Sayın, 2003), while in others it did not show any difference (Ünal & Şimşek, 2008). In comparisons made considering teachers' years of service, PSE did not differ according to this variable (Sarı, 2016).

Among the many factors influencing Saudi early childhood teachers' PI, PSE is a significant predictor (Motallebzadeh & Kazemi, 2018). Studies have shown that PSE and PI are positively correlated (Wu et al., 2023).

Therefore, the present study proposes hypothesis 3:

The relationship between PI and career satisfaction of Saudi early childhood teachers is mediated by PSE.

3. Study Aims

There is a scarcity of studies that address these variables in kindergartens in KSA. Therefore, the aim is to address this research gap by identifying PSE as a mediator between PI and career satisfaction of Saudi early childhood teachers.

4. The Present Study

Three hypotheses were posited (Fig. 1): (1) A positive significant relationship will be found between professional self-esteem and PI; (2) A positive relationship will be found between PSE and career satisfaction; (3) PSE moderates the relationship between PI and career satisfaction.
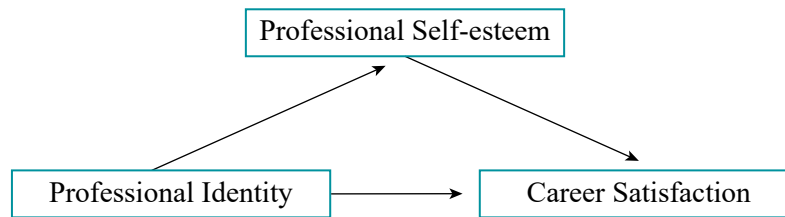
Fig. 1: Theoretical hypothesis model diagram for this study

5. Method

5.1. Design

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from Saudi early childhood teachers regarding their PSE, PI, and career satisfaction.

5.2. Participants and Procedure

This study involved 556 early childhood teachers. 26 teachers were excluded as they exhibited regularity. Participants were informed about the study's objectives. They were told not to mention their names and contact details. 530 teachers presented valid data, and they were included in the analysis (Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of the participants (N = 530)

Basic Data	Item	Amount (%)
Workplace	Urban	330(62.2%)
	Non-urban	200(37.8%)
Institution	Public schools	420(79.2%)
	Private schools	110(20.8%)
Gender	Female	100%
Education	Bachelors	520(98.2%)
	Masters	10(1.8%)
Majors	Preschool education	6(1.1%)
	Non-preschool education	524(98.9%)
Years of teaching experience	0-1 years	50(9.4%)
	2-5 years	150(28.3%)
	6 + years	330(62.3%)

Basic Data	Item	Amount (%)
Status	Regular employee	530(100%)
	Temporary employee	-
Age	21-26 years old	380(71.6%)
	27+years old	150(28.3%)

5.3. Data Collection Tools

Tests were piloted on a sample (n=180 teachers). PSE Scale: PSE Scale (Arıcak, 1999) can be applied to measure the respect attitudes of individuals aged 17 and over who have chosen a profession, received professional training in a field, or practiced a profession, towards the relevant profession. The scale consists of thirty items, of these, 14 contain positive statements and 16 contain negative statements. In positive items, "Strongly Agree" gets 5 points, "I agree" gets 4 points, "I am undecided" gets 3 points, "Disagree" gets 2 points, and "Strongly Disagree" gets 1 point, while in negative items " Strongly Agree" gets 1 point, "Agree" gets 2 points, "Undecided" gets 3 points, "I Disagree" gets 1 point. " gets 4 points, "Strongly Disagree" gets 5 points. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.90 (Arıcak, 2001).

The validity of the scale was tested in two ways. The first is content validity. In this type of validity, expert opinion was sought, and the items were accepted by seventy-five percent of the expert group, while the others were removed from the scale. The second method is the factor analysis method used to test construct validity. The scale could be used in this study (Arıcak, 2001).

Teacher's PI Scale: Teacher's PI Scale (Friesen and Besley, 2013), contains seventeen items evaluated on a five-point Likert scale indicating degrees of agreement. This scale has three subscales: Self-categorization as a teacher (n=5 items), Self-confidence in becoming a teacher (n=6 items), and Participation as a teacher (n=6 items). While the factor loadings of the scale items took values between 00.34 and 0.81, the internal consistency coefficient Cronbach Alpha (α) was reported as 0. 0.87.

Career Satisfaction: Career satisfaction was a 5-item scale (Greenhaus et al., 1990). The subordinate responded to these five items on seven-point scales. The five items were summed to form the career satisfaction measure (Cronbach's coefficient was 0.92).

5.4. Data Analysis

SPSS 23.0 was used for data collection and analysis, and the PROCESS macro program (3.0) in SPSS was used to test the mediating and moderating effects.

6. Results

6.1. Reliability and Validity of Measurement Variables

The Average Variance Extract (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) values were acceptable. This indicates that this study has good reliability and validity (Table 2).

Table 2: Reliability and convergent validity (N = 180)

Variable	α	AVE	CR
Professional Self-esteem	0.90	0.60	0.90
Professional Identity	0.92	0.63	0.92
Career Satisfaction	0.91	0.61	0.91

6.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Study Variables

All study variables show positive correlations. The tables show that there is a positive and significant correlation between PSE and PI (r=0.49; $p < 0.001$), PSE and career satisfaction (r=0.48; $p < 0.001$, Table 3).
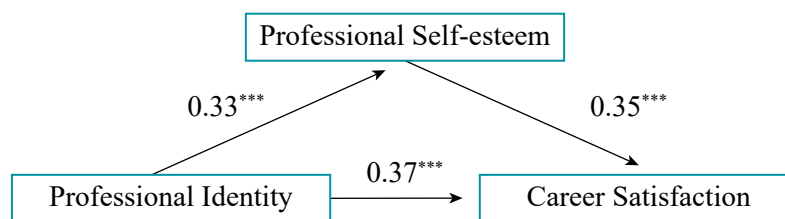
Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis (N = 530)

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Professional Self-esteem	120.35	2.47	-		
2. Professional Identity	71.61	2.06	0.49***	-	
3. Career Satisfaction	30.21	1.96	0.48***	0.51***	-

***$p < 0.001$

6.3. Model Analysis

As shown (see Fig. 2 and Table 4), PSE and PI correlated positively and significantly, as well as PSE and career satisfaction correlated positively and significantly. The direct effect of PI on career satisfaction was found to be significant. The 95% CI of [0.22, 0.27] suggested that the relationship between PI and career satisfaction of Saudi early childhood teachers is mediated by PSE.

Fig. 2: Model analysis results

Table 4: Decomposition of total effect, direct effect and indirect effect

Effect	Effect value	Boot SE	95% CI	Percentage
Total Effect	0.34	0.02	[0.28, 0.39]	
Direct Effect	0.29	0.03	[0.23, 0.33]	59.50%
Indirect Effect	0.23	0.02	[0.22, 0.27]	40.50%

7. Discussion

The three main hypotheses were supported : (1) A significant positive correlation exists between PSE and PI; (2) A significant positive correlation exists between professional self-esteem and career satisfaction; (3) The relationship between PI and career satisfaction of Saudi early childhood teachers is mediated by PSE.

7.1. The Relationship Between Professional Self-esteem and Professional Identity

As shown, there is a significant positive relationship between PSE and PI. This goes in the same line as Motallebzadeh and Kazemi (2018), who reach the same finding. Occupation is an important determinant of one's identity. It is an area that affects a person's dignity, his place in society, and his feeling of usefulness (Derin, Ilkım, & Yayan, 2017). The results of correlational analysis in Awaje & Amaha's study (2023) indicated that PSE and job satisfaction are positively and significantly correlated with professional identity.

PSE is the value developed by an individual towards their profession. PSE shows the pride and respect a person feels for their profession. In addition, it is a prerequisite for professional adaptation and satisfaction (Girgin et al., 2010), which enables a person to gain pleasure and satisfaction from both his job and life by trusting himself (Uslusoy et al., 2016). A profession that is not compatible with one's self can create problems for the person. While the probability of people with a suitable profession being successful and therefore productive increases, the opposite situation increases the possibility of people experiencing conflict and dissatisfaction (Uslusoy et al., 2016).

Professional self-esteem is the component that needs to be emphasized in terms of being successful in the profession, being productive, valuing the profession, and seeing the profession as important (Dinçer and Öztunç, 2009). Teachers' respect for their professional selves can affect the professional behavior they exhibit in educational environments. It is thought that a teacher with high self-esteem can exhibit professional competencies such as being open to professional development, willing to fulfill the requirements of their profession, and striving to create a qualified educational environment. In this context, the result obtained is thought to be important in revealing that the PI and PSE of preschool teachers are related.

7.2. Professional Self-Esteem and Career Satisfaction

As indicated by the findings, PSE and Career Satisfaction were positively and significantly correlated. This goes in the same line as prior research. For example, in a similar case, even if not on a kindergarten teacher, Kusluvan et al. (2022), in the study conducted for tourism and hotel management undergraduate students in Turkey, revealed that professional self-esteem positively affects career satisfaction. Teachers' professional identities are generated through social actions, including interactions with others (Deng, 2025). They not only reflect on past events, but also consider how these past events can provide information for future events and activities in terms of their professional development. The second is the combination of different aspects of teacher PI. Beijaard et al. (2004) pointed out that teacher PI not only refers to the influence of other people's ideas and expectations, including the widely accepted image of what teachers should know and do in society, but also refers to the important

content that teachers themselves consider in their PI and life based on their own practical experience and personal background. The third is the formation process and the state of the teacher PI. Deng (2025) proposed that teacher PI refers to both a process and a state. Among them, "'process' refers to the procedure in which the teacher's PI gradually develops from one's own experience and confirms one's own teacher role; 'state' refers to the degree to which the teacher's PI identifies with the teaching profession that the teacher is currently engaged in. Combining various explanations of teacher's PI, we can understand that: first, teacher's PI is a dynamic, changing and developing process, and initiative is an important component of PI; second, teacher's PI includes the individual and the environment, and it will change due to the interaction of factors such as the individual and social context; third, the main objects of teacher's PI are individual teachers, education and teaching, and the teaching profession. (Wong & Liu, 2024).

7.3. Direct Impact

This study showed that PSE moderates the relationship between PI and career satisfaction; thus, the research H3 was verified. Therefore, Saudi early childhood teachers should consistently strive to improve their PSE. Therefore, improving the PI of Saudi early childhood teachers is essential.

7.4. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research contributes to the literature in many ways. First, the literature lacks studies examining Professional Self-esteem as a mediator between PI and Career Satisfaction of Saudi early childhood teachers. This study will contribute to filling the gap in the literature. Secondly, studies examining the PSE as a mediator between PI and Career Satisfaction of Saudi early childhood teachers are rare. This study will contribute to the expansion of early childhood teachers literature. Third, this study offers a different perspective on the literature.

8. Conclusion

PSE has a strong power to determine the PI of teachers. Therefore, there should be close consideration to teachers' PSE, as not paying close attention to teachers' PSE might lead to a low level of PI.

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