

## Research Article

**Cite this article:** Beka, A., & Gjelaj, M. (2025). Understanding Early Childhood Teachers' Identity – Examining the Relationship between Identity Constructs and Key Variables. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 15, e2025166.  
<https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2025.15.166>

Received February 4, 2025

Accepted April 5, 2025

Published Online April 19, 2025

**Keywords:** Early childhood teachers, professional identity, working experience, professional development

## Author for correspondence:

Majlinda Gjelaj

✉ [majlinda.gjelaj@uni-pr.edu](mailto:majlinda.gjelaj@uni-pr.edu)

✉ University of Prishtina

## Understanding Early Childhood Teachers' Identity – Examining the Relationship between Identity Constructs and Key Variables

Arbresha Beka , Majlinda Gjelaj 

### Abstract

**Background/purpose.** Teachers' professional identity is viewed by the researchers as a dynamic process, evolving through both professional training and accumulated experience, rather than a fixed construct. This study explores the dynamic formation of professional identity in Kosovo ECE teachers, based on Kelchtermans' (2009) and Carrinus et al.'s (2012) models. Using questionnaires from 318 teachers, it examines the relationship between identity constructs, work experience, and professional development.

**Materials/methods.** Correlational analyses and ANOVA were employed to explore relationships between identity constructs and differences based on teachers' experience and professional development. Data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using SPSS, with factor validity tested through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Pearson correlations examined relationships, while ANOVA assessed identity differences by experience and professional development.

**Results.** Findings reveal that teachers' identity is shaped by job satisfaction, self-efficacy, role perception, future perspective, and self-image, with professional development being key to reinforcing commitment and leadership. Differences in future perspectives across career stages highlight the need for targeted support while addressing social recognition and financial rewards, which are crucial for teacher motivation and retention. The study emphasizes the need for policies supporting fair professional development and sustainable engagement throughout teachers' careers.

**Conclusions.** This study highlights the complex professional identity of preschool teachers, shaped by job satisfaction, self-efficacy, role perception, future perspective, and self-image. Professional training boosts job satisfaction and role perception, while differences in career stages call for targeted support, especially for early-career teachers. Changes in social status perception stress the need for policies promoting fair, sustainable professional development.



OPEN ACCESS

© The Author(s), 2025. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

## 1. Introduction

There's no comparison or replacement for an early childhood education teacher's (ECE teacher) tremendous contribution to a child's holistic development. Berg and Smith (2018) emphasize that the early childhood education profession is unified by a common knowledge base of specific skills and attributes that play a role in enhancing the quality of early childhood education and development and that are required to be delivered by successful professionals. Early childhood education principles are strongly based on development and learning theories (Ekinci, 2017; Mooney, 2013). These theories focus on active learning, social interaction, and the importance of the environment to children's development, and are closely linked to ECE teachers' professional identity, which encompasses an individual's attitudes, values, and commitment (as opposed to another professional) to be a special ECE teacher (Canrinus et al., 2012; Kelchtermans, 2009). In the constructs that define in-service ECE teachers' professional identity, following the model proposed by Kelchtermans (2009) and Canrinus et al. (2012), we tried to understand how ECE teachers perceive themselves as early education professionals, in other words their self-image, self-efficacy level, ECE teacher's role perception, job satisfaction level, and their future perspective.

ECE play a key role in the development and education of preschool children, contributing to the foundation of essential skills for lifelong learning and development. Faced with increasingly complex educational environments and the diverse needs of children, it is crucial for these professionals to continuously develop and update their knowledge and skills to ensure high-quality education (Wang, 2023).

Self-perceptions are a critical component of most modern human motivation theories (Berg & Smith, 2018). The central construct in Bandura's (2000) social cognitive theory is self-efficacy, which he defined as people's judgments of their abilities to produce specified levels of performance. Self-efficacy differs from self-esteem and self-concept in that it is task-specific (Hoy et al., 2006) and is sustained by what people believe they can do in a particular situation in the future. Thus, self-efficacy is, in most cases, one of the determinants of ECE teachers' professional identity and will be treated as such in this study.

From a theoretical perspective, the way ECE teachers interpret their teaching role should be related to other components of their professional identity, such as attitudes, self-efficacy and job satisfaction. None of the existing studies, however, have delved into these relationships in Kosovo. Scholars have always nurtured great interest in the study of ECE teachers' professional identity as part of their professional lives and in the broader field of education, teaching and learning. Job satisfaction is one of the components of the overall efficiency of the work performed, standing out as the gear box between what individuals expected to achieve and the actual rewards they get out of working (in terms of salary, status, recognition, etc.). This construct can be defined as the occurrence of a subjective feeling of relief, a pleasure that can be understood as a positive emotion of comfort, created by the recognition of work resulting in a certain context. The ECE teacher's profession, aside from professional skills, requires more commitment and sensitivity, availability to be constantly trained, educated, encouraged, managed, to grow and be organized, corrected, enhanced and evaluated in the formation and upgrade of human qualities that tomorrow needs (Canrinus et al., 2012).

The professional identity of ECE teachers is essential for their development as competent and independent professionals, formed through educational experiences, interaction with educators, and the building of academic self-confidence (Olsen et al., 2024).

According to Day et al. (2006), professional identity is a key factor influencing these elements and is essential for achieving success in teaching. This identity is a component that helps ECE teachers understand and interpret their future role, as well as how they interact with children and colleagues.

Continuous education and support processes are essential for the development and strengthening of the professional identity of early childhood education teachers, as they enable them to reflect on their educational practices, adopt new approaches, and improve professional skills in line with the changing needs of children and the demands of the educational system (Androusou & Tsafos, 2018). These processes also contribute to increasing self-confidence, improving collaboration with colleagues, and strengthening teachers' commitment to the sustainable development of their careers.

Strong professional identity can significantly increase the quality of education and affect children's development. Furthermore, it is an important source of motivation and commitment for ECE teachers, as it enables them to have confidence in their abilities to face daily challenges and achieve positive results in education. ECE teachers, by understanding the impact of constructs such as self-image, self-efficacy, ECE teacher's role, job satisfaction, and future perspective, can contribute to their professional experience and development, improving engagement and motivation at work, as well as creating a supportive and stimulating environment for children.

Self-image and self-efficacy directly influence the performance and engagement of ECE teachers, as confidence in their abilities and perception of their role in education create a motivating and productive environment. Job satisfaction is a factor related to the long-term engagement and dedication of ECE teachers. Furthermore, future perspective helps in their professional development, motivating them for further training and continuous improvement. These identity constructs affect the work experience of ECE teachers and are closely linked to the quality of education and opportunities for further development of the education system in Kosovo.

The primary objective of this study was to review and describe the main identity constructs of in-service ECE teachers according to their self-report using a quantitative method based on previous studies carried out by Kelchtermans (2009) and Canrinus et al. (2012).

Therefore, the first main question of this study is:

What does the professional identity of in-service ECE teachers in the Republic of Kosovo look like?

This question is supported by the following sub-questions:

How do ECE teachers describe themselves (self-image) as early childhood education professionals?

How do they evaluate their efficacy in their work as ECE teachers?

What are ECE teachers' attitudes towards their role as ECE teachers?

How satisfied and motivated are ECE teachers? \What is the perspective of ECE teachers on their professional future?

The second objective of this study is to answer the question of whether there is a significant correlation between in-service ECE teacher professional identity constructs according to their self-reports, as well as whether there are correlations and differences in in-service ECE teacher professional identity according to their work experience, but also their professional development level as independent variables in this study. This objective is scrutinized with research questions such as:

What is the relationship between in-service ECE teachers' professional identity constructs (self-image, self-efficacy, their role, job satisfaction, and future perspective)?

Are there any differences in professional identity constructs of in-service ECE teachers when sorted by work experience?

Are there any differences in professional identity constructs of in-service ECE teachers when sorted by their professional development level?

## 2. Literature Review

ECE teachers' professional identity is a multidimensional construct that includes ECE teachers' self-perception, beliefs, values, and emotional investment in their role as teachers (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2009). The concept of ECE teachers' professional identity has recently evolved as a field of research; however, according to the literature in this field, there is still no single definition of professional identity. At global level, numerous researchers (Van der Valk et al., 2019; Canrinus et al., 2012 & Kelchtermans, 2009; Liston & Whitcomb, 2008; Vanassche, 2014; Beijaard et al., 2000, etc.) have explored ECE teachers' professional identity in order to gain deeper understanding into their personalities, since in addition to being ECE teachers or professional in a field, they are also unique individuals with their own perspectives on reality. Beauchamp and Thomas (2022) provide an in-depth review of the literature regarding ECE teachers' professional identity, analyzing the factors that contribute to its formation and development. They emphasize that ECE teachers' identity is a dynamic and interdependent construct, determined by personal and professional experiences, as well as socio-cultural influences.

According to Erikson's (1968) psychosocial development theory, human identity evolves by following predetermined life stages. Chimbi & Jita (2021) emphasize that professional identity is an influential aspect in shaping educational practices, directly influencing how ECE teachers select teaching methods and strategies. They argue that ECE teachers who have a clear professional identity make decisions guided by pedagogical principles, to improve quality in education, and to create educational environments for children.

ECE teachers' well-being and their professional identity are closely linked to confidence in their abilities to have a successful impact in the classroom and to working conditions (Zee & Koomen, 2022). Teachers' professional identity is defined as an individual's perception of oneself as a professional within a community of professionals (Ibarra, 1999). This form is considered to include a set of features about one's profession and is based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences (Beijaard et al., 2000). Kelchtermans (2009,a) describes the concept of professional identity as a lens through which ECE teachers view, make sense of, and act upon their work. This leads to the statement that professional identity builds a personal framework that guides one's perceptions, interpretations and actions in embedded situations embedded at work. There is also consensus among researchers that professional identity is a multidimensional concept, but there is still no unanimous agreement on its central components (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004).

Often, although the professional development of ECE teachers changes and develops throughout a person's career, identity formation occurs early in childhood. The environments and experiences that influence the development of a professional identity include three principal backgrounds: a) previous life experience, either personal or professional, prior to enrollment in a preparation program (Schempp et al., 1998), (b) training including formal education, preparation, and programs that provide endorsement, and (c) experiences gained professionally during the career (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Based on Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory, an individual's belief about who they are depends on the groups they belong to. According to them, a person may have more than one identity, depending on the social groups they belong to. For example, a person may have an identity as a parent of children in the family, but they may also have another identity in the collective where they work as a certain professional.

From another perspective, Rather (2018) argues that a stronger identity with the group will lead a teacher to spontaneously seek benefits for the group and even build an awareness of a community with a shared future. Alden and Cheung (2000) also demonstrate that ECE teachers with a higher sense of identity will engage in activities that facilitate positive group growth and even engage in proactive civic behaviors.

According to Kelchtermans (2009b), five components emerging from a series of studies have been identified as determinants of professional identity or as he refers to the "self-understanding" of ECE teachers, namely: a) self-image or the way ECE teachers see themselves, and this largely depends not only on self-perception but also on how others see an ECE teacher (i.e., what children, parents and colleagues think of them); b) self-esteem, which refers to the teacher's assessment of the quality of the work they perform, which is largely related to an ECE teacher's perception of self-efficacy and pertains to their affective field. This is why negative public judgments, which to someone else (who is not an ECE teacher) seem almost insignificant, can have a devastating impact on them (Kelchtermans, 2009c), c) job motivation, or how satisfied the ECE teachers are with the work they perform, d) ECE teacher's perception of their role, or what they see as their task, and e) teacher's future perspective, that is, where ECE teachers see themselves in the future. Therefore, since this study's explore professional identity of in-service ECE teachers will be oriented around these key constructs, based on the heuristic model according to Canrinus et al. (2012) and Kelchtermans (2009 d), they are elaborated below.

### **2.1. Professional Identity Constructs**

Based on the theories elaborated above, various researchers (Trepte & Loy, 2017; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2009; Cropanzano et al., 2017; DeCenzo et al., 2013; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Beijaard et al, 2000; etc.) have identified various indicators that explain teachers' identity. Kelchtermans (2009) has suggested breaking down teachers' identity into several key constructs that are related to: a) self-image, self-confidence, perception of their role and future perspective. Meanwhile, numerous studies related to the exploration of teacher identity have suggested: a) self-image, b) self-efficacy, c) ECE teachers' role, d) job satisfaction, and f) future perspective of ECE teachers (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Brief & Weiss, 2002; Bandura et al., 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2007 etc.) as key constructs.

Kelchtermans (2009) defines self-image as part of a teacher's personal interpretive framework, emphasizing that it is shaped by unique experiences and perceptions of others, including students, parents, and colleagues. This point of view is supported by Yağan et al. (2022), who claim that self-image is significantly influenced by reactions from their environment, including professional relationships and the social expectations placed on them. Furthermore, the construction of a teacher's identity is closely related to their competence, which Mutlu & Ortaçtepe (2016) argue is shaped by the way teachers perceive themselves as subject matter and pedagogy experts. This interaction between self-image and competence is essential, as teachers with a positive self-image tend to have higher levels of competence, leading to more effective teaching practices and better outcomes for children (Pedota, 2015).

One of the key influences on ECE teachers' self-efficacy is the level of social support they receive from colleagues, management, and parents. Various researchers emphasize that social support contributes significantly to self-esteem, suggesting that ECE teachers who feel supported tend to have higher self-esteem, which, in turn, can improve their teaching effectiveness and their job satisfaction (Baker-Doyle & Yoon, 2020). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2007) emphasize that ECE teachers' perception of self-efficacy influences the achievements of the children they teach.

The perception of the role of ECE teachers is multifaceted and crucial to fostering positive learning environments. ECE teachers face various challenges as they interact with children, parents,

colleagues, and the broader early childhood community (Chong & Lu, 2019). Various researchers have explored the perceptions of pre- and in-service ECE teachers related to specific roles in relation to their profession, such as interaction with children, communication with parents and the community (Chong & Lu, 2019), play and physical activities or other developmental areas (Connelly et al., 2018).

Over the last decade, preschool education has received unprecedented scrutiny both internationally and locally, from which competing and contradictory discourses of professionalism have emerged (Chong & Lu, 2017). While according to Ekinci, ECE teachers see their lives as very appealing and attractive because of the stimulation and power to positively influence the future of children. ECE teachers see themselves as involved in the holistic development of the child, including ethical values during preschool age, which supports the development of children's personality and character, and helps develop skills that will serve them throughout their lives, influencing later academic success (Şanver et al., 2023).

Job satisfaction is another determinant of teachers' identity, and it represents a difficult concept to define, inextricably linked to numerous variables (Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). ECE teachers' job satisfaction focuses mainly on their professional attitudes, passion for teaching, and enthusiasm for work, which affects the educational system (Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Sumanasena & Nawastheen, 2022). It is important to note that the results found by Mishra & Sharma (2021) showed a significant positive correlation not only between job satisfaction and job performance but also between job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Numerous researchers have explored the future perspective of early childhood ECE teachers regarding their prospects as professionals. In most studies, a radical shift is observed in terms of where ECE teachers see themselves and how their roles are changing over time. Goffin & Washington (2007) suggest that ECE teachers are increasingly seen as facilitators of learning, rather than simple caregivers. This shift towards recognizing the critical role of early childhood education professionals is driving the need for more specialized training, greater engagement in curriculum development, and a strong commitment to supporting changes in early childhood education policies. It is also noted that the role of future ECE teachers will include a deeper engagement with parents, communities and policymakers to support children's development in a holistic manner (ibid).

On the other hand, Darling-Hammond (2017) emphasizes that ECE teachers seem to see the need to integrate technology into their future teaching practices. This also includes creating inclusive environments, adapting curricula, and ensuring that all children feel valued and understood. It is also required to create better working conditions, including opportunities for continuous professional development and exchange of experiences among ECE teachers (ibid). The research model presented in Figure 1 represents the examined identity constructs of ECE teachers based on Kelchtermans (2009) and Canrinus et al. (2012).

### 3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach, utilizing questionnaires completed by 318 ECE teachers in Kosovo. Correlational analyses were performed to understand the relationship between the main identity construct of teachers as professionals, including ANOVA for finding out the difference between teacher's identity based on their working experience and professional development. However, since we have used multiple instruments to measure a large number of variables and factors about teachers' identity constructs, factor analysis was performed to reduce the complexity of the data and uncover underlying relationships. The rationale for using factor analysis in this context is to identify clusters of variables that are highly correlated with each other, which are believed to represent latent factors (Fabrigar, L.R. et al., 1999). By grouping variables into factors, we have simplified the data, making them easier to interpret and analyze while preserving the essential



information. Additionally, factor analysis can validate whether the different instruments are measuring the same or related constructs, thereby providing evidence of the instruments' construct validity. Moreover, it provides construct validity evidence of self-reporting scales (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

### **3.1. Sample and Sample Selection**

This study used a quantitative method, using structured questionnaires. Given the impossibility of conducting a complete count, the sampling method was used. The sample selection is of the probability type known as stratified sampling. The research involved 318 ECE teachers with over three years of work experience from all 7 regions of the country. Table 1 presents the demographic data of the participants.

The stratification was based on two key criteria: (1) work experience of at least three years and (2) the ministry region where teachers are employed. The rationale for using stratified sampling was to obtain a more representative sample of preschool education (ECE) teachers across all seven regions of the country, reducing sampling bias and improving the generalizability of the findings. This method ensures that teachers from different regions and with adequate professional experience are proportionally included.

### **3.2. Data collection tools**

Self-image, one of the main identity constructs, was assessed using the scale developed by Richardson et al. (2006). This scale consists of twenty statements in total distributed across six factors: expertise ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ), difficulty ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ), social status ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ), salary ( $\alpha = 0.96$ ), social concern ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), and satisfaction with choice ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ).

Self-efficacy was measured using eight statements adapted from Chen et al. (2001) adapted to the ECE teacher's context. The reliability coefficient was found to be  $\alpha = 0.88$ .

Role perception. Two factors from the scale developed by Hackam (1980), which assesses job design, were used to measure the role perception construct. The adapted factors are task identity ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ) and skill variety ( $\alpha = 0.59$ ). These factors are based on the adaptation by Zhilla (2014). Task identity includes four statements, while skill diversity includes five statements.

Job satisfaction was measured using the Minnesota Satisfaction Instrument (MNQ) by Wisse (2022). This instrument consists of twenty statements divided into two factors: extrinsic satisfaction ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) and intrinsic satisfaction ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ).

Future perspective was measured using the Professional Engagement and Career Development Aspirations Questionnaire (PECDA Scale), developed by Watt (2008). This identity construct consists of four factors and seventeen statements in total: planned effort ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), planned persistence ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ), professional development aspirations ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ), and leadership aspirations ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ). All statements were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1=Strongly disagree and 5=Strongly agree.

### **3.3. Ethical issues**

One of the basic principles related to research work is to ensure ECE teachers working in the Republic of Kosovo and the Municipal Education Directorates are informed at the right time and sign the ethical declarations prepared for them. Consent was obtained from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. Also, each ECE teacher was informed about their rights and confidentiality. At the beginning of the questionnaire, ECE teachers were first asked for their consent while each of them had the right to withdraw from answering the questionnaire.

## 4. Results

The survey data were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially using the statistical software SPSS. A descriptive analysis was conducted for each item of the survey, with tables used to clarify each factor of measured identity constructs of ECE teachers. The validity of the constructs was tested using the exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. Specifically, Pearson correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationships between the identity constructs. ANOVA was used to find out differences between ECE teacher's identity constructs based on their working experience as well as professional development level.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics regarding the sample (n = 318)

Variables	Category	N	%
Gender	Female	316	99.37
	Male	2	00.63
Age	20-30 years old	53	16.67
	31-40 years old	134	42.14
	41-50 years old	93	29.24
	+50 years old	38	11.95
Experience	3-6 years	106	33.3
	7-10 years	99	31.1
	+10 years	113	35.5
Qualification	Bachelor's in early/preschool education	281	88.36
	Master's in education	32	10.06
	Bachelor from a private college	5	1.58
Trainings	I have attended no training	17	1.57
	1-3 trainings	50	15.7
	4-6 trainings	61	19.2
	7-10 trainings	67	21.1
	+10 trainings	123	38.7

### 4.1. Factor Analysis Results

The validity of the constructs was tested using the exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. Initially, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted where all statements were entered into the analysis. Factor analysis was conducted several times after deleting the statements: JS13, SE7, SE8, ID3, LLM3, LLM5 and SS10. In the end, the KMO test value was 0.901, while the Bartlett test was significant, indicating that the data is suitable for conducting the factor analysis. The total variance explained was 70.30%, indicating a high validity of the research constructs.

The model obtained from the exploratory factor analysis was further transferred to AMOS to perform confirmatory factor analysis to see if this model fits the collected data. Table 2 summarizes the result of the confirmatory factor analysis. Based on the results in table 2, the standard loadings for most statements are high, with fifty-two statements above 0.70 and twelve statements below this value, but within the range of 0.59 or 0.60. However, in the confirmatory factor analysis, statements



LLM4 and VLSH6 were removed from the analysis due to low loadings and to improve the fit of the model. CR values range between 0.750 and 0.961, indicating that all constructs (dimensions of constructs for other variables) have high reliability. The AVE variance values range between 0.497 and 0.815, indicating that all constructs (and construct dimensions for other variables) have convergent validity. Finally, apart from self-efficacy and role perception constructs, the MSV values of the other constructs (dimensions) are lower than their AVE values, which indicates that these constructs (dimensions) have discriminant validity. Finally, the fit indices, from  $\chi^2/shl = 2.105$ , CFI = 0.913, SRMR = 0.06 and RMSEA = 0.059 indicate that the data fit the hypothesized model moderately well.

**Table 2.** Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results

Code	std. loadings	t-Value	CR	AVE	MSV
<b>Self-image</b>					
Expertise			0.822	0.613	0.272
EXP2	0.815	Fixed			
EXP3	0.903	15.576***			
EXP1	0.598	10.786***			
Difficulty			0.750	0.607	0.337
DIFF4	0.635	Fixed			
DIFF6	–	–			
DIFF5	0.900	8.550***			
Social status and pay			0.909	0.589	0.349
SS8	0.810	Fixed			
SS9	0.713	17.191***			
SS11	0.834	16.516***			
SS7	0.732	18.494***			
PAY13	0.760	14.664***			
SS12	0.770	19.917***			
PAY14	0.747	14.312***			
Social concern			0.822	0.608	0.162
SC17	0.854	Fixed			
SC16	0.745	12.729***			
SC15	0.734	12.577***			
Satisfaction with choice			0.852	0.664	0.410
SwC18	0.590	Fixed			
SwC19	0.923	11.649***			
SwC20	0.891	11.523***			
Self-efficacy			0.866	0.520	0.529
SE2	0.751	Fixed			
SE3	0.749	13.137***			
SE5	0.778	13.686***			
SE4	0.730	12.793***			
SE1	0.625	10.835***			
SE6	0.680	11.861***			
Role perception			0.830	0.497	0.529
ID2	0.834	Fixed			
LLM1	0.742	14.110***			
LLM2	0.690	12.905***			
ID4	0.602	10.954***			

LLM4 Id1	–	–			
	0.632	11.608***			
	Job satisfaction		0.961	0.565	0.232
JS5	0.818	Fixed			
JS11	0.818	17.458***			
JS6	0.828	24.810***			
JS16	0.829	17.815***			
JS12	0.827	17.742***			
JS15	0.810	17.209***			
JS19	0.805	17.025***			
JS9	0.728	14.786***			
JS2	0.747	15.310***			
JS3	0.731	14.869***			
JS20	0.747	15.321***			
JS18	0.709	14.267***			
JS10	0.737	15.029***			
JS8	0.673	13.316***			
JS14	0.737	15.051***			
JS1	0.691	13.801***			
JS4	0.654	12.828***			
JS17	0.720	14.562***			
JS7	0.633	12.325***			
	Future perspective				
	Planned effort		0.829	0.548	0.425
PE2	0.764	Fixed			
PE2	0.706	12.135***			
PE4	0.786	13.513***			
PE3	0.702	12.064***			
	Planned persistence		0.923	0.749	0.425
PP	0.902	Fixed			
PP8	0.887	23.260***			
PP5	0.831	20.362***			
PP7	0.840	20.816***			
	Professional development aspirations		0.908	0.664	0.363
PDA12	0.783	Fixed			
PDA11	0.860	16.843***			
PDA13	0.715	18.666***			
PDA9	0.817	15.796***			
PDA10	0.887	17.491***			
	Leadership aspirations		0.946	0.815	0.045
LA14	0.926	Fixed			
LA15	0.935	29.929***			
LA16	0.898	26.630***			
LA17	0.850	23.048***			

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

#### 4.2. Relationship between the identity constructs

Following the results of the confirmatory factor analysis, the mean values for each construct and specific dimensions of the constructs were calculated based on the final result of the confirmatory factor analysis. Further analyses testing the hypothesis set out below were conducted based on these mean values. Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the first hypothesis.

**Table 3.** Results of correlation analysis regarding the relationship between study variables

Variables	EXP	DIFF	SSPAY	SC	SwC	SE	RP	JS	PE	PP	PDA	LA
SE	.416**	.258**	.395**	.121*	.490**	1						
RP	.388**	.359**	.342**	.143*	.439**	.613**	1					
JS	.283**	.119*	.441**	.139*	.369**	.432**	.396**	1				
PE	.367**	.366**	.255**	-.002	.469**	.453**	.434**	.278**	1			
PP	.393**	.254**	.399**	.034	.568**	.450**	.428**	.354**	.587**	1		
PDA	.482**	.269**	.447**	.144*	.532**	.488**	.513**	.366**	.497**	.550**	1	
LA	.185**	-.068	.200**	-.007	.044	.009	.048	.045	.085	.080	.202**	1

EXP = Expertise, DIFF = Difficulty, SSPAY = Social status and pay, SC = Social concern, SwC = Satisfaction with choice, SE = self-efficacy, RP = Role perception, JS = Job satisfaction, PE = Planned effort, PP = Planned persistence, PDA = Professional development aspirations, LA = Leadership aspirations,

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ . \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 3 summarizes the results of the correlation analysis regarding the relationship between study variables. Expertise (as a self-image factor) has significant and positive correlations with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.416$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), role perception ( $r = 0.388$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), job satisfaction ( $r = 0.283$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned persistence ( $r = 0.393$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), professional development aspirations ( $r = 0.482$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and leadership aspirations ( $r = 0.185$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Difficulty (as the second self-image factor) has positive and significant correlations with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.258$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), role perception ( $r = 0.359$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), job satisfaction ( $r = 0.119$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), planned effort ( $r = 0.366$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned persistence ( $r = 0.254$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and professional development aspirations ( $r = 0.269$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Social status and salary (as the third self-image factor) have positive and significant correlations with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.395$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), role perception ( $r = 0.342$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), job satisfaction ( $r = 0.441$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned effort ( $r = 0.255$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned persistence ( $r = 0.399$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), professional development aspirations ( $r = 0.447$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and leadership aspirations ( $r = 0.200$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Social concern (as the fourth self-image factor) has significant and positive correlations with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.121$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), role perception ( $r = 0.143$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), job satisfaction ( $r = 0.143$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), job satisfaction ( $r = 0.139$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and professional development aspirations ( $r = 0.144$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Satisfaction with choice (as the final self-image factor) has positive and significant correlations with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.490$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), role perception ( $r = 0.439$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), job satisfaction ( $r = 0.369$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned effort ( $r = 0.469$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned persistence ( $r = 0.568$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and professional development aspirations ( $r = 0.532$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Self-efficacy has positive and significant correlations with role perception ( $\beta = 0.613$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), job satisfaction ( $r = 0.432$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned effort ( $\beta = 0.453$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned persistence ( $\beta = 0.450$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and professional development aspirations ( $\beta = 0.488$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Role perception. has positive and significant correlations with job satisfaction ( $r = 0.396$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned effort ( $r = 0.434$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned persistence ( $\beta = 0.428$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and professional development aspirations ( $\beta = 0.513$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Job satisfaction has significant and positive correlations with planned effort ( $\beta = 0.278$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), planned persistence ( $\beta = 0.354$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and professional development aspirations ( $\beta = 0.366$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Planned effort (as a factor of the future perspective construct) has significant and positive correlations with planned persistence ( $\beta = 0.587$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and professional development aspirations ( $\beta = 0.497$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Planned persistence has a significant and positive correlation with professional development aspirations ( $\beta = 0.550$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The “Professional development aspirations” dimension has a significant and positive correlation with leadership aspirations ( $\beta = 0.202$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

All these results provide support for the H1 hypothesis: “There is a strong and positive and statistically significant correlation between all professional identity constructs according to ECE teachers’ self-reports”.

Differences between professional identity constructs of in-service ECE teachers when sorted by work experience

To test differences in professional identity constructs according to work experience, the one-way analysis of variance (One-Way ANOVA) was used. Since some identity constructs were of first order, and some of second order (according to the results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis), the tables are divided into three sections. In the first section, the results of the ANOVA analysis for the self-image construct, according to the dimensions of the construct, are presented. In the second section, the results of the ANOVA analysis are presented for the three constructs, which are not divided into dimensions, respectively for the constructs of job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and role perception. In the third section, the results of the ANOVA analysis for the construct of future perspective, according to the dimensions of the construct, are presented. The tables have been abbreviated to summarize only the significant results.

**Table 4.** Results of One-Way ANOVA analysis regarding differences in the construct of self-image according to experience

Constructs	Category	Average	Std. deviation	F-test	Sig.
Social status and pay	3-6 years	3.8342	0.99798	3,317	0,038
	7-10 years	3.8788	0.95752		
	+10 years	3.5512	1.08224		

Table 4 summarizes the results of One-Way ANOVA analysis regarding differences in the identity construct of self-image according to experience. The values  $F = 1.377$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $F = 0.295$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $F = 1.037$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , and  $F = 0.130$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , indicate that there are no significant differences in the dimensions of expertise, difficulty, social concern and satisfaction with choice according to ECE teachers' experience. Whereas the values  $F = 3.317$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , indicate that there is at least a significant difference in the dimension of social status and pay according to experience. This difference was further examined using the results of the Bonferroni test after ensuring the assumption of homogeneity of variances. The difference close to the level of significance is between ECE teachers with 7-10 years of experience and those with over 10 years, a significant difference at  $p = 0.060$ . According to this difference, ECE teachers with 7-10 years of work experience have a higher average in terms of social status and pay than ECE teachers with over 10 years of work experience. After calculating the effect size, the eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) value was 0.021, indicating a small effect. This suggests that while a difference exists, the practical significance of experience on perceived social status and pay is limited.

Next, regarding the differences in ECE teachers' professional identity constructs according to work experience, the values obtained from SPSS,  $F = 0.778$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $F = 2.182$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , and  $F = 1.840$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , show that there are no significant differences in the constructs of self-efficacy, role perception and job satisfaction according to ECE teachers' work experience. The effect size for leadership aspirations, eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) = 0.085, reflects a moderate effect, indicating that differences in leadership aspirations based on experience are more substantial.

**Table 5.** Results of One-Way ANOVA analysis regarding differences in the construct of future perspective according to experience

Constructs	Category	Average	Std. deviation	F-test	Sig.
Planned persistence	3-6 years	4.3443	0.93824	3,225	0,041
	7-10 years	4.5505	0.64679		
	+10 years	4.5819	0.60175		
Leadership aspirations	3-6 years	4.0401	1.11009	14,574	<0,001
	7-10 years	3.9091	1.27498		
	+10 years	3.1659	1.45912		

Table 5 presents the results of the One-Way ANOVA analysis regarding differences in the construct of future perspective according to experience. The values  $F = 0.693$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , and  $F = 0.638$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , indicate that there are no significant differences in the dimension of planned effort and professional development aspirations according to work experience. While the values  $F = 3.225$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , and  $F = 14.574$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , indicate that there are significant differences in the constructs of planned persistence and leadership aspirations. The results of the Bonferroni test showed that, in fact, the differences are almost not significant. There are almost significant differences between ECE teachers with 3-6 years of work experience and those with over 10 years of experience. The average difference shows that ECE teachers with 3-6 years of work experience have a lower level of planned persistence, however the difference is found at the significance level  $p = 0.05$ .

Meanwhile, in the dimension of leadership aspirations, there is a significant difference between ECE teachers with over 10 years of work experience and ECE teachers with 3-6 years and 7-10 years of work experience. The mean differences are  $MD = -0.87417$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and  $MD = -0.74316$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . According to these differences, ECE teachers with over 10 years of work experience have lower leadership aspirations than ECE teachers with 3-6 years and 7-10 years of work experience. Assuming that there is at least one significant difference between the two groups, we can accept the H2 hypothesis: "There are significant differences between ECE teachers' professional identity constructs when sorted by work experience".

Differences between ECE teachers' professional identity constructs when sorted by their professional development level

Similarly, this hypothesis was also tested using the One-Way ANOVA analysis.

The tables have been abbreviated to summarize only the significant results (see Tables 6, 7 and 8). The values  $F = 1.412$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $F = 0.542$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ,  $F = 1.439$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , and  $F = 0.166$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , indicate that there are no significant differences in the dimensions of expertise, social status and pay, social concern, and satisfaction with choice, according to the level of professional development. Whereas the value  $F = 2.465$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , indicates that there is a significant difference in the difficulty dimension according to the level of professional development. However, since this value is almost 5%, the differences are not targeted in the multiple comparison table. However, if the mean values

between groups are compared, ECE teachers who have not attended any training have a lower average than ECE teachers who have attended training.

**Table 6.** Results of One-Way ANOVA analysis regarding differences in the construct of self-image according to professional development level

Constructs	Category	Average	Std. deviation	F-test	Sig.
Difficulty	I have attended no training	4.2549	0.69251	2,465	0,045
	1-3 trainings	4.4733	0.67036		
	4-6 trainings	4.5847	0.50792		
	7-10 trainings	4.3433	0.70346		
	+10 trainings	4.5854	0.64209		

Table 7 summarizes the results of the One-Way ANOVA analysis regarding differences in the identity construct of ECE teachers' professional identity according to professional development level. The value  $F = 1.711$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , indicates that there are no significant differences in self-efficacy according to the level of professional development. Whereas the values  $F = 4.208$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and  $F = 4.548$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , indicate that there are significant differences in role perception and job satisfaction according to the level of professional development, measured by the number of trainings attended. The effect size for this difference, eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) = 0.031, suggests a small effect, meaning that while there is a statistically significant difference, the practical significance remains limited.

**Table 7.** Results of One-Way ANOVA analysis regarding differences in the identity construct of ECE teachers' professional identity according to professional development level

Constructs	Category	Average	Std. deviation	F-test	Sig.
Role perception	I have attended no training	4.5196	0.50305	4,208	0,002
	1-3 trainings	4.5000	0.48911		
	4-6 trainings	4.6940	0.47158		
	7-10 trainings	4.6119	0.44983		
	+10 trainings	4.7575	0.33214		
Job satisfaction	I have attended no training	3.9474	1.00810	4,548	0,001
	1-3 trainings	4.1221	0.85744		
	4-6 trainings	4.3865	0.79813		
	7-10 trainings	4.5082	0.52067		
	+10 trainings	4.4865	0.61660		

*JS = Job Satisfaction, SE = Self-Efficacy, RP = Role Perception*

Regarding the identity construct of job satisfaction, there is a significant difference (according to the results of the Bonferroni test) between ECE teachers who have not attended any training and ECE teachers who have attended 7-10 training courses and over 10. The mean differences are  $MD = -0.56088$ ,  $p < 0.05$  and  $MD = -0.53915$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . According to these differences, ECE teachers who have not attended any training have a lower level of job satisfaction than ECE teachers who have attended 7-10 training courses and ECE teachers who have attended over 10 training courses. A second difference exists between ECE teachers who have attended 1-3 trainings with ECE teachers who have attended 7-10 trainings and over 10 trainings. The mean differences are  $MD = -0.38614$ ,  $p$



$< 0.05$  and  $MD = -0.36442$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Again, these differences indicate that ECE teachers who have attended 1-3 trainings have a lower level of satisfaction than ECE teachers who have attended 7-10 trainings and over 10 trainings (or conversely: ECE teachers who have attended 7-10 trainings and ECE teachers who have attended over 10 trainings have higher levels of job satisfaction than ECE teachers who have attended 1-3 trainings. The effect size for this difference, eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) = 0.055, suggests a moderate effect, meaning that professional development explains a meaningful proportion of the variance in job satisfaction among ECE teachers.

In the Role Perception construct, there is a significant difference between ECE teachers who have attended 1-3 trainings and those who have attended over 10 trainings. The difference in arithmetic mean value is for  $MD = -0.25745$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . According to this difference, ECE teachers who have attended 1-3 training courses have a lower level of perception of their role as ECE teachers than ECE teachers who have attended over 10 training courses.

The effect size for this difference, eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) = 0.051, indicates a moderate effect, suggesting that variations in professional development contribute substantially to differences in role perception among ECE teachers.

**Table 8.** Results of One-Way ANOVA analysis regarding differences in the identity construct of a future perspective according to professional development level

Constructs	Category	Average	Std. deviation	F-test	Sig.
Planned persistence	I have attended no training	3.9265	0.97534	3,549	0,008
	1-3 trainings	4.3650	0.87803		
	4-6 trainings	4.4918	0.84775		
	7-10 trainings	4.5522	0.58636		
	+10 trainings	4.5915	0.64677		
Leadership aspirations	I have attended no training	4.1029	0.71293	6,055	<0,001
	1-3 trainings	3.9600	1.16536		
	4-6 trainings	4.0328	1.11006		
	7-10 trainings	3.8918	1.14666		
	+10 trainings	3.2398	1.56597		

Table 8 summarizes the results of the One-Way ANOVA analysis regarding differences in the construct of future perspective according to professional development level. The values  $F = 0.431$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , and  $F = 0.297$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , indicate that there are no significant differences in the dimensions of planned effort and professional development aspirations according to the level of professional development. Whereas,  $F = 3.549$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and  $F = 6.055$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , indicate that there are significant differences in the dimensions of planned persistence and leadership aspirations.

According to the results of the Bonferroni test, in the dimension of professional persistence there is a significant difference between ECE teachers who have not attended any training and ECE teachers who have attended 7-10 training and over 10 trainings. The mean differences are  $MD = -0.62577$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , and  $MD = -0.66499$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . According to these differences, ECE teachers who have not attended any training have a lower level of planned persistence than ECE teachers who have attended 7-10 training and over 10 trainings. In the dimension of leadership aspirations, there are significant differences between ECE teachers who have attended 1-3 trainings and over 10 trainings, 4-6 trainings and over 10 trainings, and 7-10 trainings and over 10 trainings. The effect size for this

difference, eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) = 0.043, suggests a moderate effect, indicating that professional development meaningfully contributes to differences in planned persistence among ECE teachers.

The mean differences are MD = 0.72016,  $p < 0.05$ , MD = 0.79295,  $p < 0.01$  and MD = 0.65195,  $p < 0.05$ , respectively. According to these differences, ECE teachers who have attended 1-3 trainings, 4-6 trainings and 7-10 trainings have higher levels of leadership aspirations than ECE teachers who have attended over 10 trainings. As can be seen from Table 4.21, these ECE teachers have the lowest arithmetic mean value compared to ECE teachers from other groups. However, it should be noted that the standard deviations in this dimension are significantly higher and this implies that there are differences in responses among ECE teachers, even within the group. The effect size for this difference, eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ) = 0.072, suggests a moderate to large effect, meaning that professional development level substantially influences leadership aspirations.

Based on all these results for all constructs, in other words, since there are significant differences in job satisfaction, role perception, and future perspective constructs, hypothesis H3 is accepted: There is a significant relationship between ECE teachers' professional identity constructs and their professional development level.

## 5. Discussion

This study highlights the strong professional identity of early childhood education (ECE) teachers, reflected in their high job satisfaction, self-efficacy, role perception, future perspective, and self-image. However, identity development often faces challenges, as noted by Flores and Day (2006), who argue that institutional pressures and policy changes can hinder autonomy and control, making it difficult for ECE teachers to establish a strong and sustainable identity. Similarly, Pillen et al. (2020) point out that changes in educational policies can create uncertainty and hinder the formation of a stable professional identity.

The correlation analysis revealed significant connections between the constructs of professional identity. Job satisfaction was positively associated with self-efficacy, role perception, future perspective, and self-image, suggesting that ECE teachers with higher job satisfaction tend to have stronger beliefs in their abilities and a clearer professional vision. These findings align with those of Beltman et al. (2021), who stress that educators with a positive self-image have more confidence in their abilities and are better equipped to manage challenges and changes in the educational environment. The findings also support the importance of self-image in shaping professional identity, as it helps educators recognize and value their skills, impacting children's lives (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2022).

Self-efficacy was strongly linked to role perception and future perspective, underlining the significance of ECE teachers' belief in their effectiveness and its impact on their professional aspirations. This aligns with Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007), who emphasize self-efficacy as crucial in motivating ECE teachers and enhancing their resilience. According to Zee and Koomen (2022), self-efficacy helps educators believe in their ability to achieve positive teaching outcomes. Similar findings are also reported by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2007), who show that educators confident in their abilities to impact children's lives are more motivated and better able to meet professional challenges.

The emotional connections that educators form with their profession also play a key role in their professional identity development. As highlighted by Chong & Lu (2019), these connections are linked to a deep passion for their work and reflect their commitment to the profession. Connelly et al. (2018) argue that these emotional ties are integral to how educators adapt to their profession.

Job satisfaction and motivation are important factors in developing professional identity. The findings of this study align with Estafianto et al. (2020), who highlight professional support and

continuous development opportunities as key to enhancing ECE teacher satisfaction and motivation. However, contrary findings by Lavy & Sabar-Ben Yehoshua (2021) suggest that factors such as low salaries, difficult working conditions, and lack of social recognition might influence job satisfaction and motivation more than professional development opportunities.

Additionally, this study explored ECE teachers' perspectives on the future of their profession as a key element of professional identity. Whitebook et al. (2014) argue that a positive outlook on the future is an important motivator for ECE teachers, helping them engage in their daily tasks. Macdonald & McAllister (2021) further suggest that positive perspectives on the future help maintain a stable professional identity, enabling educators to cope with ongoing changes in the educational environment. This supports Liu & Trent (2023), who indicate that recognizing and appreciating teachers' responsibilities can improve their professional identity and overall job fulfillment.

Lastly, the study examined the relationship between professional identity constructs and ECE teaching experience. While job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and role perception remained consistent across different experience levels, variations were observed in future perspectives. Less experienced ECE teachers showed lower persistence in planning but had higher leadership aspirations, suggesting that early-career educators may be more ambitious about career advancement but less certain about long-term sustainability.

Meanwhile, regarding the analysis of the relationship between identity constructs and key variables, the correlation analysis confirms a strong and significant relationship between professional identity constructs. Expertise, difficulty, social status, salary, social concern, and satisfaction with career choice show positive correlations with self-efficacy, role perception, job satisfaction, and professional development aspirations. In particular, self-efficacy and role perception contribute to strengthening planned persistence and effort, supporting professional growth and leadership aspirations among ECE teachers. These findings support the hypothesis that all professional identity constructs are interconnected, highlighting the importance of continuous support for their development. These results also align with the findings of authors (Fuming & Jiliang, 2007; Sumanasena & Nawastheen, 2022), who emphasize the close connections between professional identity factors and other key variables that help form and reinforce identity in teaching.

## 6. Conclusion

This study underscores the multidimensional nature of ECE teachers' professional identity, emphasizing the interplay between job satisfaction, self-efficacy, role perception, future perspective, and self-image. The findings suggest that ECE teachers generally hold a positive self-concept regarding their professional roles, with their identity shaped by factors such as work experience and professional development. Notably, participation in professional training appears to be a critical factor in enhancing job satisfaction and reinforcing ECE teachers' perceptions of their roles.

Despite these positive findings, the study also highlights areas requiring attention, particularly the variations in future perspectives among teachers at different career stages. Early-career teachers' higher leadership aspirations but lower planned persistence may indicate a need for targeted support to sustain their long-term commitment to the profession. Furthermore, the perception of social status and financial rewards fluctuates with experience, suggesting the need for policies that ensure equitable career progression and recognition for ECE professionals.

## 7. Suggestion

Strengthening professional development opportunities is crucial, as training significantly influences the formation of professional identity. Policymakers and educational institutions should invest in accessible, high-quality training programs to enhance job satisfaction, role perception, and career aspirations. Supporting early-career preschool teachers through targeted mentoring and

structured career pathways can help sustain their long-term commitment while effectively channelling leadership aspirations.

Furthermore, improving the recognition and compensation of preschool teachers is essential, as addressing disparities in social status and pay can enhance job satisfaction and reinforce professional identity. Encouraging reflective practices through professional dialogue and knowledge-sharing can further support a sustainable professional identity, fostering resilience and professional growth among preschool teachers. Research in early childhood education plays a crucial role in identifying best practices, shaping curriculum development, and ensuring effective teaching strategies that support young children's learning and development. A comprehensive approach that integrates training, mentorship, research, and equitable compensation will contribute to the long-term development of preschool teachers and the overall improvement of early childhood education quality.

## 8. Recommendations

Given the variations in future perspectives across career stages, future research should investigate the specific needs and challenges of early-career teachers. Research could focus on how to bridge the gap between their aspirations and long-term sustainability in the profession.

More studies should explore the emotional connections that teachers develop with their profession, as these ties seem integral to professional identity. Investigating how emotional commitment affects long-term retention and resilience could help in developing more supportive educational environments.

In the other hand, academic work should further examine how changes in educational policies, such as salary adjustments or professional recognition, impact the development of teachers' professional identities, especially in relation to job satisfaction and motivation.

In a practical manner, professional development programs should be tailored to the specific needs of early-career teachers, offering mentorship, career guidance, and leadership training to help them align their aspirations with long-term professional growth. While schools and educational institutions should focus on improving job satisfaction by providing support systems, addressing difficult working conditions, and recognizing teachers' contributions. This includes offering competitive salaries and social recognition to reduce the impact of external pressures.

By implementing these recommendations, both academic research and practical measures can better support the development of a strong and sustainable professional identity for ECE teachers, ensuring long-term commitment and success in the profession.

## Declarations

**Author Contributions.** (A.B.: Literature review, conceptualization. M.GJ &F.K.: methodology, data analysis. M.GJ.: review-editing and A.B. writing, original manuscript preparation. All authors have read and approved the published on the final version of the article)

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

**Funding.** The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

**Ethical Approval.** All procedures conducted during the study adhered to the ethical guidelines set by institutional and national research committees, as well as the principles outlined in the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its subsequent amendments.

**Data Availability Statement.** The datasets are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to approval.

## References

- Alden, D. L., & Cheung, A. H. (2000). Organ donation and culture: A comparison of Asian American and European American beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 30*, 293–314. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2000.tb02317.x>
- Androusou, A., & Tsafos, V. (2018). Aspects of the professional identity of preschool teachers in Greece: Investigating the role of teacher education and professional experience. *Teacher Development, 22*(4), 473–488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2018.1438309>
- Baker-Doyle, K. J., & Yoon, S. A. (2020). The social side of teacher education: Implications of social network research for the design of professional development. *International Journal of Educational Research, 102*, 101563. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101563>
- Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (1999). Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations and career trajectories. *Child Development, 70*(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00001>
- Bandura, A. (2000). Self-efficacy: The foundation of agency. In *Control of human behavior, mental processes, and consciousness: Essays in honor of the 60th birthday of August Flammer* (pp. 16–37). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: An overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 39*(2), 175–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640902902252>
- Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2022). Identity learning in teacher education. In *Encyclopedia of Teacher Education* (pp. 786–790). Springer. [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-16-8679-5\\_51](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-981-16-8679-5_51)
- Beijaard, D., Verloop, N., & Vermunt, J. (2000). Teachers' perceptions of professional identity: An exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 16*(7), 749–764. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(00\)00023-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(00)00023-8)
- Beijaard, D., Verloop, N., & Meijer, P. C. (2000). Teachers' perceptions of professional identity: An exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 16*, 749–764. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(00\)00023-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(00)00023-8)
- Beltman, S., Mansfield, C., & Price, A. (2021). Teacher resilience: A key to building sustainable educational practices. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 113*(4), 804–817. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000398>
- Berg, D. A., & Smith, L. F. (2018). The effect of school-based experience on preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. *Issues in Educational Research, 28*, 530–544.
- Brief, A. P., & Weiss, H. M. (2002). Organizational behavior: Affect in the workplace. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53*(1), 279–307.
- Canrinus, E. T., et al. (2012). Self-efficacy, job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment: Exploring the relationships between indicators of teachers' professional identity. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 27*, 115–132. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10212-011-0069-2>
- Canrinus, E. T., Helms-Lorenz, M., Beijaard, D., & Buitink, J. (2012). The relations between teachers' self-efficacy, their emotions, and their job satisfaction. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(6), 802–812.
- Chen, G., Gully, S. M., & Eden, D. (2001). Validation of a new general self-efficacy scale. *Organizational Research Methods, 4*(1), 62–83.
- Chimbi, G. T., & Jita, L. C. (2021, May 23). Teachers' life-history narratives and reform policy implementation at the classroom level. ERIC. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED613986.pdf>
- Chong, S., & Lu, T. (2019). Early Childhood Teachers' Perception of the Professional Self and In Relation to the Early Childhood Communities. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 44*(7).

- Connelly, J. A., Champagne, M., & Manningham, S. (2018). Early childhood educators' perception of their role in children's physical activity: Do we need to clarify expectations? *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 32(3), 283-294.
- Chen, G., Gully, S. M., & Eden, D. (2001). Validation of a new general self-efficacy scale. *Organizational research methods*, 4(1), 62-83
- Cropanzano, R., Rupp, D. E., & Byrne, Z. S. (2017). The relationship of organizational justice to work attitudes, job performance, and organizational citizenship behaviors: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102(6), 1124-1139. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000207>
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Teaching in the flat world: Learning from high-performing systems*. Teachers College Press.
- Day, C., Kington, A., Stobart, G., & Sammons, P. (2006). The personal and professional selves of teachers: Stable and unstable identities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(4), 601-616. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920600775316>
- DeCenzo, D. A., Robbins, S. P., & Verhulst, S. L. (2013). *Fundamentals of Human Resource Management*. Eleventh Edition, Wiley.
- Ekinci, N. (2017). Öğretmen Adaylarının Öğretmenlik Mesleği ve Alan Seçiminde Etkili Olan Motivasyonel Etkenler. *İlköğretim Online*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.17051/ilkonline.2017.304706>
- Estafianto, A., Fakhruddin, S., & Sutarto, M. (2020). The Role of Reward in Teachers' Job Satisfaction Towards Job Performance: A Literature Review. 10.47405/mjssh.v8i11.2591
- Fabrigar, L. R., Wegener, D. T., MacCallum, R. C., & Strahan, E. J. (1999). Evaluating the use of exploratory factor analysis in psychological research. *Psychological Methods*, 4(3), 272-299. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1082-989X.4.3.272>
- Flores, M. A., & Day, C. (2006). Contexts which shape and reshape new teachers' identities: A multi-perspective study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(2), 219-232. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.09.002>
- Fuming, X., & Jiliang, S. (2007). Research on job satisfaction of elementary and high school teachers and strategies to increase job satisfaction. *Chinese Education & Society*, 40(5), 86-96. 10.2753/CED1061-1932400509
- Goffin, S. G., & Washington, V. (2007). *Ready or not: Leadership choices in early care and education*. Teachers College Press.
- Hackam J, R (1980). Work redesign and motivation, Copyright 1980 by the American Psychological Association.
- Hoy, A. W., Davis, H., & Pape, S. J. (2006). Teacher knowledge and beliefs. In P. A. Alexander (Ed.), *Handbook of educational psychology* (pp. 587-607). Routledge.
- Ibarra, H. (1999). Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44, 764-791. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2667055>
- Ingersoll, R. M., & Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 201-233. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311403323>
- Kelchtermans, G. (2009). Career stories: A tool for developing teacher identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(6), 785-794.
- Kelchtermans, G. (2009). Who I am in how I teach is the message: Self-understanding, vulnerability, and reflection. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15, 257-272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600902875332>
- Lavy, V., & Sabar-Ben Yehoshua, N. (2021). Teacher job satisfaction and motivation: An international comparison. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 107, 101765. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101765>



- Liston, D., Borko, H., & Whitcomb, J. (2008). The teacher educator's role in enhancing teacher quality. *The Teacher Educator*, 59, 111–116. Sage Publications.
- Liu, X., & Trent, J. (2023). Being a teacher in China: A systematic review of teacher identity in education reform. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 22(4), 267–293. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.4.15>
- MacDonald, K., & McAllister, C. (2021). Teacher professional identity in transition: Examining the shift towards career advancement or profession change. *Journal of Education and Career Development*, 8(4), 214–225.
- Mishra, P., & Sharma, R. (2021). Job satisfaction and its impact on job performance and organizational commitment: A systematic review of literature. *Journal of Business Research*, 126, 339-356. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.12.034>
- Mooney, C. G. (2013). *Theories of childhood: An introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erickson, Piaget, and Vygotsky*. Redleaf Press.
- Olsen, A. K. V., Kjær, I. G. H., & Spieler, K. S. (2024). Predictors of professional identity among early childhood teacher students. *Education Sciences*, 14(6), 589. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14060589>
- Pedota, P. J. (2015). How can student success support teacher self-efficacy and retention? *The Educational Forum*, 79(1), 54-61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2014.998600>
- Pillen, M., Beijaard, D., & den Brok, P. (2013). Professional identity tensions of beginning teachers. *Teachers and Teaching*, 19(6), 660–678. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2013.827455>
- Rather, R. A. (2018). Investigating the impact of customer brand identification on hospitality brand loyalty: A social identity perspective. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 27, 487–513. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2018.1404539>
- Richardson, P. W., & Watt, H. M. G. (2006). Who chooses teaching and why? Profiling characteristics and motivations across three Australian universities. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1), 27-56.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton University Press
- Schempp, P. G., Graber, K., & Marshall, J. C. (1998). The teacher's professional identity and development. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 49(4), 230-238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487198049004002>
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2010). Teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout: A study of relations. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(4), 1059-1069. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.11.001>
- Sumanasena, M. L. H., & Nawastheen, F. M. (2022). Teacher job satisfaction: A review of the literature. *MJSSH Online*, 6(4), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.33306/mjssh/209>
- Şanver, M., Sarıtunç, B., Gjelaj, M., & Ünsal, A. (2023). Kosova'da okul öncesi eğitim kurumlarında değerler eğitimine dair bir durum tespiti. *Türkiye Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 27(3), 733–754.
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2001). *Using multivariate statistics* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- Trepte, S., & Loy, L. S. (2017). Social identity theory and self-categorization theory. *The international encyclopedia of media effects*, 1-13.
- Vanassche, E., & Kelchtermans, G. (2014). Teacher educators' professionalism in practice: Positioning theory and personal interpretative framework. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 44, 117–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.08.006>
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2007). The differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(6), 944–956. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.05.003>

- Wang, X. (2023). A study of early childhood teachers' professional development and teaching effectiveness enhancement from the perspective of educational psychology. CETR, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.61360/bonicetr232014330806>
- Watt, H. M. G., & Richardson, P. W. (2008). Motivations, perceptions, and aspirations concerning teaching as a career for different types of beginning teachers. *Learning and Instruction, 18*(5), 408-428.
- Weiss, D. J., Dawis, R. V., England, G. W., & Lofquist, L. H. (1977). Minnesota satisfaction questionnaire--short form. Educational and Psychological Measurement
- Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014). Worth waiting for: Preschool teachers and the promise of high-quality early education. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.
- Zee, M., & Koomen, H. M. Y. (2022). Teacher well-being and professional identity: The role of self-efficacy and work conditions. *Journal of School Psychology, 85*, 52–67. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10857-021-09515->

### About the Contributor(s)

**Arbresha Beka**, is a Phd student at the Faculty of Education, University of Prishtina. She has submitted her PhD thesis for final evaluation. She works as a preschool teacher at Naim Frasheri school in Prishtina. She is very active and engaged at different national and international conferences, presenting several research papers.

Email: [Arbresha.vuthaj@gmail.com](mailto:Arbresha.vuthaj@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3239-6193>

**Majlinda Gjelaj**, Dr., is associated Professor at Faculty of Education, University of Prishtina in Republic of Kosovo. Her main research interests include early childhood education, teacher education, educational policy and quality assurance in higher education. She has published a number of research papers and chapters on education topics.

Email: [majlinda.gjelaj@uni-pr.edu](mailto:majlinda.gjelaj@uni-pr.edu)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8609-2289>

---

**Publisher's Note:** *The opinions, statements, and data presented in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributors and do not reflect the views of Universitepark, EDUPIJ, and/or the editor(s). Universitepark, the Journal, and/or the editor(s) accept no responsibility for any harm or damage to persons or property arising from the use of ideas, methods, instructions, or products mentioned in the content.*

---