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Understanding Professional Identity Through Policy and Support Perceptions: A Latent Profile Study of Pre-Service Preschool Teachers in China

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Abstract

Government-funded teacher education in China links financial support, teacher preparation, employment expectations, and post-graduation service obligations. Understanding how pre-service preschool teachers perceive this policy-based pathway is important for explaining their professional identity development; therefore, this study examined how policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support were associated with the professional identity of government-funded pre-service preschool teachers in Chongqing, Southwest China. Based on paper-based questionnaire data from 620 participants, Latent Profile Analysis identified four profiles: Dissatisfied–Low Support, Moderately Satisfied–Moderate Support, Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support, and Highly Satisfied–High Support. Multinomial logistic regression showed that only-child status and age significantly predicted profile membership, and one-way ANOVA and multiple regression further indicated that professional identity differed significantly across profiles, with lower scores observed in the less satisfied and less supported profiles after controlling for demographic covariates. These findings suggest that strengthening policy communication and accessible teacher support may help promote professional identity development among government-funded pre-service preschool teachers.

Keywords: pre-service preschool teachers; professional identity; policy satisfaction; teacher support; latent profile analysis

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1. Introduction

Teacher education policies are increasingly understood not only as instruments for recruiting and allocating teachers, but also as institutional contexts that shape how pre-service teachers interpret professional value, occupational obligation, and future career possibilities. This issue is particularly salient in early childhood education, where many countries continue to face challenges related to teacher supply, professional recognition, and career commitment (Hunkin, 2021; Murray, 2021). In China, government-funded teacher education offers a distinctive setting for examining this issue because it links financial support and structured teacher preparation with employment allocation and post-graduation service obligations, meaning that pre-service preschool teachers do not merely receive policy benefits; they also need to interpret the constraints, expectations, and support systems attached to their future professional role. Therefore, examining

how they evaluate policy arrangements and perceive support during teacher education is important for understanding how professional identity develops within a policy-driven training-to-employment system.

1.1. Policy Context and Research Setting

In May 2007, the State Council of China issued the Implementation Measures for Free Teacher Education at Universities Directly Affiliated with the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2007), marking the initial stage of China's government-funded teacher education policy. At this stage, the main policy goal was to attract academically capable students into teacher education and to address teacher shortages in basic education through financial incentives and post-graduation service commitments. Under this arrangement, students received tuition waivers, accommodation exemptions, and living allowances during their studies, while committing to teaching in designated areas after graduation. The 2007 policy therefore established a "training–fulfillment" contract in which state-provided support was directly linked to students' future service obligations. This dual structure gave the policy both supportive and binding characteristics: it provided material support and employment security, but it also required students to make long-term career commitments within a predetermined policy framework.

Since then, the policy has been refined in response to changing demands in teacher education and basic education development. Compared with the 2007 policy, which primarily emphasized financial attraction and contractual service obligations, the 2018 adjustment placed greater emphasis on system standardization, training quality, fulfillment management, and employment arrangements (Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2018). The 2024 adjustment further extended this policy logic by emphasizing academic progression and long-term teacher preparation, including a gradual shift from a four-year undergraduate training model to a six-year integrated bachelor's-to-master's pathway, together with stronger support for county-level and less-developed regions (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2024). These changes indicate a policy trajectory of attracting teacher candidates, improving training governance, and then strengthening long-term preparation and regional targeting; this path is directly relevant to the present study because students' policy satisfaction may depend not only on the material support they receive, but also on how they perceive training quality, employment arrangements, and future service obligations (Luo & Tang, 2025).

Within this broader policy framework, some local governments have developed targeted programs for specific teacher education fields. For example, Chongqing introduced a government-funded pre-service preschool teacher education program to train early childhood teachers for districts and counties with relatively weak preschool education resources (Chongqing Municipal Education Commission, 2020), which is relevant to the present study because it combines financial support during training with post-graduation service expectations in local early childhood education settings. Studying government-funded pre-service preschool teachers in Chongqing therefore allows us to examine how national policy goals are translated into local teacher education experiences, and how students' perceptions of policy arrangements and teacher support are associated with their professional identity.

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Professional Identity in Pre-Service Preschool Teacher Education

Professional identity is a central construct in teacher education because it concerns how pre-service teachers understand who they are becoming as future teachers, what values they attach to the teaching profession, and how they imagine their future career participation. In

the changing landscape of 21st-century education, teachers are expected not only to deliver curriculum content but also to respond to diverse learners, changing policy requirements, family expectations, and increasing demands for professional accountability. Therefore, professional identity should not be understood as a stable personal preference or a simple intention to teach; rather, it is a developmental and context-sensitive process through which pre-service teachers gradually interpret professional roles, internalize occupational values, and negotiate the relationship between personal aspirations and institutional expectations (Beijaard et al., 2004; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Cuadra-Martínez et al., 2023; Hong, 2010; Rushton et al., 2023). In the present study, professional identity refers specifically to government-funded pre-service preschool teachers' recognition of the value of preschool teaching, their evaluation of its social and occupational meaning, and their willingness to commit to this profession in the future.

For these pre-service teachers, professional identity development is particularly complex because early childhood education involves not only instructional responsibilities but also caregiving, emotional communication, family engagement, and support for children's holistic development. Their recognition of the value of preschool teaching is not formed at a single point in time; rather, it develops gradually through teacher education curricula, practicum or field experiences, interactions with teacher educators, and broader social understandings of early childhood teaching. Previous research has shown that early childhood education is often shaped by gendered occupational expectations, care-related professional assumptions, and concerns about professional recognition and working conditions (Arndt et al., 2021; Aslanian, 2020; Kay, 2024; Whitebook et al., 2014; Xu & Waniganayake, 2018). Recent studies have also emphasized that pre-service early childhood teachers' professional identity develops within teacher education programs and broader policy contexts (Chikoko & Msibi, 2020; Rogers et al., 2020). These conditions may influence how these pre-service teachers evaluate the social status, occupational value, and long-term development prospects of the profession, and may further affect whether they develop stable commitment to becoming preschool teachers.

For government-funded pre-service preschool teachers, professional identity is further shaped by a policy-driven training-to-employment pathway; unlike students in general teacher education programs, government-funded students enter a preparation system in which financial support, training expectations, employment placement, and post-graduation service obligations are institutionally connected. Previous research on government-funded teacher education has suggested that education policy may influence pre-service teachers' teaching motivation and professional identity (Zhao & Zhang, 2015). However, such policy influence is unlikely to operate only through formal policy documents; it is also experienced through students' everyday training environment, their interactions with teacher educators, and their perceptions of whether the policy arrangement supports or constrains their future professional development. For this reason, professional identity among government-funded pre-service preschool teachers should be examined in relation to both policy perceptions and support experiences during teacher education.

1.2.2. Policy Satisfaction and Perceived Teacher Support

Policy satisfaction represents students' subjective evaluation of the institutional conditions attached to their teacher education pathway. From an ecological perspective, students' professional development is shaped not only by individual motivation, but also by the broader policy and institutional systems in which their learning and future career trajectories are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the present study, policy satisfaction refers to government-funded pre-service preschool teachers' evaluation of both the supportive and restrictive components of the policy. The former include tuition waivers, accommoda-

tion exemptions, living allowances, and employment-related security, whereas the latter include service obligations, placement requirements, and fulfillment arrangements. This definition is important because government-funded teacher education is experienced not only as financial support, but also as a set of institutional expectations that may shape students' sense of autonomy, obligation, and future career possibilities. Previous research has suggested that positive evaluations of government-funded teacher education policies may strengthen pre-service teachers' teaching motivation and professional identity (Zhao & Zhang, 2015), whereas policy arrangements involving strong binding conditions may create pressure when students perceive them as limiting future professional choices (Chen & Gu, 2025).

Perceived teacher support represents students' experience of the more immediate educational environment in which policy arrangements are translated into everyday training practices. Whereas policy satisfaction reflects students' evaluation of the broader institutional framework, perceived teacher support captures their proximal experience of academic guidance, emotional encouragement, and competence-related assistance during teacher education. This distinction is consistent with ecological and motivational perspectives, which suggest that individual development is shaped by both distal institutional contexts and proximal interpersonal support (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the present study, perceived teacher support refers to students' subjective perception of learning support, including academic guidance, instructional explanation, and feedback on learning difficulties; emotional support, encompassing encouragement, care, and recognition; and competence-related support, referring to assistance that helps students build confidence and professional capability in teaching. Previous studies have shown that supportive teacher–student relationships are associated with student engagement, motivation, and adjustment (Roorda et al., 2011), and that support within early childhood education is closely connected with professional learning conditions and teacher development (Whitebook et al., 2014).

Although policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support can be analytically distinguished, they are likely to be experienced together by government-funded pre-service preschool teachers. Recent research on teacher professional identity has increasingly emphasized that identity development is shaped by the interaction between institutional conditions, teacher education experiences, and students' own interpretations of future professional roles (Suarez & McGrath, 2022; Meyer et al., 2023). From this perspective, policy satisfaction reflects how students evaluate the institutional pathway that structures their financial support, training obligations, and employment expectations, whereas perceived teacher support reflects how they experience the interpersonal and pedagogical resources available within that pathway. For government-funded pre-service preschool teachers, these two perceptions may jointly form a subjective "policy-and-support experience" that shapes how they understand the preschool teaching profession and their own future place within it; therefore, examining both aspects together may provide a more complete account of professional identity development than examining either factor alone.

1.2.3. A Person-Centered Approach to Policy and Support Perceptions

Previous studies on pre-service teachers' professional identity have commonly adopted variable-centered approaches, such as correlation or regression analysis, to examine whether policy evaluation, teacher support, or other predictors are associated with professional identity. These approaches are useful for estimating average relationships between variables, but they are less able to reveal whether different subgroups of students experience policy arrangements and teacher education support in distinct combinations. This limitation is important for the present study because government-funded pre-service

preschool teachers may not respond to policy and teacher support in a uniform way: some students may evaluate both the policy and teacher support positively, whereas others may report lower satisfaction with policy arrangements, weaker perceived teacher support, or uneven combinations of the two. A person-centered approach is therefore appropriate because it identifies latent subgroups of individuals who share similar response patterns across multiple indicators, rather than assuming that the same variable relationships apply equally to all participants (Spurk et al., 2020).

Compared with regression-based analyses, which mainly estimate the independent or interaction effects of predictors, Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) is better suited to the present research question because it focuses on how multiple perceptions are combined within individuals. Regression analysis could show whether policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support are each associated with professional identity, and interaction analysis could test whether the effect of one variable depends on the level of the other. However, these approaches still treat policy satisfaction and teacher support primarily as variables rather than as configurations of student experience. Traditional cluster analysis could also be used to classify participants, but LPA provides a model-based classification procedure, uses fit indices to compare alternative profile solutions, and allows researchers to evaluate classification quality (Nylund et al., 2007; Spurk et al., 2020). Therefore, the aim of using LPA in the present study is not simply to divide students into groups, but to examine whether different configurations of policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support can reveal meaningful heterogeneity among government-funded pre-service preschool teachers. Recent research has also shown that pre-service teachers' professional identity can be meaningfully examined through identity profiles, suggesting that profile-based approaches can reveal heterogeneity that may be obscured in variable-centered analyses (Meyer et al., 2023).

1.3. The Present Study

Taken together, previous research has provided important evidence that professional identity is related to policy conditions, teacher education experiences, and perceived support. However, most studies have examined these factors separately, either by focusing on policy evaluation in government-funded teacher education or by examining teacher support as an independent predictor of student development. In addition, much of the literature on early childhood teachers' professional identity has been based in general teacher education contexts, international policy settings, or broader teacher populations, rather than in the specific context of government-funded pre-service preschool teacher education in China, leaving an important gap: little is known about how these specific teachers jointly experience policy arrangements and teacher support, and whether different configurations of these perceptions are associated with different levels of professional identity. Addressing this gap is important because students in government-funded teacher education do not encounter policy and training support as isolated factors; instead, they experience them simultaneously within a policy-driven pathway that connects financial support, professional preparation, employment expectations, and service obligations.

Specifically, this study addressed three research questions: whether distinct latent profiles of policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support could be identified among government-funded pre-service preschool teachers; whether demographic characteristics, including gender, grade, age, only-child status, and urban–rural background, were associated with profile membership; whether professional identity differed across the identified profiles. Based on previous research showing that positive policy evaluation and perceived support are associated with teacher motivation, commitment, and identity development, the study proposed two hypotheses: Hypothesis 1 stated that profiles

characterized by higher policy satisfaction and higher perceived teacher support would show stronger professional identity than profiles characterized by lower levels of these perceptions. Hypothesis 2 stated that profiles characterized by lower policy satisfaction and lower perceived teacher support would show weaker professional identity, even after controlling for demographic covariates.

The present study contributes to the literature in three ways: First, it extends research on pre-service teachers' professional identity by locating identity development within a policy-driven training-to-employment system, rather than treating professional identity only as an individual motivational outcome. This is particularly important for government-funded pre-service preschool teachers, whose professional development is shaped by both educational preparation and policy-based service expectations. Second, the study integrates policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support into the same analytical framework, thereby linking students' evaluation of macro-level institutional arrangements with their experience of proximal support during teacher education. This helps explain how policy conditions and training experiences may jointly structure students' understanding of the preschool teaching profession. Third, by using a person-centered approach, the study examines whether different configurations of policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support are associated with different levels of professional identity. In doing so, it moves beyond average associations between isolated variables and provides a more differentiated account of heterogeneity among government-funded pre-service preschool teachers.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Variables

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The main profile indicators were policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support, and the main outcome variable was professional identity, with demographic variables, including gender, grade, age, only-child status, and urban–rural background, included as covariates or predictors of latent profile membership. The study first identified latent profiles based on policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support, then examined whether demographic characteristics predicted profile membership, and finally tested whether professional identity differed across the identified profiles. This design was appropriate for exploring heterogeneity in students' combined policy-and-support perceptions and their associations with professional identity. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants and was approved by the institutional review board (Approval No. I20231202).

2.2. Procedure and Data Collection

Data were collected from May to June 2024 from two universities in Chongqing, Southwest China. Participants were recruited from government-funded pre-service preschool teacher education programs, and the inclusion criteria were as follows: participants had to be enrolled as government-funded pre-service preschool teachers, major in early childhood education, and be willing to participate voluntarily. Questionnaires were excluded if they contained substantial missing responses, showed invariant response patterns, or failed to meet basic logical consistency checks. A cluster sampling method was used, with naturally existing classes serving as the sampling units. The questionnaire was administered in Chinese, which was the participants' native language and that in which the original or adapted scales had been developed or used in prior Chinese educational research. Before data collection, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, voluntary nature of participation, and principles of anonymity and confidentiality, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Paper-based questionnaires were distributed

by the research team during class sessions, and participants completed them independently within approximately 30 min. No identifying information was collected, and participants were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. No direct teaching relationship existed between the participants and the researchers, which helped reduce potential pressure to participate. After collection, the research team screened the questionnaires for completeness and response quality before conducting statistical analyses.

2.3. Participants

A total of 643 students from two universities in Chongqing, Southwest China, were invited to participate in the study, all of whom were enrolled in government-funded pre-service preschool teacher education programs and majored in early childhood education. After the initial screening, 23 questionnaires were excluded because of substantial missing responses or invariant response patterns, resulting in a final analytic sample of 620 valid cases; no additional cases were removed after this screening, and all subsequent analyses were conducted using the same final sample.

Among the 620 participants, 533 were female and 87 were male; 226, 241, 148, and 5 were first-, second-, third-, and fourth-year students, respectively; age ranged from 16 to 21 years, with a mean of 17.54 years (SD = 1.37); a total of 160 were only children, while 460 were non-only children; and 338 students came from urban areas and 282 from rural areas. The sample therefore reflected the gender composition commonly observed in early childhood teacher education programs, in which female students are substantially overrepresented.

To evaluate the adequacy of the sample size, a power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007). Because the present study used multiple regression analysis to examine the association between latent profile membership, demographic covariates, and professional identity, the sample-size estimation was based on a fixed-model multiple regression framework. With an alpha level of 0.05, a desired statistical power of 0.95, eight predictors, and a small-to-medium effect size of $f^2 = 0.05$, the required minimum sample size was 463; thus, the final analytic sample of 620 participants exceeded this requirement. For the Latent Profile Analysis, the smallest identified profile contained 8.55% of the sample, corresponding to approximately 53 participants. This subgroup size provided a basic empirical basis for profile interpretation, although the smallest profile should still be interpreted with caution.

2.4. Measures

All measures were administered in Chinese. The policy satisfaction and teacher professional identity scales were originally developed for Chinese samples of government-funded teacher education students, and the perceived teacher support measure was adapted from a questionnaire that had previously been used in Chinese educational research. Before administration, the research team reviewed the wording of all items to ensure that they were understandable for pre-service preschool teachers and appropriate for the teacher education context. A separate formal pilot study was not conducted; however, the instruments were based on previously validated or widely used Chinese measures. Higher scores on each measure indicated higher levels of the corresponding construct.

(1) **Policy satisfaction**: The Policy Satisfaction Questionnaire for Free Teacher Education, developed by Zhao and Zhang (2015), was used to assess participants' satisfaction with the government-funded teacher education policy. This measure was selected because it was developed in the Chinese government-funded teacher education context and directly corresponds to the policy arrangement examined in the present study. The questionnaire includes two dimensions—satisfaction with supportive and restrictive policies—comprising

a total of 10 items. The former refers to students' evaluation of policy benefits, such as tuition waivers, accommodation exemptions, living allowances, and employment-related security; the latter refers to students' evaluation of binding policy conditions, such as required service commitments and assigned teaching locations after graduation. Responses were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = "*very dissatisfied*" to 6 = "*very satisfied*"), with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. Subscale scores were calculated separately. Typical items include "*Exemption from tuition and accommodation fees*" and "*Teaching in an assigned location after graduation as stipulated in the agreement*" for supportive and restrictive policy satisfaction, respectively. In the present study, the overall reliability of the scale was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$), with α coefficients of 0.89 and 0.95 for the supportive and restrictive dimensions, respectively. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated a good model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.79$, $TLI = 0.97$, $CFI = 0.98$, $RMSEA = 0.06$, and $SRMR = 0.04$.

(2) **Perceived teacher support**: This was assessed using the Teacher Behavior Questionnaire adapted by Ouyang (2005) based on the original work of Babad (1990). The scale was originally designed to evaluate students' perceptions of supportive teacher behaviors and consists of three dimensions: learning, emotional, and competence support. In the present study, the scale was used to assess how government-funded pre-service preschool teachers perceived support from teacher educators during their training. The instructions and item wording were reviewed and adjusted slightly to fit the teacher education context, while the core meaning of the items was retained. A 6-point Likert scale was used (1 = "*strongly disagree*" to 6 = "*strongly agree*"), with higher scores indicating stronger perceived teacher support. Learning support included academic guidance, instructional explanation, and feedback on learning difficulties; emotional support included encouragement, care, and recognition; and competence support referred to assistance that helped students develop confidence and professional capability in teaching. Typical items include "*When I cannot answer a question, the teacher often repeats it to help me understand*" and "*The teacher often encourages me in both study and life.*" A separate formal pilot study was not conducted; however, because the adapted scale had previously been used in Chinese educational research and the present participants completed the questionnaire in Chinese, the research team reviewed all items before administration to ensure that they were understandable and relevant to the current teacher education context.

In the present study, the internal consistency coefficients for learning, emotional, and competence support were 0.92, 0.82, and 0.77, respectively. Confirmatory factor analysis yielded the following fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 3.86$, $RMSEA = 0.096$, $CFI = 0.930$, $TLI = 0.916$, and $SRMR = 0.048$. Although the RMSEA value was above the conventional threshold of 0.08, the CFI, TLI, and SRMR values were within acceptable ranges; therefore, the overall model fit was considered adequate but not optimal. Given the acceptable reliability coefficients and the theoretical relevance of the three support dimensions, the scale was retained for subsequent analyses, but the relatively high RMSEA value was considered when interpreting the findings.

(3) **Professional identity**: Professional identity was measured using the Teacher Professional Identity Scale developed by Zhao et al. (2012), as it was developed for Chinese government-funded teacher education students and was therefore closely aligned with the population examined in the present study. The scale comprises 15 items across three dimensions: intrinsic value identity, reflecting students' recognition of the educational value and personal meaning of the teaching profession; extrinsic value identity, signifying their evaluation of the social status, working conditions, and external value of the profession; and will-behavior identity, portraying their willingness to engage in teaching-related learning, attention, and future professional commitment. Responses were rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 6 = "strongly agree"), with higher scores indicating a

stronger sense of professional identity. Typical items include "I believe being a preschool teacher is a valuable profession," "I believe the working conditions for preschool teachers are good," and "I often pay attention to information about preschool teacher policies, benefits, and professional development."

In the present study, the overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.91, and the reliability coefficients for the three subscales were 0.97, 0.82, and 0.93, respectively. Confirmatory factor analysis yielded the following fit indices: χ^2/df = 4.03, *RMSEA* = 0.099, *CFI* = 0.949, *TLI* = 0.937, and *SRMR* = 0.068. Although the RMSEA value exceeded the conventional threshold of 0.08, the CFI, TLI, and SRMR values suggested an acceptable level of fit; thus, the overall model fit was considered adequate but not optimal. Given the high internal consistency and the close relevance of the scale to Chinese government-funded teacher education students, the scale was retained for subsequent analyses. However, the relatively high RMSEA value was acknowledged as a measurement limitation and was considered when interpreting the findings.

2.5. Data Screening and Common Method Bias

Before conducting the main analyses, the dataset was screened for missing responses, patterned responding, out-of-range values, and potential outliers. As described above, 23 questionnaires were excluded during the initial screening because of substantial missing responses or invariant response patterns; after this screening, the final analytic dataset consisted of 620 valid cases. For the variables included in the main analyses, no item-level missing values were found, and no additional cases were excluded; therefore, mean imputation was not applied, and all subsequent analyses were conducted using the same final sample of 620 participants.

The distributions of the main continuous variables were also inspected before analysis. The skewness values for policy satisfaction, perceived teacher support, and professional identity were −0.848, −0.056, and −0.693, respectively, and the kurtosis values were −0.067, −0.474, and 0.043, respectively. These values were within commonly used acceptable ranges, suggesting that there were no severe deviations from normality. Standardized scores were also inspected to identify potential univariate outliers, and no additional outliers were removed after the initial questionnaire-screening stage.

As all main variables were measured using self-report questionnaires completed by the same participants, common method bias was assessed using a confirmatory factor analysis approach. Following Harris and Mossholder (1996), all measurement items were loaded onto a single latent factor, and the results showed that the single-factor model fitted the data poorly: χ^2/df = 15.87, *CFI* = 0.509, *TLI* = 0.485, *RMSEA* = 0.155, and *SRMR* = 0.137. These results indicate that a single common factor could not adequately account for the covariance among all items, suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to be a serious threat in the present study.

2.6. Statistical Methods

All statistical analyses were conducted using the final analytic sample of 620 participants. Descriptive statistics and correlations among policy satisfaction, perceived teacher support, and professional identity were first calculated, and then Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was used to identify unobserved subgroups of government-funded pre-service preschool teachers based on their policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support scores. Before conducting the LPA, composite scores for policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support were calculated by averaging the corresponding items. Both measures were rated on 6-point Likert scales; therefore, no rescaling or standardization was applied before the

LPA, which was conducted using the raw composite scores and whose means reported in the profile descriptions also reflect raw scale scores.

The model-fitting process began with a one-profile solution and gradually increased the number of profiles to five. The one-profile model was included as a baseline model for comparison, whereas models with two or more profiles were evaluated to determine the optimal profile solution. Model fit was assessed using multiple indices, including the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), sample-size-adjusted BIC (aBIC), entropy, and the Lo–Mendell–Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test (LMR-LRT). Lower AIC, BIC, and aBIC values indicate better model fit, whereas higher entropy values indicate clearer classification. The LMR-LRT was used to examine whether a model with k profiles provided a significantly better fit than a model with $k - 1$ profiles. In selecting the final model, BIC and aBIC were given particular attention because they balance model fit and parsimony. Entropy, average posterior classification probabilities, profile size, theoretical interpretability, and practical meaningfulness were also considered (Nylund et al., 2007; Spurk et al., 2020).

After the optimal profile solution was selected, each participant was assigned to the profile with the highest posterior probability, and the identified profiles were labeled according to their mean patterns of policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support. To evaluate the reliability of profile assignment, entropy and average posterior classification probabilities were reported.

Subsequently, a multinomial logistic regression model was used to examine whether gender, grade, age, only-child status, and urban–rural background predicted latent profile membership, with the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile used as the reference group. Regression coefficients, standard errors, odds ratios, 95% confidence intervals, and p values were reported.

Finally, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine whether professional identity differed across the latent profiles, followed by Tukey's post hoc tests for pairwise comparisons. Effect sizes were reported using η^2. In addition, multiple linear regression was conducted to test whether latent profile membership was associated with professional identity after controlling for gender, grade, age, only-child status, and urban–rural background. Unstandardized coefficients, standard errors, standardized coefficients, 95% confidence intervals, and p values were reported to improve the transparency and interpretability of the results.

3. Results

3.1. Correlations Among Policy Satisfaction, Perceived Teacher Support, and Professional Identity

As shown in Table 1, policy satisfaction was significantly and positively correlated with perceived teacher support ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that students who reported higher satisfaction with the policy also tended to report stronger perceived teacher support, and positively associated with professional identity ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that students with higher policy satisfaction tended to report stronger professional identity. Similarly, perceived teacher support was significantly and positively correlated with professional identity ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that students who perceived stronger teacher support also tended to report higher professional identity. These results provided preliminary evidence of significant associations among the three main variables, but they should be interpreted as correlational rather than causal findings.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients, means, and standard deviations for policy satisfaction, perceived teacher support, and teacher professional identity.

	1	2	3
1 Policy Satisfaction	—		
2 Perceived Teacher Support	0.47 ***	—	
3 Teacher Professional Identity	0.59 ***	0.54 ***	—
M	5.41	4.80	3.55
SD	0.60	0.66	0.46

Note: *** $p < 0.001$.

3.2. Identification of Latent Profiles of Policy Satisfaction and Perceived Teacher Support

To examine heterogeneity in policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support, Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was conducted using the two composite indicators. The model-fitting process began with a one-profile model, included only as a baseline for comparison, and then the number of profiles was increased from two to five, with these models evaluated as potential profile solutions. Table 2 presents the fit indices for the one- to five-profile models.

Table 2. Fit indices and profile proportions for different latent profile models.

Model	AIC	BIC	aBIC	Entropy	LMR-LRT (*p*)	Profile Proportion
1	2231.543	2253.692	2237.817			
2	2147.944	2183.382	2157.983	0.727	88.18 (0.04)	0.34/0.66
3	2147.755	2196.482	2161.559	0.537	5.884 (0.31)	0.24/0.40/0.36
4	1887.842	1949.858	1905.411	0.914	69.551 (0.04)	0.26/0.19/0.09/0.46
5	1887.373	1962.679	1908.706	0.846	6.150 (0.10)	0.09/0.19/0.03/0.43/0.26

Note. AIC = Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; aBIC = sample-size-adjusted Bayesian information criterion; LMR-LRT = Lo–Mendell–Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test. The one-profile model was included as a baseline model for comparison. Profile proportions were based on the most likely class membership.

As shown in Table 2, AIC decreased as the number of profiles increased, with the five-profile model showing a slightly lower value than the four-profile model; however, AIC often continues to decrease as model complexity increases and therefore was not used as the sole criterion for model selection. The four-profile solution showed the lowest BIC and aBIC values, high entropy, and a significant LMR-LRT; by contrast, although the five-profile solution had a slightly lower AIC, it did not show lower BIC or aBIC values and did not provide a more parsimonious or substantively clearer classification structure. Therefore, considering statistical fit, model parsimony, classification quality, profile size, and substantive interpretability together, the four-profile model was selected as the optimal solution, which also showed acceptable classification quality. Entropy was 0.914, indicating clear separation among the profiles. The average posterior probabilities for the four assigned profiles were 0.958, 0.880, 0.985, and 0.973, respectively, suggesting that participants were assigned to their most likely profiles with acceptable precision.

Figure 1 and Table 3 illustrate the mean patterns of policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support across the four latent profiles derived from the LPA. Profile 1, the Dissatisfied–Low Support profile, accounted for 26.45% of the sample and showed relatively low scores on both policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support; Profile 2, the Moderately Satisfied–Moderate Support profile, accounted for 18.55% and showed moderate levels of both variables; Profile 3, the Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support profile, accounted for 8.55% and showed the lowest scores on both variables; Profile 4, the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile, accounted for 46.45% and showed the highest scores on both policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support. Although Profile 3 was the smallest

subgroup, it represented a distinct pattern of consistently negative perceptions of both policy arrangements and teacher support and was therefore retained as a substantively meaningful profile.

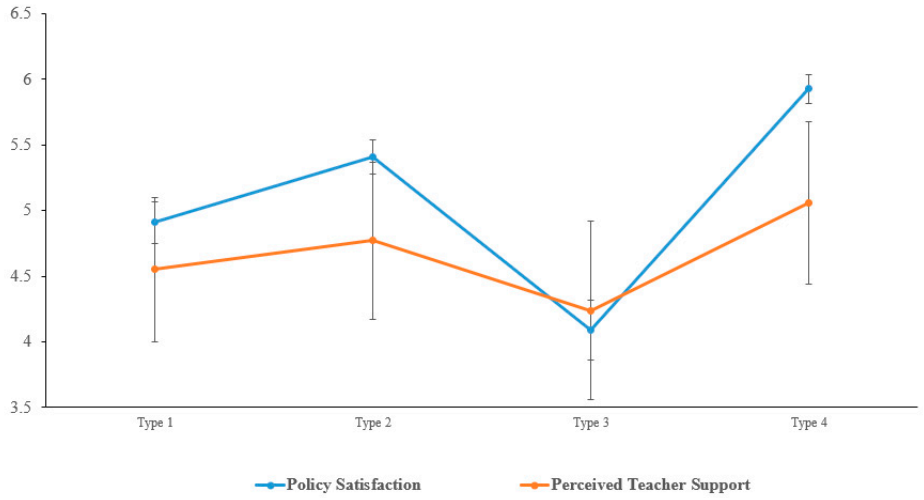


Figure 1. Comparison of mean policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support across four latent classes. Profile 1 = Dissatisfied–Low Support, Profile 2 = Moderately Satisfied–Moderate Support, Profile 3 = Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support, Profile 4 = Highly Satisfied–High Support.

Table 3. Mean differences across latent profiles.

Variable	Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3	Profile 4	*F*-value	η^2
Policy Satisfaction	4.91 (0.16)	5.41 (0.13)	4.09 (0.23)	5.93 (0.11)	3529.84 ***	0.945
Perceived Teacher Support	4.55 (0.55)	4.77 (0.60)	4.24 (0.68)	5.05 (0.62)	28.88 ***	0.123
Professional Identity	3.21 (0.38)	3.57 (0.40)	3.12 (0.42)	3.81 (0.46)	118.52 ***	0.366

Note. Values are presented as mean (standard deviation). *F*-values were derived from one-way ANOVA. *** $p < 0.001$; η^2 = eta squared. Post hoc comparisons conducted using Tukey's HSD. Profile 1 = Dissatisfied–Low Support, Profile 2 = Moderately Satisfied–Moderate Support, Profile 3 = Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support, Profile 4 = Highly Satisfied–High Support.

To further verify the empirical distinctiveness of the latent profiles, a one-way ANOVA was conducted for the two profile indicators, demonstrating significant differences across the four profiles in policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support. Post hoc pairwise comparisons indicated that all four profiles differed significantly from one another on both policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support, with ps < 0.05. These results support the empirical distinctiveness and interpretability of the four-profile solution.

3.3. Associations Between Background Variables and Latent Profile Membership

To examine whether background variables were associated with latent profile membership, a multinomial logistic regression analysis was conducted, using the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile (Profile 4) as the reference category. The model produced the following fit indices: *AIC* = 1528.78, *BIC* = 1608.52, and sample-size-adjusted *BIC* = 1551.37. Gender, grade, age, only-child status, and urban–rural background were entered simultaneously as predictors.

As shown in Table 4, only-child status was significantly associated with the likelihood of belonging to Profile 1 rather than Profile 4; specifically, only-child students were less likely than non-only-child students to be classified into the Dissatisfied–Low Support profile rather than the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile ($\beta = -1.04$, *SE* = 0.26, *OR* = 0.36, 95% *CI* = [0.21, 0.59], $p < 0.001$). This result suggests that only-child students had lower odds of

belonging to the dissatisfied and low support group, compared with the Highly Satisfied–High Support group. Age was also significantly associated with profile membership. Compared with Profile 4, older students were more likely to belong to Profile 3, the Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support profile (β = 0.37, SE = 0.10, OR = 1.45, 95% CI = [1.20, 1.75], $p < 0.001$), indicating that increase in age was associated with higher odds of being classified into the highly dissatisfied and low support profile rather than the highly satisfied and high support profile.

Table 4. Multinomial logistic regression results predicting latent profile membership.

Profile Comparison	Variable	β	SE	OR	95% CI	p Value
Profile 1 vs. Profile 4	Gender	0.14	0.37	1.14	[0.55, 2.38]	0.64
	Grade	−0.02	0.16	0.98	[0.71, 1.35]	0.85
	Age	0.07	0.10	1.07	[0.87, 1.31]	0.41
	Only-child	−1.04	0.26	0.36	[0.21, 0.59]	<0.001
	Urban–rural	−0.15	0.20	0.86	[0.58, 1.28]	0.45
Profile 2 vs. Profile 4	Gender	0.01	0.32	1.01	[0.54, 1.91]	0.97
	Grade	−0.05	0.15	0.95	[0.71, 1.27]	0.74
	Age	−0.01	0.08	0.99	[0.85, 1.17]	0.94
	Only-child	−0.28	0.25	0.76	[0.46, 1.23]	0.26
	Urban–rural	−0.08	0.23	0.92	[0.59, 1.44]	0.73
Profile 3 vs. Profile 4	Gender	−0.15	0.49	0.86	[0.33, 2.23]	0.76
	Grade	−0.03	0.19	0.97	[0.67, 1.40]	0.86
	Age	0.37	0.10	1.45	[1.20, 1.75]	<0.001
	Only-child	−0.26	0.32	0.78	[0.44, 1.56]	0.47
	Urban–rural	0.06	0.32	1.06	[0.57, 1.99]	0.85

Note: Profile 4, the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile, was used as the reference category. β = logit coefficient; SE = standard error; OR = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval. Gender was coded as 1 = male and 0 = female; only-child status was coded as 1 = only-child and 0 = non-only-child; urban–rural background was coded as 1 = urban and 0 = rural. Profile 1 = Dissatisfied–Low Support; Profile 2 = Moderately Satisfied–Moderate Support; Profile 3 = Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support; Profile 4 = Highly Satisfied–High Support.

No significant associations were found for gender, grade, or urban–rural background in any profile comparison. In addition, only-child status did not significantly distinguish Profile 2 or 3 from Profile 4, and age did not significantly distinguish Profile 1 or 2 from Profile 4. Overall, the results suggest that only-child status and age were the main background variables associated with latent profile membership, whereas the other demographic variables showed no statistically significant associations.

3.4. Associations Between Latent Profile Membership and Professional Identity

To examine whether professional identity differed across the four latent profiles, we conducted a one-way ANOVA and a multiple linear regression analysis; the former was used to compare mean levels of professional identity across profiles, whereas the latter further examined whether profile membership was associated with professional identity after controlling for demographic covariates.

The one-way ANOVA showed significant differences in professional identity across the four latent profiles (Table 3); this effect size indicates that latent profile membership accounted for a substantial proportion of the variance in professional identity. Tukey's post hoc tests indicated that the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile (Profile 4) had the highest professional identity scores and scored significantly higher than the other three profiles. The Moderately Satisfied–Moderate Support profile (Profile 2) also showed significantly higher professional identity than both the Dissatisfied–Low Support (Profile 1) and Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support profile (Profile 3). No significant difference was found between Profile 1 and Profile 3. These findings suggest that students with more positive combined

perceptions of policy satisfaction and teacher support tended to report stronger professional identity, whereas those in the two lower-perception profiles showed similarly lower levels of professional identity.

A multiple linear regression analysis was then conducted with professional identity as the dependent variable. Profile membership was dummy-coded, with the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile (Profile 4) serving as the reference group, and gender, grade, age, only-child status, and urban–rural background were entered as control variables. The overall model explained 37.4% of the variance in professional identity, with $R^2 = 0.374$ and $p < 0.001$. Compared with Profile 4, students in Profiles 1, 2, and 3 reported significantly lower professional identity, with $B = -0.605$, -0.239, and -0.685; $SE = 0.035$, 0.042, and 0.061; 95% $CI = [-0.674, -0.537]$, $[-0.321, -0.157]$, and $[-0.804, -0.567]$; and $\beta = -0.581$, -0.202, and -0.417, respectively, with $p < 0.001$. None of the demographic covariates significantly predicted professional identity after profile membership was included in the model. These results indicate that latent profile membership was robustly associated with professional identity, even after controlling for demographic characteristics. The detailed regression results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Multiple linear regression predicting professional identity from latent profile membership.

Variable	*B*	*SE*	*95% CI*	*Standardized β*	*p*
Intercept	3.787	0.208	[3.379, 4.194]	—	<0.001
Profile 1 vs. Profile 4	−0.605	0.035	[−0.674, −0.537]	−0.581	<0.001
Profile 2 vs. Profile 4	−0.239	0.042	[−0.321, −0.157]	−0.202	<0.001
Profile 3 vs. Profile 4	−0.685	0.061	[−0.804, −0.567]	−0.417	<0.001
Gender	0.049	0.046	[−0.041, 0.139]	0.037	0.289
Grade	−0.032	0.018	[−0.067, 0.004]	−0.054	0.083
Age	0.003	0.011	[−0.019, 0.026]	0.009	0.783
Only-child status	−0.027	0.031	[−0.089, 0.034]	−0.026	0.387
Urban–rural background	0.057	0.031	[−0.002, 0.117]	0.062	0.060

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval; β = standardized coefficient. Profile 4 was used as the reference group. Standardized coefficients are based on STDYX standardization. Profile 1 = Dissatisfied–Low Support; Profile 2 = Moderately Satisfied–Moderate Support; Profile 3 = Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support. Gender: 1 = male, 0 = female; only-child status: 1 = only-child, 0 = non-only-child; urban–rural background: 1 = urban, 0 = rural.

4. Discussion

4.1. Joint Latent Profile Analysis of Policy Satisfaction and Perceived Teacher Support

This study identified four latent profiles of policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support among government-funded pre-service preschool teachers: Dissatisfied–Low Support, Moderately Satisfied–Moderate Support, Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support, and Highly Satisfied–High Support. These profiles indicate that students in the same policy-based teacher education program did not perceive policy arrangements and teacher support in a uniform way; instead, they showed meaningful heterogeneity in how they evaluated the policy context and experienced support within teacher education. This finding supports the value of using a person-centered approach, as it reveals different configurations of student perceptions that may be obscured when policy satisfaction and teacher support are examined only as separate variables (Spurk et al., 2020), and is also consistent with recent research suggesting that pre-service teachers' professional identity and related developmental experiences may be better understood by considering heterogeneous profiles rather than relying only on average associations (Meyer et al., 2023).

A notable finding was that the identified profiles generally showed a similar direction of variation across policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support: students who reported higher policy satisfaction also tended to report stronger teacher support, whereas those with

lower policy satisfaction tended to report weaker teacher support. However, this pattern should be interpreted descriptively rather than as evidence that policy satisfaction and teacher support are structurally coupled or mutually causal. Because the LPA was based on two composite indicators and the study used cross-sectional data, the results cannot determine whether positive policy evaluations lead students to perceive more teacher support, supportive teacher education experiences improve students' policy satisfaction, or both perceptions reflect a broader positive evaluation of the teacher education environment. From an ecological perspective, students' professional development is shaped by both broader institutional systems and proximal interpersonal environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and motivational perspectives also emphasize the importance of support, autonomy, and competence-related experiences in the internalization of professional goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, the present findings suggest a coordinated pattern of policy-and-support perceptions, but they do not establish a causal mechanism.

The differences in professional identity across profiles further suggest that it may be stronger when students experience both the policy pathway and teacher education support in positive terms: students in the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile reported the strongest professional identity, whereas those in the Dissatisfied–Low Support and Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support profiles reported lower levels of professional identity. This interpretation is consistent with prior work emphasizing that teacher professional identity develops through the interaction of personal meaning, professional values, and contextual experiences (Beijaard et al., 2004; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Hong, 2010), and also aligns with studies highlighting the importance of supportive teacher education environments for pre-service teachers' professional learning and identity construction (Cuadra-Martínez et al., 2023; Rushton et al., 2023). Although the Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support profile was the smallest subgroup, accounting for only 8.55% of the sample, it represented a distinct pattern of consistently negative perceptions and deserves attention because it may include students who experience both policy obligations and teacher education support as insufficient or unsatisfactory.

At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that material policy incentives are ineffective. The present study did not directly test the independent effects of specific policy components, such as tuition waivers, living allowances, employment guarantees, or service obligations; rather, it examined students' overall satisfaction with supportive and restrictive policy arrangements and their perceived teacher support. Therefore, the results suggest that policy benefits may need to be accompanied by clear policy communication, responsive guidance, and sustained teacher support during training. In this sense, the study indicates that professional identity development in government-funded teacher education may depend not only on the existence of policy support, but also on how students understand, experience, and are supported within the policy-based training pathway.

4.2. Background Variables Associated with Latent Profile Membership

The multinomial logistic regression results showed that only-child status and age were significantly associated with latent profile membership, whereas gender, grade, and urban–rural background were not significant predictors. Specifically, only-child students were less likely than non-only-child students to belong to the Dissatisfied–Low Support profile rather than the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile, suggesting that they may be more likely to report relatively positive combined perceptions of policy satisfaction and teacher support. However, this result should be interpreted cautiously because the present study did not directly measure family socioeconomic resources, parental expectations, or family educational support; therefore, it cannot be concluded that only-child

students reported more positive perceptions because of stronger family resources. A more cautious interpretation is that only-child status may be associated with different family experiences, educational expectations, or perceived support conditions that could shape students' evaluations of the policy-based teacher education pathway. Future studies should include direct measures of family background, parental expectations, and perceived family support to clarify the mechanisms underlying this association.

Age was also associated with profile membership: older students were more likely to belong to the Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support profile rather than the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile, possibly suggesting that students' perceptions of policy obligations and teacher education support become more differentiated as they progress through training and approach future employment or service commitments. As students become older, they may have more opportunities to encounter practicum experiences, employment information, service requirements, and career-related uncertainties, which may make them more sensitive to the restrictive aspects of the policy and to the adequacy of teacher support. This interpretation is consistent with the view that teacher professional identity develops through ongoing interactions between personal expectations and contextual experiences during teacher education (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Hong, 2010). Nevertheless, because the present study was cross-sectional, age differences should not be interpreted as developmental change. Longitudinal research is needed to examine whether students' policy satisfaction, perceived teacher support, and professional identity change over time.

The nonsignificant effects of gender, grade, and urban–rural background also deserve attention. Although early childhood education programs are often characterized by gender imbalance, gender did not significantly distinguish profile membership in the present sample; similarly, grade and urban–rural background were not significant predictors after the other background variables were included. These findings suggest that differences in policy-and-support perceptions may not be adequately explained by demographic characteristics alone; rather, students' profile membership may be more closely related to their subjective interpretation of policy arrangements and their everyday support experiences within teacher education. This reinforces the importance of examining policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support directly, rather than assuming that demographic categories can sufficiently capture differences in students' professional development experiences.

4.3. Implications for Policy and Teacher Education Practice

The findings have several implications for the implementation of government-funded pre-service preschool teacher education programs: First, policy support should not be understood only as the provision of financial benefits or employment security. Although tuition waivers, living allowances, and employment arrangements are important components of government-funded teacher education, students' professional identity may also depend on how clearly they understand the policy, how fairly they perceive service obligations, and how confidently they view their future career pathway. Therefore, teacher education institutions and local education authorities should strengthen policy communication throughout the training process: rather than presenting policy requirements only at the time of enrollment or contract signing, institutions could provide continuous policy explanation, career guidance, and opportunities for students to discuss concerns about service commitments, placement arrangements, and future professional development. Such efforts may help students understand the policy pathway more clearly and reduce uncertainty related to restrictive policy components.

Second, the results suggest that perceived teacher support is closely associated with students' professional identity; therefore, teacher educators play an important role in translating policy-based training arrangements into meaningful professional learning

experiences. Support should not be limited to academic instruction, but should also include emotional encouragement, feedback on professional growth, and competence-related guidance, because supportive professional environments are closely related to teachers' wellbeing, resilience, and professional development (Hascher et al., 2021). From a motivational perspective, students are more likely to internalize professional goals when they experience support, competence, and a sense of meaningful participation in their learning environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For government-funded pre-service preschool teachers, teacher educators can help connect policy obligations with professional meaning by explaining the social value of preschool education, providing constructive feedback during coursework and practicum preparation, and helping students develop realistic but positive expectations about future teaching work.

Third, the identification of distinct profiles suggests the need for differentiated support. Students in the Dissatisfied–Low Support and Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support profiles may require more targeted attention, because they reported both lower policy satisfaction and weaker perceived teacher support and also showed lower professional identity. Teacher education programs could establish regular formative assessments of students' policy understanding, perceived support, and professional identity—not for labeling or screening students negatively, but for identifying those who may need additional guidance. For example, students with consistently low policy satisfaction may benefit from policy consultation and career planning support, whereas those with low perceived teacher support may benefit from stronger mentoring, academic feedback, and emotional support. In this sense, the practical value of the present study lies not in providing a one-size-fits-all policy recommendation, but in showing that government-funded pre-service preschool teachers may require differentiated support according to their combined policy-and-support experiences.

4.4. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged: First, this study used a cross-sectional survey design. Although the findings revealed significant associations among policy satisfaction, perceived teacher support, latent profile membership, and professional identity, they should not be interpreted as causal or developmental relationships. Future research could use longitudinal designs to examine how students' policy-and-support perceptions and professional identity change across teacher education, practicum experience, and post-graduation service commitments.

Second, the sample was drawn from two universities in Chongqing, Southwest China. Although this context is relevant to local government-funded pre-service preschool teacher education, the findings may not be generalizable to all government-funded teacher education programs in China or to other policy contexts. In addition, because the questionnaires were collected anonymously and were not coded by university, the exact distribution of participants across the two universities could not be reported. Future studies should include larger multi-region samples and record institution-level information while preserving anonymity.

Third, the sample was highly gender-imbalanced, with female students accounting for the majority of participants. This distribution reflects the common gender composition of early childhood teacher education, but it may limit the examination of gender differences in profile membership and professional identity (Whitebook et al., 2014; Xu & Waniganayake, 2018). Future research could include more male pre-service preschool teachers where possible or examine whether professional identity has different meanings across gender groups in early childhood education.

Fourth, although the measures showed acceptable internal consistency, some CFA fit indices were not optimal, especially the RMSEA values for perceived teacher support and

professional identity. Therefore, future studies should further validate and refine these measures in samples of government-funded pre-service preschool teachers. In addition, the present study did not directly measure potential mechanisms such as family socioeconomic resources, parental expectations, practicum experience, employment concerns, or students' understanding of service obligations. Future research could incorporate these variables and combine person-centered and longitudinal approaches to examine how different policy-and-support profiles emerge and change over time (Spurk et al., 2020).

5. Conclusions

This study employed Latent Profile Analysis to identify individual differences in government-funded pre-service preschool teachers' perceptions of policy satisfaction and perceived teacher support. Four distinct profiles were identified: Dissatisfied–Low Support, Moderately Satisfied–Moderate Support, Highly Dissatisfied–Low Support, and Highly Satisfied–High Support. Only-child status and age were significantly associated with profile membership. Professional identity differed significantly across profiles, with the Highly Satisfied–High Support profile showing the strongest and the lower satisfaction–lower support profiles showing weaker professional identity, which suggests that it is associated with the combined pattern of students' policy-and-support perceptions, highlighting the need for clearer policy communication, stronger teacher support, and differentiated guidance for students with less positive experiences.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of Chongqing Preschool Education College (Approval No. I20231202).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout the research process.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy and ethical restrictions related to human participant data. De-identified data may be made available upon reasonable request and with appropriate institutional approval.

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