



**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL UTILITY VALUE
AND CAREER CHOICE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS OF
PRESCHOOL EDUCATION MAJOR IN CHONGQING, CHINA:
TAKING THE PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT AS MEDIATOR**

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Abstract:

Based on the Situated Expectancy-Value Theory, this study aims to explore the relationship between social utility value, professional commitment, and career choice among preschool education major students in Chongqing, China. Through a questionnaire survey, it conducted convenience sampling with 503 senior students majoring in preschool education from 8 universities in Chongqing to investigate the relationship between social utility value, professional commitment, and career choice among preschool education major students in Chongqing. The results show that the social utility value and professional commitment of preschool education major students in Chongqing can both positively and significantly influence their career choices, and professional commitment plays a partial mediating role between social utility value and career choice.

Keywords: social utility value; career choice; professional commitment; college students of preschool education major

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1. Introduction

Preschool education serves as the cornerstone of all education, and its development is of paramount importance. Teachers are the decisive force in educational development (Wang, 2020) and are indispensable stakeholders in education. Without teachers, no country can achieve its educational goals (Salifu, 2013). They are considered responsible for promoting learners' socio-emotional development (Schonert-Reichl, 2017) and are key to improving overall teaching quality (Fray & Gore, 2018). However, at the current stage, the shortage and retention of teachers remain global issues (Carter, 2021; Ünsal *et al.*, 2018). With the implementation of the two-child policy and the emergence of a new generation of baby boomers, the demand for preschool education in China is becoming even greater, which also requires the authorities to adjust the demand for teacher resources (Yang *et al.*, 2022).

Compared to primary and secondary school teachers, preschool teachers exhibit lower professional commitment and higher attrition rates (White book *et al.*, 2014). The professionalism of kindergarten teachers is not well recognized in some sociocultural contexts (Zhang & Wang, 2018; Hartsuyker, 2007; Torquati *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, early childhood and preschool education face serious issues of social marginalization (Hargreaves & Hopper, 2006), and there is a significant disparity in qualified teachers in the field of education (Xiao Li, 2022). Similarly, Li (2018) found that preschool teachers in Chongqing typically have low salaries, lack effective support for career development, suffer from strong job burnout, and experience substantial work pressure and burden, resulting in high job mobility. For decades, the job market for teachers has not been well analyzed, and some studies have found that half of education major graduates do not engage in teaching after graduation (McVey & Trinidad, 2019; Partelow, 2019).

Ye *et al.* (2021) conducted a study on 107 newly appointed teachers (full-time teachers with less than six years of work experience) and 122 pre-service teachers through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The interviewees all emphasized the impact of social influence, personal utility value, and social utility value on career choice. This means that the most influential factors behind the occupation choices of teachers lie in three main aspects: internal causes, external causes/social utility, and altruistic causes (Kyriaco & Coulthard, 2000; Al-Yaseen, 2018). In a study by Celik (2020), internal/altruistic causes and social utility value were also found to be important factors in selecting the teaching profession as a career. Among them, social utility value is the most influential factor for students to choose teaching as a career (Akpochofo, 2020; Celik, 2020).

According to Marcia (1980), commitment involves choosing an option and personally investing in it. As the exploration of pre-service teachers matures, they make a tentative career choice, they will make tentative career choices and then strive to figure out whether they have made the right choice. Teacher's commitment is a crucial factor, and some scholars have conducted extensive research on the commitment of both pre-

service and in-service teachers (Betoret, 2009; Chesnut & Burley, 2015; Chesnut & Cullen, 2014). The commitment made by students before entering the teaching profession is relatively blind, stemming from unrealistic optimism and childish visions rather than a true understanding of educational reality. When teacher interns face the harsh realities as full-time teachers, their initial commitment is easy to abandon (Durksen & Klassen, 2012; Gomez *et al.*, 2009). Pre-service teachers with low professional commitment are more inclined to abandon teaching as a career choice (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2020). If pre-service teachers believe that what they have learned and experienced in teacher education programs is helpful and important for becoming the person they want to be, then they will go through a smoother process in confirming their decision to become a teacher (Ji *et al.*, 2018).

Against the backdrops of labor relations and broader policies, the profession of preschool teachers is often seen as a marginalized occupation by the public, further contributing to the scarcity of preschool teachers (Fenech *et al.*, 2009). Providing and maintaining a high-quality teaching workforce is a pressing issue (Buchanan *et al.*, 2013). Cultivating future teachers to choose careers as preschool educators or pre-service teachers can improve this situation and better understand the reasons for teacher attrition and shortage (Kelly *et al.*, 2019). Career choice is a major challenge in higher education (Kazi & Akhlaq, 2017), and finding ways to attract and retain high-quality preschool educators is an important task for higher education (Fenech *et al.*, 2009; Gardner *et al.*, 2019). To better understand the causes of teacher attrition and shortage and to identify ways to attract and retain high-quality preschool teachers (Zhang *et al.*, 2019), this study focuses on the social utility value and professional commitment that affect students' career choices. It aims to intervene in the career choices of college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, encouraging them to choose the profession of preschool teachers, thereby ameliorating the shortage of preschool teachers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT)

The Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (SEVT) is a method for studying academic motivation and has confirmed the rationality of learners' task selection, persistent learning, and academic performance (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000; Wigfield & Cambria, 2010). It associates achievement, perseverance, and learners' expectations-related beliefs with their perceptions of task value (Eccles, 2011). The theory emphasizes that expectations of success and task value are the main factors influencing individual task choices. Eccles and Wigfield (2002) hold that expectations of success, perceptions of self-competence, and task value are the primary motivational factors influencing task selection, motivation to perform a task, and task performance; they also highlight the role of social experiences in affecting expectations of success, perceptions of self-competence, and task value (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). Almulla (2020) found that altruism (i.e., social utility values)

and external motivation (i.e., job security/salary, previous positive teaching and learning experiences), as well as professional competence of personal perception, play significant roles in deciding choices of being teachers. Additionally, internal motivation, social utility values, and professional competence are key factors leading to pre-service teachers' career commitment (Almulla, 2020). Therefore, this study regards social utility value as the students' value and professional commitment as the expectation of success, thus predicting whether college students majoring in preschool education will choose to become preschool teachers after graduation.

2.2 Differences of Various Background Variables in Social Utility Value, Professional Commitment, and Career Choice

Regarding social utility value, some studies conducting differentiated analyses on gender found that social utility value related to the STEM field is particularly important for women, while men tend to emphasize the realization of personal value (Sáinz *et al.*, 2020). However, King *et al.* (2021) proposed a different opinion, suggesting that men's levels of utility value are slightly higher than those of women. Instead, Yüce *et al.* (2013) conducted a study with 283 Turkish pre-service teachers and found that women reported more social utility value motivations, while men reported more personal utility value motivations. Simić (2022) discovered that women and future head teachers are more driven by altruistic motives/social utility value, and they view the profession as more demanding than men and future subject teachers. See *et al.* (2022) confirmed this finding, indicating that women are more likely to be motivated by internal and altruistic/social causes, while men are more likely to be motivated by external causes. In every culture, men are more influenced by social norms and expectations, making them unlikely to choose jobs in primary and preschool teaching.

In terms of professional commitment, Sun (2018) discovered that there are significant differences in career commitment among individuals due to differences in gender, working years, marital status, and educational background. Magdalena (2009) studied preschool staff in urban and rural areas and found significant differences in their affective commitment. Ivanuš-Grmek & Krečič (2005) measured teacher commitment in Han and Uyghur regions and found that for teachers in these regions, behavioral decisions and performances may not be consistent with their attitudes towards the teaching profession. Teachers in Han areas had significantly higher scores in school commitment than those in Uyghur areas. Şahin *et al.* (2022) categorized factors influencing professional commitment into individual and professional factors, with age, gender, and marital status significantly affecting professional commitment among individual factors. In contrast, Jadidi (2022) divided career commitment into three dimensions: affective commitment, normative commitment to the profession, and dimension continuity. Additionally, the study found that 82.7% of female teachers would choose the teaching profession in early childhood if they had the chance to select their major again. Bennett *et al.* (2021) discovered that female students show greater confidence

in their professional commitment compared to male students in terms of making career choices.

Regarding career choice, See *et al.* (2022) found that in almost all countries and at all stages of education, there are more women choosing teaching as a career than men. Avcı *et al.* (2018) believed that due to gender stereotypes, male teacher candidates are often more cautious than female teacher candidates when considering preschool teaching as their future career choices. The results indicate that, despite preschool teachers having been part of the Turkish system for over 30 years, early preschool education remains a female-dominated profession (Demirkasımoğlu & Taşkın, 2019), a fact also confirmed by Yüce *et al.* (2013), who suggested that in some cases, teaching is more popular as a preferred degree for women (Yüce *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, teachers working in schools with a large number of academically disadvantaged minority students and higher poverty rates are more likely to leave (Hanushek *et al.*, 2004; Redding & Nguyen, 2020; Scafidi *et al.*, 2007).

For the above discussion, this study proposes three research hypotheses:

H1: There are significant differences in social utility value among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, with different background variables (gender, ethnicity, town/country).

H1a: There are significant differences in social utility value among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, with different genders.

H1b: There are significant differences in social utility value among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, with different ethnicities.

H1c: There are significant differences in social utility value among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, from different regions (town/country).

H2: There are significant differences in professional commitment among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, with different background variables (gender, nationality, town/country).

H2a: There are significant differences in professional commitment among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, with different genders.

H2b: There are significant differences in professional commitment among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, with different ethnicities.

H2c: There are significant differences in professional commitment among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, from different regions (town/country).

H3: There are significant differences in career choice among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, with different background variables (gender, ethnicity, town/country).

H3a: There are significant differences in career choice among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, with different genders.

H3b: There are significant differences in career choice among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, with different ethnicities.

H3c: There are significant differences in career choice among college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, from different regions (town/country).

2.3 The Relationship Between Social Utility Value and Career Choice

A study specifically targeting undergraduates who are still considering their career paths reported that, although it is important to have a pleasant job for all surveyed individuals, those considering teaching are more likely to list factors such as job responsibilities and contributions to society as important considerations (Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000). Additionally, research conducted on undergraduates already committed to the teaching profession found that most reported similar desires, such as contributing to society, working with children, and achieving personal fulfillment, which are core factors in their career choices (Manuel & Hughes, 2006). Brookhart and Freeman (1992) found that the desire to work with children and adolescents is often the primary cause for both men and women to choose teaching as a career, which previous researchers have referred to as internal and altruistic (social utility value).

Celik (2020) also confirmed this, arguing that internal and altruistic/social utility values are the most important factors behind the choice of engaging in teaching. The persistence and choice of pre-service teachers in their plans are associated with variables such as predictive ability, internal career value, social contribution, and career choice satisfaction (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014). Some pre-service teachers also indicated that they are attracted to teaching because they desire to contribute to society (Lee *et al.*, 2019; Lin *et al.*, 2012; Ye *et al.*, 2021). They believe that choosing teaching as a career is driven by their altruistic motivation, as they perceive teaching to have social utility value and to be beneficial for promoting personal and social development (Htang, 2019). Therefore, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H4: The social utility value of college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, positively and significantly affects their career choices.

2.4 The Relationship Between Professional Commitment and Career Choice

Teachers' commitment is influenced by various factors such as job satisfaction, employment status, educational background, gender, and teaching experience. The early stages of a career are considered a particularly important area of focus. Recent research findings suggest that newly appointed teachers' well-being (McLean *et al.*, 2017) and their impressions of commitment to the profession (Goldstein, 2005) may be especially vulnerable as they establish their new roles. According to recent estimates, up to 50% of new teachers resign within the first five years (Gallant & Riley, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, 2016; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014).

In the Netherlands, there is also a large number of pre-service teachers who do not persist in the teaching profession. Meens and Bakx (2019) found that students who were initially proactive may become disappointed during teacher training. The same study also discovered that the content and organization of the program, as well as the difficulty level that appears too high or too low, can affect their decisions. Moreover, Chesnut and Burley (2015) found that the self-efficacy of in-service teachers influences their teaching commitment, thus impacting their career choices. Similarly, Eren (2012) found in the study of pre-service teachers' professional commitment that planned effort towards the teaching profession and intentional persistence in teaching or commitment to the teaching profession are the most common indicators of taking teaching as a career commitment. Teachers' commitment will affect their decision to choose teaching as a lifelong career (Noor *et al.*, 2021).

Therefore, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H5: Professional commitment of college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, positively and significantly affects their career choices.

2.5 The Relationship Between Social Utility Value and Professional Commitment

Asriani *et al.* (2022) used the motivation framework of Watt and Richardson (2007) and conducted an online survey with 216 pre-service teachers, which included closed questions and open questions adapted from the FIT-Choice scale. The results demonstrated that the primary motivational factors influencing pre-service teachers' choice of English teaching as a future career were subject interest ($M = 6.13$), internal career value ($M = 5.78$), social utility value ($M = 5.75$), and previous teaching and learning experiences ($M = 5.79$). Additionally, related to teaching beliefs, pre-service teachers perceive teaching as a demanding profession, and the motivation to choose the teaching profession is of significant importance to the professionalism and dedication of the teaching career. Similarly, Berger and Girardet (2021) conducted path analysis through data from a questionnaire survey and found that the social utility value of teaching is the most consistent predictor of a teacher's responsibility.

Almulla (2020) adopted a parallel hybrid method, conducting a questionnaire survey of 793 pre-service and in-service teachers and collecting qualitative data from 16 in-service teachers through semi-structured interviews. The study compared the different factors and motivations of teacher subgroups and found that female teachers reported higher satisfaction and stronger career motivation. In-service teachers demonstrated greater professional competence and assigned more emphasis on social utility factors and job security compared to pre-service teachers. Finally, regarding professional commitment, the importance of social utility value (shaping children's futures, working with them, and making social contributions) and internal career value showed a strong correlation with the professional commitment of the pre-service sample. This suggests that these motivational factors can effectively predict teaching commitment, especially for pre-service teachers who choose teaching for these reasons.

Individuals with internal and altruistic values/social utility values are easier to develop teaching commitment than those with strong external values (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

Therefore, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H6: The social utility value of college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, positively and significantly affects their professional commitment.

2.6 The Mediating Role of Professional Commitment

Cambon *et al.* (2006) believed that social utility is relevant to the extent to which individuals fulfill societal expectations. Teachers with social utility are more likely to continue their careers (Büyükgöze, 2023). Asriani *et al.* (2022) conducted a study of 216 pre-service teachers using a questionnaire survey and found that the main motivational factors influencing pre-service teachers' choice of English teaching as a future career were subject interest, internal career value, social utility value, and previous teaching and learning experiences. Related to teaching beliefs, pre-service teachers regard teaching as a demanding profession which requires high commitment, but their evaluation of task rewards is relatively low. Other studies have also shown that students are worried about their future commitment to the teaching profession (Wang *et al.*, 2022). Almulla (2020) found that altruism (i.e., social utility values) and external motivation (i.e., job security/salary, and previous positive teaching and learning experiences), as well as professional competence of personal perception, play significant roles in deciding choices of being teachers. Additionally, internal motivation, social utility values, and professional competence are key factors leading to pre-service teachers' professional commitment.

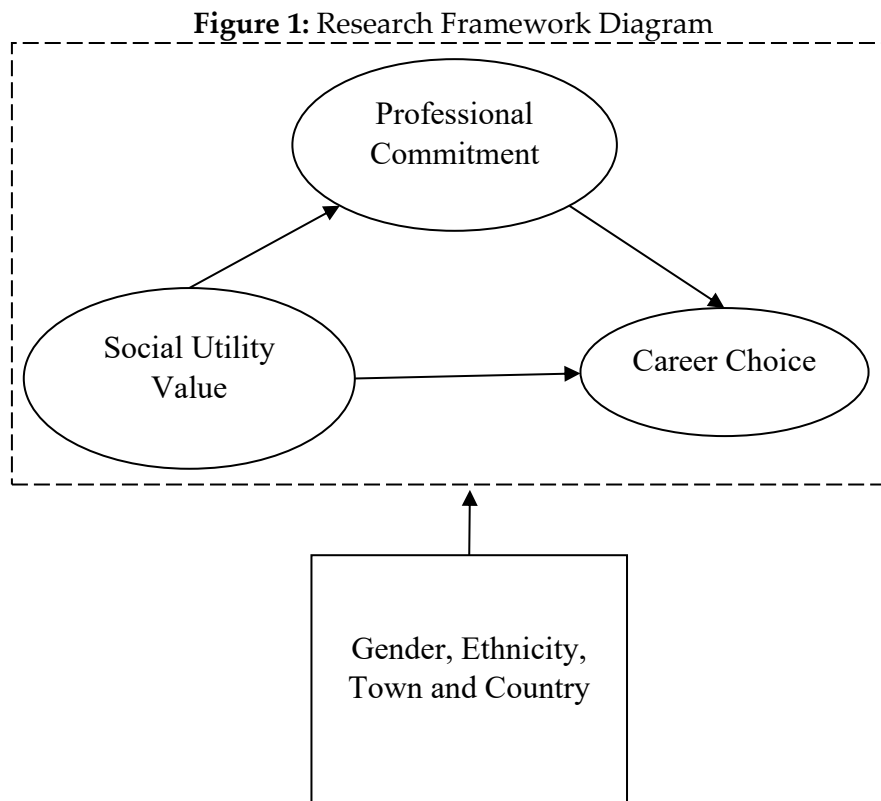
Zhang *et al.* (2019) conducted a comparative interview study among teachers who compromised on their commitment and those who were indecisive. They found that changes in the work environment, significant others, personal beliefs, values, and teaching experiences not only influenced their commitment but also their motivation to choose and remain in the teaching profession, as well as their teaching commitment. Kissau *et al.* (2019) discovered in the study of 54 teachers and 66 candidates that professional competence, internal career value, the promotion of social equity, social contribution, and the portrayal of children's future are closely related to commitment to the teaching profession. Lopez and Irene (2017) adopted a descriptive mixed-method design involving 255 pre-service teachers and found that altruistic factors hold a dominant post in pursuing teaching commitment, aiming to recommend action plans for teachers entering the teaching profession. In other words, teaching commitment plays a partial mediating role between altruistic factors (i.e., social utility value) and entering the teaching profession (i.e., career choice).

Therefore, this study proposes the hypothesis:

H7: Professional commitment of college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, mediates the relationship between social utility value and career choice.

3. Research Framework

Based on the relevant literature on the social utility value, professional commitment, and career choice of college students majoring in preschool education, this study has designed the following research framework:



4. Research Methods

4.1 Sampling Subjects

Chongqing, abbreviated as “Yu” and also referred to as the “Mountain City,” serves as a provincial-level administrative region, a direct-administered municipality, a national central city, and a megacity in the People’s Republic of China (Beijing Daily, 2021). It is one of China’s national central cities approved by the State Council, an economic center for the upstream Yangtze River (Official Website of the Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2011), a core city in the Chengdu-Chongqing twin-city economic circle (Chongqing Municipal People’s Government, 2022), and a national center for advanced manufacturing, a financial center in western China, and international comprehensive transportation and gateway hub (State Council, 2022). However, Chongqing faces a shortage of preschool teachers, with a high student-faculty ratio. Moreover, preschool teachers in Chongqing are more inclined to choose better positions or cities, leading to an even greater shortage of kindergarten teachers (Jianhong & Ziten, 2020). There are four undergraduate schools and four vocational colleges offering

preschool education majors in Chongqing. Therefore, this study conveniently sampled senior students from one or two classes of the preschool education major in these eight schools as the research subjects, hoping to encourage more students to choose the profession of preschool teachers. Through convenience sampling, the study distributed questionnaires to 620 senior students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing, China, with 503 questionnaires proven to be valid, achieving an effective rate of 79.8%.

4.2 Research Tools

The research tools used in this study comprise two parts. The first part is the background variables, which aim to understand basic information about the research subjects. The second part includes three scales that make up the questionnaire: the Social Utility Value Scale, the Professional Commitment Scale, and the Preschool Teaching Choice Motivation Scale.

A. Social Utility Value

This study chooses the Social Utility Value Scale adapted by Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus (2012). The scale includes four dimensions: shaping children's future (items 1-3), promoting social equity (items 4-6), making social contributions (items 7-9), and working with children (items 10-12), totaling 12 items. The scale uses a Likert 7-point scoring method, with the following scoring options: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree. Higher scores indicate a higher social utility value of the subjects.

B. Professional Commitment

This study uses the Professional Commitment Scale established by Magdalena (2009) to quantify the professional commitment of college students majoring in preschool education in Chongqing. The scale includes 18 items, with six items of continuance commitment (items 1-6), affective commitment (items 7-12), and normative commitment (items 13-18). Items 5, 8, 10, 11, and 14 are reverse-scored. The scale employs a Likert 5-point scoring method, with the following scoring options: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = somewhat disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = strongly agree. Higher scores indicate a higher level of professional commitment among the subjects.

C. Career Choice

Marina *et al.* (2022) used the Preschool Teaching Choice Motivation Scale to measure career choice, aiming to evaluate the determinants of choosing a career as a preschool teacher, which is in accordance with the purpose of this study. Therefore, this study adopts the Preschool Teaching Choice Motivation Scale to measure career choice and the scale includes 12 items. To facilitate subsequent statistical analysis, this study named each item with codes. The internal and altruistic motivation dimension was named CC1, which comprises 7 items, with items 1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 5, and 12 named CC1_1 - CC1_7, respectively.

The motivation for simplifying learning and career concepts was named CC2, comprising 5 items, with items 9, 11, 3, 8, and 4 named CC2_1 - CC2_5, respectively. The scale uses a Likert 5-point scoring method, with the following scoring options: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Higher scores indicate a higher likelihood of subjects choosing preschool teaching as their career.

4.3 Data Analysis Methods

This study uses SPSS for reliability analysis, difference analysis, and correlation analysis; it also employs AMOS for confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation model analysis.

5. Research Findings

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

In this study, a total of 630 formal questionnaires were collected, with 503 being valid questionnaires, resulting in an effective rate of 79.8%. The sample distribution is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic Information of Valid Samples from the Research Questionnaire

Measurement Variable	Category	Number of People	Percentage
Gender	Male	106	21.1%
	Female	397	78.9%
Ethnicity	The Han nationality	479	95.2%
	Minority	24	4.8%
Town/Country	Urban area	224	44.5%
	Rural area	279	55.5%

5.2 Reliability Analysis

This study uses Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient to examine the reliability of the three research variables in the formal questionnaire of this study across their respective measurement items. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the social utility value scale is 0.957, for the professional commitment scale is 0.949, and for the career choice scale is 0.916, suggesting good reliability.

5.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

In this study, the social utility value scale is measured by four observation indicators: shaping children's future, promoting social equity, making social contributions, and working with children, comprising a total of 12 measurement items. The overall indicators meet the fit criteria, indicating that the model is a good fit. See Table 2.

Table 2: Fit Checklists for Social Utility Value Model

Measurement Variable	Index	Fit Index Standard	Identification Result Data	Model Fit Judgment
Absolute Fit Indexes	χ^2	Smaller is better	87.858	
	χ^2/df	<5.000	1.83	Fit
	GFI	$\geq .900$	.973	Fit
	AGFI	$\geq .800$	.955	Fit
Absolute Fit Indexes	RMR	$\leq .080$	.020	Fit
	SRMR	$\leq .080$	.017	Fit
	RMSEA	$\leq .100$	.041	Fit
Incremental Fit Indexes	NFI	$\geq .800$	.983	Fit
	NNFI(TLI)	$\geq .800$	.989	Fit
	CFI	$\geq .900$	.992	Fit
	RFI	$\geq .900$	.977	Fit
	IFI	>.900	.992	Fit
Parsimonious Fit Indexes	PNFI	$\geq .500$	.715	Fit
	PGFI	$\geq .500$	.598	Fit
	CN	>200	323	Fit

In this study, the professional commitment scale is measured by three observation indexes: continuance commitment, affective commitment, and normative commitment, comprising a total of 17 measurement items. The overall indexes meet the fit criteria. See Table 3.

Table 3: Fit Checklists for Professional Commitment Model

Measurement Variable	Index	Fit Index Standard	Identification Result Data	Model Fit Judgment
Absolute Fit Indexes	χ^2	Smaller is better	324.297	
	χ^2/df	<5.000	2.796	Fit
	GFI	$\geq .900$	.925	Fit
	AGFI	$\geq .800$	.901	Fit
	RMR	$\leq .080$	.044	Fit
	SRMR	$\leq .080$	.035	Fit
	RMSEA	$\leq .100$	.060	Fit
Incremental Fit Indexes	NFI	$\geq .800$	.939	Fit
	NNFI(TLI)	$\geq .800$	.953	Fit
	CFI	$\geq .900$	.960	Fit
	RFI	$\geq .900$	.929	Fit
	IFI	>.900	.960	Fit
Parsimonious Fit Indexes	PNFI	$\geq .500$	.801	Fit
	PGFI	$\geq .500$	.701	Fit
	CN	>200	221	Fit

In this study, the career choice scale is measured by two observation indexes: internal and altruistic motivation and simplification of learning and career concepts, comprising a total of 12 measurement items. Based on the comprehensive indexes, this study holds

that the model has a good fit and the scale has good structural validity. The details are shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Fit Checklists for Career Choice Model

Measurement Variable	Index	Fit Index Standard	Identification Result Data	Model Fit Judgment
Absolute Fit Indexes	χ^2	Smaller is better	429.205	
	χ^2/df	<5.000	8.287	Close
	GFI	$\geq .900$	.849	Fit
	AGFI	$\geq .800$	.777	Close
	RMR	$\leq .080$	.111	Fit
	SRMR	$\leq .080$	.083	Close
	RMSEA	$\leq .100$	.120	Close
Incremental Fit Indexes	NFI	$\geq .800$	.869	Fit
	NNFI(TLI)	$\geq .800$	.854	Fit
	CFI	$\geq .900$	.883	Close
	RFI	$\geq .900$	.837	Close
	IFI	>.900	.883	Close
Parsimonious Fit Indexes	PNFI	$\geq .500$	.698	Fit
	PGFI	$\geq .500$	.577	Fit
	CN	>200	82	Not Fit

5.4 Difference Analysis

5.4.1 Difference Analysis of Gender

In terms of gender, independent samples t-tests revealed that the p-values for college students' social utility value and professional commitment were both greater than 0.05, indicating that there are no significant differences in college students' social utility value and professional commitment between different genders. Therefore, Hypotheses H1a and H2a are not supported. However, there is a significant difference in career choice between genders ($t = 1.890$, $*p < .05$), with females scoring higher than males, thus confirming Hypothesis H3a.

5.4.2 Difference Analysis of Ethnicity

Regarding ethnicity, independent sample t-tests revealed that the p-value for college students' social utility value was greater than 0.05, indicating that there are no significant differences in social utility value among college students from different ethnic groups. Thus, hypothesis H1b is not supported. However, there is a significant difference in professional commitment among college students from different ethnic groups ($t = 3.840$, $***p < .001$), with ethnic students scoring higher than Han students, confirming hypothesis H2b. Additionally, career choice has a significant difference among students from different ethnic groups ($t = 1.913$, $*p < .05$), with Han students scoring higher than ethnic students, supporting hypothesis H3b.

5.4.3 Difference Analysis of Residential Areas (Town and Country)

In terms of urban and rural areas, independent sample t-tests revealed that the p-values for college students' social utility value and career choice were both greater than 0.05, indicating that there are no significant differences in different residential areas (town and country). Thus, hypotheses H1c and H3c are not supported. However, there is a significant difference in professional commitment among students from different residential areas (town and country), with rural students scoring lower than urban students, confirming hypothesis H2c.

5.5 Correlation Analysis

When the correlation coefficient is positive, it indicates a positive correlation between the two variables; when it is negative, it indicates a negative correlation. The significance of the correlation between two variables is determined by the p-value of the correlation coefficient significance test. If p is less than 0.050, it indicates that the correlation between the two variables is significant; instead, if p is greater than 0.050, it indicates that the correlation is not significant. A correlation coefficient less than 0.400 indicates a low correlation; a correlation coefficient greater than 0.400 but less than 0.700 indicates a moderate correlation; a correlation coefficient greater than 0.800 suggests a high correlation. In this study, the correlation coefficients between social utility value, professional commitment, and career choice dimensions are all less than 0.800, indicating that there is no high correlation and no serious multicollinearity. Moreover, p-values are all less than 0.001, indicating significance and statistical significance.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis of Variables and Dimensions

Dimension	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	1								
2	.814***	1							
3	.856***	.813***	1						
4	.731***	.757***	.740***	1					
5	.335***	.270***	.294***	.333***	1				
6	.343***	.320***	.308***	.398***	.812***	1			
7	.349***	.345***	.303***	.391***	.826***	.847***	1		
8	.405***	.372***	.406***	.399***	.431***	.439***	.466***	1	
9	.210***	.272***	.215***	.305***	.300***	.287***	.350***	.688***	1

Note 1: *** p < .001.

Note 2: "1" represents shaping children's future; "2" signifies promoting social equity; "3" stands for making social contributions; "4" represents working with children; "5" represents continuance commitment; "6" is affective commitment; "7" signifies normative commitment; "8" represents internal and altruistic motivation; and "9" stands for the motivation for simplifying learning and career concepts.

5.6 Structural Equation Model

5.6.1 Path Coefficient Analysis of the Research Model

This study uses path analysis to test the research hypotheses, which primarily illustrate the unidirectional causal relationships between variables. Specifically, the social utility

value has a positive and significant impact on career choice, with a coefficient of .232 ($t = 5.200, p < .001$), confirming Hypothesis H4. Professional commitment also has a positive and significant impact on career choice, with a coefficient of .335 ($t = 7.630, p < .001$), confirming Hypothesis H5. Besides, social utility value positively and significantly affects professional commitment, with a coefficient of .304 ($t = 6.296, p < .001$), confirming Hypothesis H6.

5.6.2 Mediating Effect Analysis

This study adopts the nonparametric percentile Bootstrap method with bias correction to calculate the effect size of social utility value's impact on career choice. The results show that the confidence intervals (CI) for the indirect effect, direct effect, and total effect of the nonparametric percentile with bias correction exclude 0. This suggests that the influence of social utility value on career choice has a significant total effect and direct effect, with a significant mediating effect on professional commitment. The total effect size ranges from .369 to .520, the direct effect size ranges from .140 to .323, and the indirect effect ranges from .156 to .282. Therefore, professional commitment plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between social utility value and career choice, confirming Hypothesis H7.

Table 6: Bootstrap SEM Analysis of Total Effects, Direct Effects, and Indirect Effects

Effects	Path Coefficients	P Value	Confidence Intervals
Direct Effects			
Social Utility Value -> Professional Commitment	.304	< .001	[.205, .395]
Social Utility Value -> Career Choice	.232	< .001	[.140, .323]
Professional Commitment -> Career Choice	.335	< .001	[.242, .417]
Indirect Effects			
Social Utility Value -> Career Choice	.213	< .001	[.156, .282]
Total Effects			
Social Utility Value -> Career Choice	.445	< .001	[.369, .520]

6. Research Conclusions

This study discusses and summarizes the research purpose, hypotheses, and findings to draw the following conclusions:

- 1) In terms of demographic variables, female college students tend to choose the profession of preschool teachers. Regarding ethnicity, the number of Han students choosing the profession of preschool teachers is significantly higher than that of ethnic students, but their professional commitment is significantly lower than that of ethnic students. In terms of origin of students, college students from urban areas have stronger professional commitment than those from rural areas.
- 2) Social utility value positively and significantly affects both professional commitment and career choice; professional commitment also positively and significantly affects career choice.

- 3) Professional commitment plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between social utility value and career choice.

6.1 Research Suggestions

Currently, Chinese universities have offered career development and employment guidance courses to provide students with job information and teach them about the resume creation and interview skills. However, the employment counseling system lacks unity and clarity, failing to design courses or counsel from a capability perspective, leading to insufficient pertinence and difficulty in sustaining effect. Establishing an employment guidance system based on professional alignment can help students achieve long-term counseling effects through the effective connection of social utility value and professional ability, clarify career goals, and realize the smooth transition to the next stage of life.

The career choice of a college student majoring in preschool education is greatly influenced by social utility value and professional commitment. It is suggested to convey the practicality and value of preschool education knowledge through courses to stimulate students' interest and commitment to children's education. Both the theoretical and practical courses should be designed to enhance students' sense of identity and cultivate their positive attitudes and behaviors towards preschool teaching.

Besides, increasing the duration of education internships and combining centralized and independent internships can strengthen students' practical abilities. Helping pre-service teachers improve their teaching skills through multi-scenario inspections and course evaluations, ensuring that students of preschool education major possess solid professional abilities and high teaching quality.

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Transparency Statement

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study, that no vital features of the study have been omitted, and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. These data are not publicly available due to privacy reasons.

Competing Interests Statement

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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