

## Professional Self-Esteem as a Mediator Between the Perception of Teaching as a Profession and the Motivation to Study Teacher Education in an ODL Context

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the mediating role of professional self-esteem in the relationship between motivation to pursue teacher education in an open distance learning (ODL) context and individuals' perceptions of the teaching profession. Four hypotheses have been examined: 1) the perception of teaching as a profession has a positive effect on professional self-esteem; 2) professional self-esteem is positively related to the motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context; 3) the perception of teaching as a profession indirectly induces a motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context; and 4) the perception of teaching as a profession has a direct effect on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context. Using a quantitative approach and adopting a cross-sectional research design, 314



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respondents enrolled in an ODL programme in the two Cameroon anglophone state universities were sampled to unravel the complex dynamics underpinning critical variables. The findings revealed that professional self-esteem does indeed mediate the relationship between motivation to study teacher education through ODL and the perception of teaching. Moreover, teachers who perceive teaching as a respected and rewarding profession tend to have higher levels of professional self-esteem, which in turn increases their intrinsic motivation to study. Conversely, those with lower perceptions of the profession show reduced motivation, even when they recognise the convenience of the ODL system. Recommendations of the study include targeted interventions by educational institutions to promote teaching as a career by integrating strategies that build professional confidence among student teachers.

**Keywords:** Cameroon, distance education, motivation, perception, self-esteem, teacher

# **L'estime de soi professionnelle comme médiatrice entre la perception de l'enseignement comme profession et la motivation à suivre une formation d'enseignant dans un contexte de FOAD**

**Résumé :** Cette étude examine le rôle médiateur de l'estime de soi professionnelle dans la relation entre la motivation à suivre une formation d'enseignant dans un contexte de formation ouverte et à distance (FOAD) et la perception qu'ont les individus de la profession enseignante. Quatre hypothèses ont été examinées : 1) la perception de l'enseignement en tant que profession a un effet positif sur l'estime de soi professionnelle ; 2) l'estime de soi professionnelle est positivement liée à la motivation à suivre une formation d'enseignant dans un contexte de FOAD ; 3) la perception de l'enseignement en tant que profession induit indirectement une motivation à suivre une formation d'enseignant dans un contexte de FOAD ; et 4) la perception de l'enseignement en tant que profession a un effet direct sur la motivation à suivre une formation d'enseignant dans un contexte FOAD. À l'aide d'une approche quantitative et d'un plan de recherche transversal, 314 répondants inscrits à un programme en FOAD dans les deux universités d'État anglophones du Cameroun ont été sélectionnés afin de faire ressortir la dynamique complexe qui sous-tend les variables critiques. Les résultats ont révélé que l'estime de soi professionnelle joue effectivement un rôle médiateur dans la relation entre la motivation à suivre une formation d'enseignant en FOAD et la perception de l'enseignement. De plus, les enseignants qui perçoivent l'enseignement comme une profession respectée et gratifiante ont tendance à avoir une estime de soi professionnelle plus élevée, ce qui augmente leur motivation intrinsèque à étudier. À l'inverse, ceux qui ont une perception moins favorable de la profession font preuve d'une

motivation réduite, même lorsqu'ils reconnaissent la commodité du système de FOAD. Les recommandations de l'étude proposent des interventions ciblées de la part des établissements d'enseignement afin de promouvoir la carrière d'enseignant en intégrant des stratégies qui renforcent la confiance professionnelle des enseignants en formation.

**Mots-clés** : Cameroun, formation à distance, motivation, perception, estime de soi, enseignant

## Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, practical teacher training has become increasingly paramount. This necessity is amplified by the diverse challenges teachers face, which demand the incessant enhancement of their instructional knowledge and skills (Barni et al., 2019) to meet both academic standards and the varied needs of students (Ingersoll, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In Cameroon, as in many developing countries, the teaching profession is often seen through a lens of mixed perceptions, where societal respect may contrast with the challenges of underfunding, inadequate infrastructure, and poor working conditions (Tambo, 2003). These perceptions can significantly impact the motivation of individuals to pursue teacher education, particularly in non-traditional learning environments like open distance learning (ODL).

This complex interplay between professional status and practical challenges directly relates to the 2024 World Teachers' Day theme, "Valuing teacher voices: Towards a new social contract for education." The theme's call for incorporating teachers' perspectives into educational policy and decision-making processes resonates particularly strongly in the Cameroonian context, where systemic constraints often overshadow professional recognition. In alignment with this imperative, the present study seeks to amplify teachers' voices by examining the relationships between their perception of their

profession and their motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context, mediated by their professional self-esteem.

## **Teachers' Motivation to Study Teacher Education in an ODL Context**

The choice to pursue teacher education through an ODL program is influenced by a range of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors (Feng et al., 2023; Kanwar & Daniel, 2010).

### **Extrinsic Factors That Motivate Teacher Education**

Engaging in teacher education appeals to a collection of key elements external to the individual, such as related economic (dis)incentives. Economic considerations, such as low salaries and poor working conditions, are a major driver in deciding whether or not to study teacher education; they also shape motivation to study teacher education in Africa (Ngoma & Chikumbi, 2018). Many potential candidates are deterred by the financial challenges associated with teaching, such as the inability to support themselves or their families (Guajardo, 2011). The opportunity cost of pursuing teacher education, in terms of forgone earnings and career prospects, can also be a significant barrier (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). For instance, a study in Tanzania (Opalo, 2023) revealed that low salaries and limited opportunities for career advancement were major factors discouraging individuals from entering the teaching profession. This view

is in line with that of Ngonga (2010) when comparing the efficiency of public and private education in Cameroon.

## **Intrinsic Motivational Factors to Study Teacher Education**

The motivation to study teacher education is also driven by the interplay of personal beliefs, personal values, and personal aspirations.

Beyond economic factors, individuals' personal beliefs, values, and aspirations also play a crucial role in shaping their decision to pursue teacher education. Research has shown that intrinsic motivations, such as a desire to make a positive difference in the lives of students, a passion for the subject matter, and a commitment to the teaching profession, can serve as powerful drivers for individuals to embark on a teacher education journey (Tang et al., 2020). Research from Africa shows that many individuals are driven by a personal sense of duty to contribute to national development through education (Nyikeineh, 2019; Tchombe, 2019). This aligns with findings from Europe, where intrinsic motivation is closely linked to a desire for personal fulfilment and a belief in the transformative power of education (Klassen & Kim, 2016). Similar findings have been reported from a study conducted in Brazil, which revealed that pre-service teachers were primarily motivated by a desire to work with children, a love for their subject area, and a sense of mission to contribute to society (Gatti & Barreto, 2009). In the United States, a study by Ugarte-Torre (2021) found that individuals' psychological traits, such as a strong sense of self-

efficacy, resilience, and a growth mindset, were key factors in determining their long-term commitment and success within the teaching profession (Lauermann et al., 2017; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014).

The complex nature of the teaching profession requires a deep understanding of the personal values that motivate individuals to pursue teacher education through ODL programmes. A study found that in Zimbabwe, many student-teachers were driven by a sense of vocation and a desire to positively impact their communities (Chireshe & Shumba, 2011). In South Africa, research (Mswazi & Blignaut, 2019) has revealed that individuals often choose teaching because of their passion for the subject matter, a belief in the transformative power of education, and a desire to inspire and empower young people. In Cameroon, teachers' motivation has also been linked to their personal values, such as a commitment to social justice, a love for learning, and a belief in the ability of education to change lives (Atemnkeng et al., 2020).

In addition to personal values, individuals' aspirations and career goals also significantly shape their motivation to study teacher education through ODL programmes. Prospective teachers often seek to fulfil their educational and professional ambitions, such as acquiring advanced knowledge, developing teaching skills, and securing a stable career path.

## Professional Self-Esteem in the Teaching Profession

Professional self-esteem is defined as an individual's overall evaluation of their competence, skills, and worthiness as a member of a particular profession (Maphosa et al., 2015). As such, professional self-esteem has emerged as a critical factor for understanding the experiences and perspectives of teachers (Durksen et al., 2017; Karanikola et al., 2018; Qurban et al., 2018). Research has shown that teachers with higher levels of professional self-esteem are more likely to exhibit greater commitment to the teaching profession, engage in more effective instructional practices, and experience higher levels of job satisfaction and well-being (Barni et al., 2019; Heinz, 2015).

In the African context, the teaching profession has long grappled with a perceived lack of prestige and social status, which can significantly undermine the professional self-esteem of educators (Assié-Lumumba, 2012). In many African countries, teaching is often viewed as a *fallback* career option, with a lack of recognition for the critical role that teachers play in shaping the future of the continent's youth. Additionally, poor working conditions, inadequate remuneration, and limited opportunities for professional development and advancement can further erode the sense of self-worth among African teachers, specifically women (Chireshe & Shumba, 2011).

Gender-related disparities in the teaching profession can also have a significant impact on professional self-esteem (Mhlaba & Rankhumise, 2022).

Women teachers, mostly represented at the level of basic education, often face additional challenges, such as balancing work and family responsibilities, having limited access to leadership positions, and facing persistent gender-based biases and discrimination (Nwoko et al., 2023). These factors can contribute to a lower sense of professional self-worth among female educators, hindering their career advancement and overall job satisfaction. In contrast, women teachers are more involved in pursuing additional qualifications at the tertiary level, which can contribute to their sense of professional self-worth (Malhotra, 2018). On the other hand, a comparative study between teachers in South Africa and Finland found that Finnish teachers generally reported higher levels of professional self-esteem and job satisfaction, which was attributed to factors such as greater autonomy, better working conditions, social esteem for their profession, and opportunities for continuous professional development (Babalola et al., 2021).

Research suggests that the relationships between the perception of teaching as a profession, professional self-esteem, and motivation to teach are intricate and multifaceted. An individual's level of professional self-esteem has been shown to significantly impact their overall perception of the teaching profession. It also influences their sense of belonging and perceived value within the field (Daniels, 2017; Spilková, 2018; Wardoyo et al., 2017). Teachers with high intrinsic motivation and a strong sense of professional self-worth are more likely to view teaching as a prestigious and fulfilling career (Arviv-Elyashiv & Gal, 2017). Conversely, those driven by extrinsic motivations and with lower levels of

professional self-esteem tend to have a more negative perception of the profession (Barni et al., 2019; Bilim, 2014; Rampa, 2014).

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in an integrated theoretical framework combining Self-Determination Theory, Professional Identity Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory to examine the interplay between teachers' perceptions of their profession, professional self-esteem, and motivation to pursue ODL training.

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020) explains motivation through intrinsic (passion for teaching) and extrinsic (career advancement) drivers. In the Cameroonian context, extrinsic factors like economic constraints (Ngoma & Chikumbi, 2018) may dominate, yet intrinsic values such as social impact (Tchombe, 2019) sustain engagement in ODL programmes.

Professional Identity Theory (Zee & Koomen, 2016) posits that teachers' self-concept is shaped by societal perceptions of their profession. In Africa, where teaching is often undervalued (Assié-Lumumba, 2012), this framework elucidates how low professional self-esteem may affect ODL motivation.

Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles et al., 1983) bridges these constructs: teachers' expectations of ODL's utility (career mobility) and its value (flexibility) mediate their engagement. The negative mediation effect (indirect path) suggests that contextual barriers, such as perceived ODL inferiority, undermine expected outcomes.

Together, these theories reveal a tension: while Self-Determination Theory and Professional Identity Theory predict positive motivation from self-worth, the relationship is inverted by structural inequities and institutional distrust. This framework thus advances a culturally nuanced understanding of teacher motivation in resource-constrained ODL settings.

The literature reveals persistent tensions in how teachers perceive their profession, particularly in resource-constrained contexts like Cameroon, where societal respect contrasts starkly with systemic challenges (Tambo, 2017). While ODL emerges as a flexible solution for teacher education (Bozkurt, 2021), its acceptance is mediated by complex motivational factors. Extrinsic drivers, such as economic incentives often dominate in African settings (Ngoma & Chikumbi, 2018). Yet, intrinsic motivations, such as a sense of vocation, remain critical (Tchombe, 2019). Notably, professional self-esteem acts as a pivotal psychological resource, influencing both career perceptions and engagement in professional development (Barni et al., 2019). However, the African context presents a paradox: while teachers with higher professional self-esteem typically demonstrate greater commitment (Zee & Koomen, 2016), structural barriers may distort this relationship in ODL environments, where programme quality perceptions are often contested (Wetcho et al., 2023).

In Cameroon's under-resourced educational system, ODL has emerged as a critical pathway for teacher professional development. However, persistent challenges—including low professional prestige, gender disparities, and systemic

underfunding—shape educators’ motivations to pursue ODL qualifications in complex ways. While existing research highlights the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors (Ryan & Deci, 2020), the mediating influence of professional self-esteem in this context remains underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by quantitatively examining how Cameroonian teachers’ perceptions of their profession interact with their self-worth to predict ODL engagement, offering novel insights into the psychological and structural barriers to teacher development in low-resource settings. Specifically, it seeks to answer four key research questions:

- 1. To what extent does the perception of teaching as a profession directly influence teachers’ professional self-esteem?*
- 2. How does professional self-esteem relate to teachers’ motivation to pursue ODL-based teacher education?*
- 3. Does professional self-esteem mediate the relationship between perceptions of teaching and motivation to engage in ODL teacher education?*
- 4. What is the direct effect of perceptions of teaching as a profession on motivation to study via ODL, independent of professional self-esteem?*

To guide this investigation, four hypotheses are to be tested:

- $H_1$  posits that one’s perception of teaching as a profession has a direct positive effect on professional self-esteem.
- $H_2$  proposes that professional self-esteem is positively related to motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context.

- H<sub>3</sub> suggests that one's perception of teaching indirectly enhances motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context.
- H<sub>4</sub> asserts that one's perception of teaching as a profession has a direct effect on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative approach, specifically a cross-sectional survey research design to collect data from respondents.

#### ***Respondents***

The study sample consisted of 314 primary school teachers who were enrolled in, or had recently completed, a teacher education programme through distance education learning, and who were purposively selected from a population of 719 student teachers. Participants were recruited through the various online forums of the distance education programmes offered by the University of Bamenda and the University of Buea.

Of the total respondents, 19.4% were males and 80.6% were females. All of the respondents (100%) held a Teacher Grade I certificate, while 39.5% also had another certificate apart from the GCE (General Certificate of Education) Advanced Level and the Teacher Grade I certificate.

## ***Data Collection***

To assess the key variables of interest, the study used the following measures:

- Motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context and perception of teaching as a profession were measured using an adapted version of the Factors-Influencing-Teaching-Choice Scale (FIT-Choice Scale) from Watt and Richardson (2012). This FIT-Choice Scale is based on a seven-point Likert-type scale (minimum value of 1 and maximum value of 7).
- The professional scale of the Coopersmith (1967) Self-Esteem Inventory was used to assess attitudes towards oneself in a professional setting.
- The survey also collected demographic information, such as work status, age, gender, marital status, certificates obtained, and teaching experience.

## ***Procedures***

Data collection was conducted over a one-month period. Respondents were contacted through various WhatsApp platforms and invited to complete an online survey. Informed consent was obtained, and respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. To increase response rates, hard copies of the instrument were directly submitted to respondents during face-to-face tutorials on campus.

## ***Data Analysis***

The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 26 and the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2017) for mediation analysis. Descriptive statistics were first calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and the key study variables. Following this, Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between motivation, perception of teaching, and professional self-esteem.

A mediation analysis was performed using the PROCESS macro to test whether professional self-esteem mediated the relationship between perception of teaching and motivation to study teacher education. This approach allowed for the estimation of direct and indirect effects, providing insight into the role of self-esteem as a mediator (Hayes, 2017).

## ***Test of Common Method Variance***

Since the data for all variables were collected from the same respondents through self-reported questionnaires, there was a potential risk of common method variance (CMV) bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To address this issue, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to check for the presence of CMV. This test involves conducting an exploratory factor analysis to determine whether a single factor accounts for the majority of the variance in the data. If one factor explains more than 50% of the total variance, CMV may be a concern. In this study, the results of Harman's test indicated that no single factor

accounted for a majority of the variance, suggesting that CMV was not a significant issue.

Additionally, procedural remedies were used to minimize CMV, such as ensuring the anonymity of respondents, using different response formats for different sections of the survey, and separating the measures for key variables to reduce the likelihood of respondents perceiving a connection between the questions (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

### ***Mediation Analysis Procedure***

As outlined by Hayes (2017), all of the mediation paths were structured using ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, which entails performing three regressions using PROCESS. The PROCESS macro was used for this purpose, employing Model 4, which tests simple mediation. First, the estimated model included the association between perception of teaching as a profession and professional self-esteem (path *a* or hypothesis 1). Second, professional self-esteem was regressed on the criterion variables (path *b* or hypothesis 2).

Third, perception of teaching as a profession was included as a predictor of the criterion variable (path *c'* or hypothesis 3). The *c'* coefficients estimate the strength of the direct (also called partial) effect of perception of teaching as a profession on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context. This includes any effect not mediated by professional self-esteem that perception of teaching as a profession has on motivation to study teacher education in an

ODL context. Although this third step is valuable in the mediation analysis, it is sometimes omitted.

Fourth, for the sake of clarity, and following the recommendation provided by Warner (2013), the strength of the association between the independent variable and the dependent variable was tested to see whether the association became smaller after being controlled by the mediator's effect (path *c* or hypothesis 4).

## **Results**

The first step in analysing the relationship between the variables included in this study was to consider the descriptive statistics and the correlations between the main constructs and the control variables.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The results of the descriptive statistics for the study variables (Table 1) show that respondents tended to report relatively high levels of perception of teaching as a profession (mean score 71.18), professional self-esteem (mean score 5.25), and motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context (mean score 171.97).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Perception of Teaching as a Profession	32	90	71.18	12.909
Professional Self-Esteem	2	8	5.25	1.442
Motivation to Study Teacher Education in ODL Context	86	254	171.97	32.661

The data were then examined to ensure that the assumptions of normality were upheld. Data are normally distributed if they range between +3 and -3 standard deviations of the sample mean (Warner, 2013). Using this criterion, no observed violation of the normality assumption was found, since both the skewness and kurtosis numbers were less than 2.

The zero-order correlations of the variables of the study were performed as shown in Table 2, and the *p*-values for these statistics are presented. The correlations ranged from .00 to .24, except for the variable Perception of Teaching as a Profession, which was correlated at .78. The zero-order correlations provide a statistical overview of the relationships among the three variables of the study: Perception of Teaching as a Profession (independent variable), Professional Self-Esteem (mediating variable), and Motivation to Study Teacher Education in an ODL context (dependent variable).

*Table 2. Zero-Order Correlations*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Perception of Teaching as a Profession	1	–	–
Professional Self-Esteem	.237**	1	–
Motivation to Study Teacher Education in ODL Context	.780**	-.060	1

\*\* $p < .01$

## Correlations

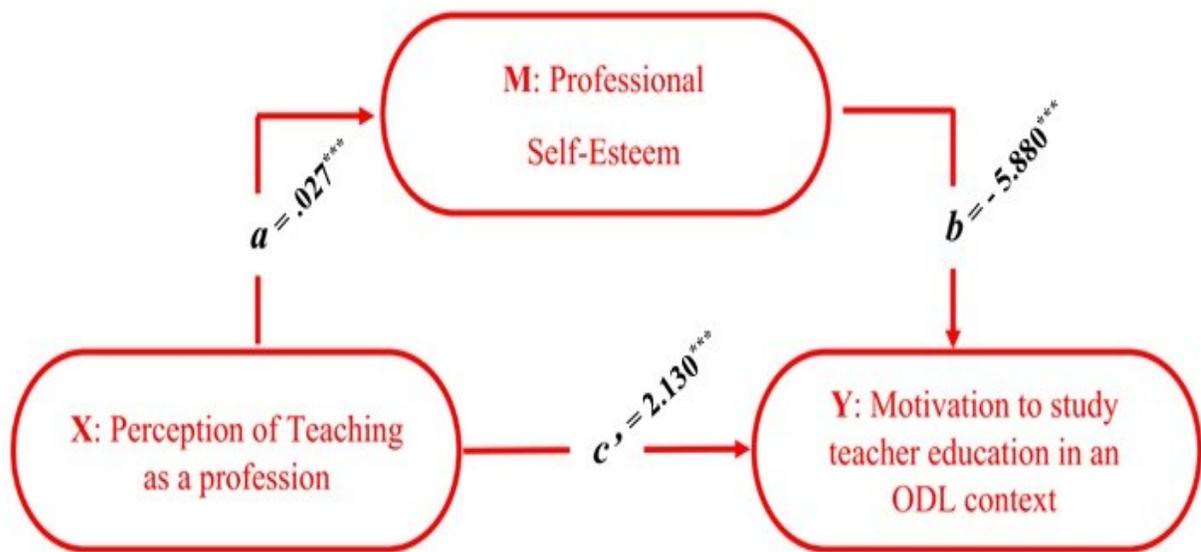
This section starts with an OLS regression and bootstrapping results.

As shown in Table 3 and the regression coefficients superimposed on the statistical diagram of the model in Figure 1, analysis revealed that the perception of teaching as a profession significantly influences professional self-esteem, albeit explaining only a small portion of the variance (5.61%). The significant  $p$ -values across all coefficients indicate strong evidence against the null hypothesis, confirming that both the constant and the independent variables are meaningful predictors in this context.

**Table 3. OLS Regression and Model Coefficients of Paths *a*, *b*, and *c'***  
**Consequent**

	M			Y				
		$\beta$	SE	$p$		$\beta$	SE	$p$
<b>X</b>	<i>a</i>	.027	.006	<.001	<i>c'</i>	2.130	.0845	<.001
<b>M</b>		–	–	–	<i>b</i>	-5.880	.7565	<.001
<b>Constant</b>		3.367				51.275		
	R <sup>2</sup> = .0561			R <sup>2</sup> = .672				

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*Figure 1. Path diagram of the indirect effects of perception of teaching as a profession on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context*

*Image description available*

Hypothesis 1, which predicted that the perception of teaching as a profession would have a direct, positive effect on professional self-esteem, was supported. The results of the OLS regression coefficients show that the perception of teaching as a profession is estimated to differ with the professional self-esteem level ( $X = 0$ ) by  $\beta = 0.027$  units,  $p < .001$ . In other words, the perception of teaching as a profession is, on average, 0.027 units or 3% higher than the level of professional self-esteem.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that professional self-esteem would be positively related to the motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context. This hypothesis was not supported, and the relationship was significant,  $p < .001$

(refer to Table 3 and Figure 1). The regression coefficient for the influence of professional self-esteem on the motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context was  $\beta = -5.880$ . This means that for every unit of increase in professional self-esteem (regardless of whether the individual has a high level of professional self-esteem), there is a 5.88 decrease in the level of motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context.

Hypothesis 3, which stated that the perception of teaching as a profession is expected to induce a high level of motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context, was supported. The regression coefficient for the perception of teaching as a profession's influence on the motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context is  $\beta = 2.130$  ( $p < .001$ ). This means the perception of teaching as a profession is, on average, 2.130 units higher than the motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context. Although the relationship was significant, the direct effect of the perception of teaching as a profession on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context was seen to be small.

OLS regression was conducted to see the extent to which the model with two predictor variables (perception of teaching as a profession and professional self-esteem) was predictive of motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context. Based on the results shown in Table 4, motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context was significantly predicted by the positive perception of teaching as a profession and professional self-esteem, with an adjusted  $R^2 = .6724$  and  $F(2, 311) = 319.1673$ ,  $p < .001$ . The *ab* path (indirect effect)

of perception of teaching as a profession on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context through the mediating variable professional self-esteem was  $b = -5.8800$ .

**Table 4.** Regression coefficients to predict motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context (Y) from perception of teaching as a profession (X1) and mediating variable professional self-esteem (X2)

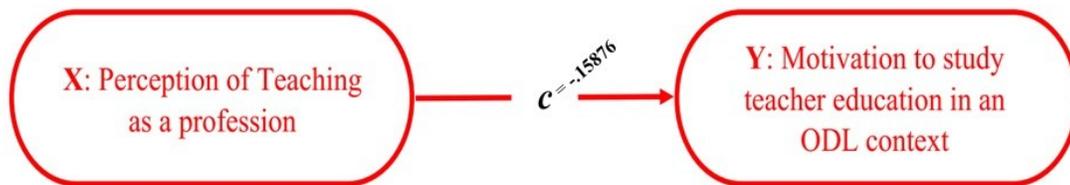
Dependent Variable	Predictor	Coefficients	t-value	p
Motivation to study teacher education in ODL context	Perception of teaching as a profession	2.1296	25.1967	.0000
	Professional self-esteem	-5.8800	-7.7731	.0000
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>			.6724	
F			319.1673	
df			(2, 311)	
Constant			51.2747	

Considering the results of the indirect effect of professional self-esteem in Table 5, the confidence interval for the indirect effect using 5,000 bootstrap samples was entirely below zero ( $[-.0938, -.0299]$ ). This indicates that the relationship between perception of teaching as a profession and motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context is partially mediated by professional self-esteem.

**Table 5.** Indirect effect, through professional self-esteem, of the perception of teaching as a profession on the motivation to study teacher education in an ODL setting

IV	M	DV	IE	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Perception of teaching as a profession	Professional self-esteem	Motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context	-0.0615	.0162	-.0938	-.0299

Looking at Figure 2, we can see that the perception of teaching as a profession affects motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context directly, and it also affects it indirectly (Figure 1) by way of its influence on professional self-esteem.



**Figure 2.** Path diagram of the Total Effect Model of perception of teaching as a profession on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context

*Image description available*

The indirect effect is  $-.0615$ , which is considerably larger than the direct effect of the perception of teaching as a profession on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context ( $-.023$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This ratio is significantly

different from zero at the 5% level because 0 is not contained in the 95% confidence interval ([-.0938, -.0299]).

This result suggests the perception of teaching as a profession is higher among women than men based on their respective average scores. According to our study, women are .026 units higher in their motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context than men, as a result of the effect of professional self-esteem levels (i.e., due to an indirect effect). The professional self-esteem, in turn, putatively increases women's motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context. Given these results, Hypothesis 4 is confirmed. All of the relationships in this mediation model remain significant to the model except for the effect of professional self-esteem on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context, which was not significant ( $p > .05$ ).

## **Discussion**

The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of professional self-esteem in the relationship between perception of teaching as a profession and motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context. The results provide partial support for the proposed mediation model.

The findings indicate that perception of teaching as a profession is positively associated with professional self-esteem. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that teachers' perceptions of their profession influence their self-beliefs and professional identity (Wardoyo et al., 2017; Zee &

Koomen, 2016). When teachers perceive teaching as a prestigious and respected profession, they are more likely to develop a strong sense of professional self-worth and competence.

However, the negative association found between professional self-esteem and motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context was unexpected and contradicts prior research. One possible explanation could be that teachers with higher professional self-esteem may feel more confident in their abilities and thus less motivated to continuously engage in professional development in an ODL context. Another possibility is that teachers with high professional self-esteem may be more selective in choosing professional development opportunities that align with their specific needs and interests, rather than being broadly motivated to study teacher education through distance education. Finally, this result suggests that an unmeasured variable could be influencing the relationship.

This finding contradicts previous research, which has generally found a positive relationship between professional self-esteem and motivation. One possible explanation for this unexpected result is that teachers with higher professional self-esteem may undermine the quality of ODL programmes, or that ODL is underestimated in Cameroon compared to traditional in-person programmes.

Another key finding is that professional self-esteem only partially mediates the relationship between perception of teaching as a profession and motivation

to study teacher education through distance education. This suggests that factors other than professional self-esteem, such as workload, job satisfaction, or perceived support from the school administration, may also play a role in shaping teachers' motivation to engage in distance education programmes. This finding is in line with a good number of research studies (Wang & Shakibaei, 2025; Wardoyo et al., 2017; Zee & Koomen, 2016) that highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of teacher motivation and professional development.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data means that causal inferences cannot be made. Second, the study relied on self-report measures, which may be subject to biases. Third, the study was conducted in a specific context of distance education programmes, so the findings may not be generalised to other educational settings. Future research may seek to address these limitations by using longitudinal designs and objective measures, and by examining a wider range of educational contexts.

### **Conclusion**

This study makes three key contributions to understanding teacher motivation in ODL contexts. First, it reveals a paradoxical finding that higher professional self-esteem correlates with reduced motivation to pursue ODL teacher education in Cameroon—a novel insight contrasting with global literature

that typically associates self-esteem with increased engagement. This suggests that Cameroonian teachers with strong professional identities may perceive ODL as inferior to traditional training, highlighting a critical need to address perceptions of distance education's quality.

Second, the research empirically validates the mediating role of professional self-esteem in the relationship between perception and motivation, demonstrating that while viewing teaching as prestigious enhances self-worth ( $\beta = 0.027, p < .001$ ), this does not translate into ODL participation motivation ( $\beta = -5.880, p < .001$ ). This mediation effect, accounting for 5.6% of variance, underscores context-specific barriers in low-resource settings.

Finally, the study introduces gender-disaggregated evidence showing female teachers' disproportionate representation (80.6% of respondents) and higher motivation, despite systemic inequities. This finding challenges assumptions about gender and professional development in Sub-Saharan Africa.

These insights urge policymakers to:

1. Rebrand ODL programmes to enhance their professional legitimacy;
2. Integrate gender-sensitive support structures; and
3. Address extrinsic deterrents like poor working conditions that undermine intrinsic motivation.

Future research should explore the longitudinal impacts of ODL quality improvements on teacher self-esteem and retention.

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## Image Descriptions

**Figure 1 image description:** A path diagram of the indirect effects of perception of teaching as a profession on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context:

The image presents a mediation analysis model examining the relationship between three key variables:

1. **X (Independent Variable):** *Perception of Teaching as a Profession*
2. **M (Mediator):** *Professional Self-Esteem*
3. **Y (Dependent Variable):** *Motivation to Study Teacher Education in an Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Context*

Key Statistical Values:

- $a = .027$ : The path coefficient (the regression coefficient) from *X (Perception of Teaching)* to *M (Professional Self-Esteem)* is 0.027, statistically significant (indicates  $p < 0.001$ ). The path from Perception of Teaching to Professional Self-Esteem is positive but very small (0.027), yet statistically solid.

- $b = -5.880$ : The path coefficient from  $M$  (*Professional Self-Esteem*) to  $Y$  (*Motivation to Study*) is  $-5.880$ , statistically significant. Unexpectedly, higher Professional Self-Esteem correlates with sharply lower Motivation to Study ( $-5.880$ ). This might reflect overconfidence or hidden factors.
- $c' = 2.130$ : *The direct effect of  $X$  (Perception of Teaching) on  $Y$  (Motivation to Study), after accounting for the mediator, is 2.130.* When Professional Self-Esteem is held constant, Perception of Teaching directly raises Motivation by 2.130 units—a much larger effect than its impact via self-esteem.

[\[Back to Figure 1\]](#)

**Figure 2 Image Description:** A path diagram of the Total Effect Model of perception of teaching as a profession on motivation to study teacher education in an ODL context.

- The regression coefficient for the influence of  $X$ : Perception of Teaching as a profession on  $Y$ : Motivation to study teach education in an ODL context is  $c = -0.15876$ . The Total Effect Model shows that higher Perception of Teaching as a Profession predicts slightly lower Motivation to Study Teacher Education in ODL (coefficient =  $-0.15876$ ). This inverse relationship is statistically significant.

[\[Back to Figure 2\]](#)