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Role of occupational self-efficacy and professional identity as mediators in the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability among teachers

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Introduction: Career sustainability has become increasingly important for teachers to maintain long-term professional engagement and effectiveness. This study examined the serial mediating roles of occupational self-efficacy and professional identity in the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability among teachers.

Methods: The study employed a correlational survey design. A total of 390 teachers working in Türkiye participated in the study. Data were collected using the Career Sustainability Scale, the Person-Job Fit Scale, the Occupational Self-efficacy Scale, and the Perceived Professional Identity Scale. We tested the research hypotheses using a serial mediation analysis with Hayes' PROCESS Macro Model 6.

Results: The findings show positive and significant relationships among person-job fit, occupational self-efficacy, professional identity, and career sustainability. Although the direct effect of person-job fit on career sustainability is not statistically significant, the indirect effects via occupational self-efficacy and professional identity are significant. The serial mediation analysis further shows that person-job fit is related to teachers' occupational self-efficacy, which may, in turn, be related to their professional identity and, consequently, to career sustainability.

Conclusion: The findings indicate a significant indirect relationship between person-job fit and teachers' career sustainability, mediated by occupational self-efficacy and professional identity. These findings highlight the importance of holistically considering person-job fit, occupational self-efficacy, and professional identity for teacher career sustainability.

KEYWORDS

career sustainability, occupational self-efficacy, person-job fit, professional identity, teacher

1 Introduction

Career sustainability refers to employees' ability to carry out their professional duties effectively and with high motivation over many years. Whereas the traditional approach focuses on an individual's linear advancement within a specific organization, contemporary careers have become more flexible, uncertain, and constantly evolving (De Vos et al., 2020). Digitalization, technological innovations, changes in job requirements, economic fluctuations, and transformations in work environments have made it imperative for individuals not only to build their careers but also to sustain them by adapting to changing work conditions. In this context, a sustainable career is a framework grounded in the interplay between an individual's efforts to manage their careers and the policies and practices of organizations that support employees' career development (Chudzikowski et al., 2020).

Various theoretical approaches explain career sustainability. One of the most comprehensive and widely accepted approaches among these is the sustainable career model (De Vos et al., 2020). This model defines career sustainability as an individual's ability to maintain physical and psychological well-being, sustain job satisfaction, and maintain productivity throughout their working life. The model states that the process is shaped by the interaction of the individual's personal characteristics, working conditions, and changes experienced over time. Accordingly, a sustainable career does not depend solely on the individual's own efforts. Institutional support, job characteristics, and the social and environmental conditions in which the individual operates also directly influence this process.

Career sustainability is a multidimensional construct influenced by numerous individual and organizational factors. Employees' access to learning opportunities and managerial support contribute significantly to career sustainability (Bozionalos et al., 2020). Similarly, lifelong learning supports career sustainability by helping individuals adapt to changing work conditions (Heslin et al., 2020). At the organizational level, inclusive leadership and development-oriented feedback provided by managers strengthen career sustainability (Fang et al., 2021). In addition, individuals' career competencies play a significant role in sustaining their careers over the long term (Zhang et al., 2022).

According to the latest UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (2024) reports, approximately 44 million new teachers will be needed worldwide by 2030 to sustain quality education. The demand for teachers has been steadily increasing worldwide; however, the rising trend of teachers leaving the profession and the growing prevalence of professional burnout are significant challenges to the sustainability of education (Martinson et al., 2024). Thus, teaching is among the top professional groups where career sustainability has gained importance because of several critical factors such as the profession's high demands for emotional labor, the need to adapt to constant changes in educational policies, an increasing workload, the integration of digital technologies into educational processes, and the requirement to simultaneously meet the expectations of diverse students, parents, school administrators, and other stakeholders (Martinson et al., 2024). Therefore, the ability of teachers to

sustain their professional lives over many years is of strategic importance not only for their individual development but also for student learning outcomes, the institutional success of schools, and the overall quality of the educational system (UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024). Regarding teaching, increases in occupational self-efficacy and job satisfaction are positively related to career sustainability (Özbilen et al., 2024).

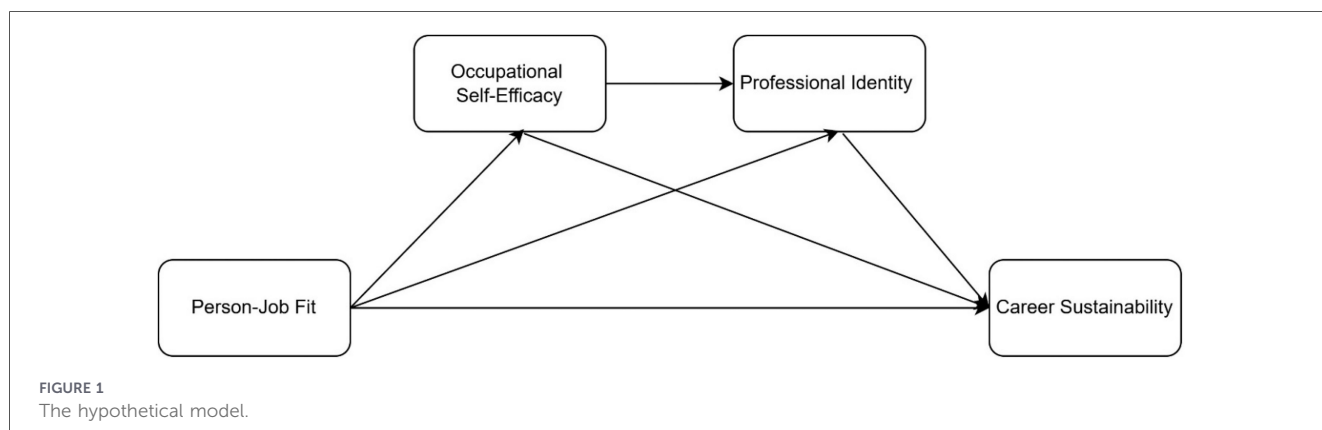
1.1 Person-job fit and career sustainability among teachers

Person-job fit is a key determinant of teachers' ability to maintain effective and productive careers over many years. It is commonly conceptualized as the compatibility between employees and their work roles, in which the knowledge, skills, competencies, and personal values they possess align with the demands, expectations, and developmental opportunities of the job (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Higher levels of person-job fit help individuals perceive their work as more meaningful, maintain motivation, and develop positive attitudes toward their work (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Recent studies suggest that person-job fit contributes to a range of favorable career outcomes. For example, improvements in person-job fit are positively associated with higher job satisfaction and stronger affective organizational commitment (Kim et al., 2020). In addition, person-environment fit plays a significant role in enhancing job satisfaction and promoting sustainable employment (Rauvola et al., 2020). More recently, person-environment fit has also been identified as an important predictor of burnout and turnover intentions (Fan et al., 2026).

In addition to subject knowledge and instructional skills, teaching requires personal qualities such as strong communication skills, emotional resilience, patience, commitment to professional values, and an embrace of the responsibilities required by the educational process (Martinson et al., 2024). Therefore, the alignment between teachers' individual characteristics and the qualifications required by the profession is one of the key factors supporting their tendency to remain in teaching. Teachers whose personal characteristics align more closely with the requirements of teaching perceive their work as more meaningful and provide positive career evaluations (e.g., De Vos et al., 2020; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). The sustainable career approach also posits that teachers' ability to sustain their career over the long term is shaped by the interaction between their individual resources, work environment, and experiences (De Vos et al., 2020). Studies with teachers indicate that variables such as fit, job satisfaction, and burnout are important for teachers' retention in the profession (Zhang et al., 2022). In sum, based on the existing literature, person-job fit seems to be a potentially crucial predictor of career sustainability for teachers.

1.2 Role of occupational self-efficacy and professional identity as mediators

Teachers' beliefs about their occupational competence and perceptions of the occupation may influence their career



sustainability. The Social Cognitive Career Theory posits that self-efficacy beliefs play a decisive role in individuals' career development and career-related attitudes and behaviors, thereby shaping long-term career outcomes (Lent et al., 1994). Similarly, the Person-Environment Fit Theory emphasizes that the fit between an individual's characteristics and their occupation strengthens positive psychological resources and supports career development (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Drawing on these theoretical perspectives, occupational self-efficacy and professional identity are expected to help explain the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability among teachers. Higher person-job fit may help teachers perceive that their knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics align with the requirements of teaching. This fit would enhance their confidence in their ability to successfully fulfill their occupational duties and contribute to the development of occupational self-efficacy. Teachers' sense of fit between the work and their competencies supports the development of occupational self-efficacy. Research with teachers indicates that occupational self-efficacy is positively associated with job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to teaching (e.g., Canrinus et al., 2012; Özbilen et al., 2024).

Occupational self-efficacy also shapes teachers' teaching role. Teachers who believe they can successfully fulfill their professional duties come to view teaching as an important part of their identity, strengthening their sense of belonging to the profession (Martinson et al., 2024). In other words, occupational self-efficacy is a fundamental psychological resource that supports the development of teachers' professional identity. Recent research indicates that teachers with higher self-efficacy develop a stronger professional identity (Sun et al., 2025). Similarly, occupational self-efficacy is a key predictor of professional identity among teacher candidates (Başdal and Özen, 2025). Accordingly, occupational self-efficacy is expected to facilitate the development of teachers' professional identity. In turn, a stronger professional identity encourages teachers to view their careers as an ongoing journey of learning and professional advancement. Consistent with this view, teachers who internalize their professional values and strongly identify with their teaching role are more likely to develop an enduring commitment to the profession, adapt successfully to occupational demands, and maintain motivation to pursue long-term careers in teaching (Beijaard et al., 2004). A strong professional identity increases teachers' commitment, professional

well-being, and career satisfaction and reduces burnout (De Vos et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2025). From this perspective, a strong professional identity serves as an instrumental psychological mechanism that supports teachers' career sustainability.

In short, person-job fit is expected to be related to teachers' perceptions of occupational self-efficacy, which can support professional identity by facilitating greater internalization of the teaching role. A strengthened professional identity can contribute to teachers' ability to evaluate their careers in a more meaningful and sustainable manner. Therefore, occupational self-efficacy and professional identity may act as serial mediators in the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability.

1.3 Present study

Teachers' ability to sustain their careers over a long period is crucial not only for their professional development but also for maintaining the quality of educational systems, enhancing teacher quality, and supporting students' learning processes (UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024). Nevertheless, research on the psychological mechanisms underlying career sustainability among teachers remains limited (De Vos et al., 2020). Despite the growing body of research on person-job fit, its connection with teachers' career sustainability and the psychological mechanisms underlying this relationship remain insufficiently understood. Previous studies have investigated the association between person-job fit and career sustainability across a variety of occupational contexts and identified important predictors of positive career-related outcomes (e.g., De Vos et al., 2020; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Nevertheless, existing research lacks an integrated examination of whether occupational self-efficacy and professional identity operate as mediators in the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability among teachers. This gap underscores the need for a more comprehensive framework to explain the factors that support teachers' career sustainability. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability among teachers by examining the sequential mediating roles of occupational self-efficacy and professional identity. The study sought to extend the current literature by offering a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms through which person-job fit

contributes to sustainable careers for teachers. Accordingly, the study hypothesized that person-job fit would strengthen teachers' perceptions of occupational self-efficacy; that increased occupational self-efficacy would support professional identity by facilitating stronger internalization of the teaching role; and that strengthened professional identity would, in turn, be associated with teachers' ability to evaluate their careers more sustainably.

This study is expected to contribute to the existing literature in several ways. First, we expect to contribute theoretically to the literature on career sustainability by examining the psychological processes that are associated with career sustainability among teachers within a holistic framework. By examining person-job fit, occupational self-efficacy, and professional identity within a single model, we present a more comprehensive and explanatory theoretical framework for career sustainability among teachers. In addition, we anticipate that the findings will inform interventions to support teachers' professional development, strengthen their professional identity, and help develop educational programs and policies to sustain teaching over the long term. In this regard, we tested the following hypotheses.

H1: There would be a positive relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability among teachers.

H2: Occupational self-efficacy and professional identity would serve as serial mediators in the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability among teachers.

2 Method

2.1 Participants and procedure

The participants were teachers working at different school levels in Türkiye. We sent out an online invitation to participate in the study via online communication channels. Convenience sampling was used to obtain the voluntary participants. During data collection, teachers were informed about the study's general purpose, assured that participation was entirely voluntary, and that their data would be used confidentially for research purposes. Teachers gave online informed consent and included in the study.

Data were collected from 390 teachers whose ages ranged from 24 to 65 years, with a mean age of 41.59 years ($SD = 8.30$). The sample consisted of 47.9% woman ($n = 187$) and 52.1% man ($n = 203$). In terms of tenure, 35.6% had 1–10 years ($n = 139$), 32.6% 10–20 years ($n = 127$), and 31.8% had 20 or more years of teaching experience ($n = 124$). Their school levels were distributed as follows: 3.6% preschool ($n = 14$), 24.4% elementary school ($n = 95$), 54.4% middle school ($n = 212$), and 17.7% high school ($n = 69$). The study adhered to the principles of scientific research and publication ethics throughout all stages, with all necessary ethics committee and institutional approvals obtained before commencing the study (Decision No.: 72; Date: 6 May 2026).

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 Career sustainability scale

The Career Sustainability Scale developed by Chin et al. (2022) and adapted into Turkish by Arar and Çetiner (2023)

assessed career sustainability. The scale comprises 12 items under a two-factor structure: Professionalism and Adaptability/Complementarity. Responses are recorded on a six-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger perceptions of career sustainability, greater adaptability to changing work conditions, continuous professional development, and career flexibility. As part of the Turkish adaptation study, the CFA of the two-factor structure yielded acceptable fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 2.06$; NFI = .96; RFI = .95; IFI = .98; TLI = .97; CFI = .98). Furthermore, the scale's internal consistency coefficient was Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$ (Arar & Çetiner, 2023). In this study, α was .95. CFA results indicated that the scale fit the model well ($\chi^2/df = 4.71$, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .05, GFI = .91, CFI = .96, IFI = .96). Factor loadings ranged from .59 to .93.

2.2.2 Person-job fit scale

Teachers' perceptions of person-job fit were measured by the Person-Job Fit Scale developed by Saks and Ashforth (1997) and adapted into Turkish by Kızrak and Güner Kibaroglu (2025). The scale comprises four items under a unidimensional structure. All items are rated on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting a stronger perceived alignment between teachers' knowledge, skills, and abilities and the requirements of their job. In the Turkish adaptation study, the scale's construct validity was found to be unidimensional (CR = .77–.80; AVE = .52–.57; SRMR = .07–.08; NFI = .95–.97). The scale's internal consistency was found to be $\alpha = .87$ (Kızrak and Güner Kibaroglu, 2025). In this study, the scale's reliability coefficient was $\alpha = .88$. and CFA results demonstrated a good fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.01$, AGFI = .98, RMSEA = .01, SRMR = .01, GFI = .99, CFI = 1.00, NFI = .99). Factor loadings ranged from .74 to .91.

2.2.3 Professional identity perception scale

Yıldız and Çetin (2020) developed the scale to assess teachers' perceptions of their professional identity. The scale is a 17-item, 5-point Likert tool consisting of five subscales: Professional Role, Educational and Instructional Interaction, Professional Status/Prestige, Professional Motivation, and Experiential Pedagogy. Higher scores indicate more positive perceptions of teachers' professional identity. CFA indicated that the model exhibited an acceptable fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.93$, GFI = .93, CFI = .96, NFI = .89, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .05). Furthermore, internal consistency coefficients ranged from $\alpha = .76$ to .80 (Yıldız and Çetin, 2020). In this study, the reliability coefficient for the entire scale was $\alpha = .86$. Second-order CFA revealed that the scale's five sub-dimensions could be represented under a higher-order factor of perceived professional identity and that the model fits the available data well ($\chi^2/df = 3.00$, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .05, GFI = .91, CFI = .95, IFI = .95). In line with the theoretical focus of this study, which treats professional identity as a holistic construct rather than as sub-dimensions, the scale's total score was used in the analyses.

2.2.4 Teacher occupational self-efficacy short form

The scale developed by Santa-Cruz-Espinoza et al. (2024) and adapted into Turkish by Çiçek et al. (2026) assesses teachers' occupational self-efficacy in performing professional duties, coping with work-related problems, and managing professional processes. The scale is unidimensional and consists of six 5-point Likert items. Higher scores indicate higher perceptions of occupational self-efficacy. Construct validity of the Turkish version was tested by CFA and reported that the single-factor structure exhibited acceptable fit ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.42$, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .03, CFI = .97, TLI = .95, NFI = .96). Internal consistency coefficient for the scale was reported to be $\alpha = .86$. In the current study, α was .86; CFA indicated fit for the model ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 3.94$, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .05, GFI = .98, CFI = .99, IFI = .99). Factor loadings ranged from 0.65 to 0.79.

2.3 Data analysis

Analyses were conducted in multiple phases. The dataset was prepared, continuous variables were examined for descriptive statistics, and bivariate relationships were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients. Harman's one-factor test was used to evaluate potential common-method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To investigate the primary goal of understanding the mediating roles of occupational self-efficacy (M1) and perceived professional identity (M2) between person-job fit (X) and career sustainability (Y), the PROCESS Macro by Hayes (2022) was used. Specifically, Model 6 was used to test three indirect pathways via: (i) occupational self-efficacy alone ($X \rightarrow M1 \rightarrow Y$), (ii) professional identity alone ($X \rightarrow M2 \rightarrow Y$), and (iii) the theoretically identified sequential indirect path ($X \rightarrow M1 \rightarrow M2 \rightarrow Y$) between person-job fit, occupational self-efficacy, professional identity, and career sustainability. The model also assessed the coefficients for the total effect, direct effects, and total indirect effect.

Nonparametric bootstrap resampling method was used to assess the significance of the mediating effects. For this purpose, 5,000 bootstrap samples were generated, and 95% confidence intervals were calculated. In the serial mediation analyses, unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standard errors (SE), t -values, p -values, and bootstrap confidence intervals were reported. To assess the model's explanatory power, the coefficients of determination (R^2) were examined for each regression equation.

3 Results

3.1 Preliminary analysis

An examination of descriptive statistics in Table 1 reveals that the skewness values for the variables range from -0.95 to -0.17 whereas kurtosis values range from -0.47 to 2.98 . These values fall within the criteria of $|\text{skewness}| < 2$ and $|\text{kurtosis}| < 7$, which are widely accepted for assessing univariate normality, indicating

that the data do not statistically deviate from a normal distribution (Curran et al., 1996). In addition, variance inflation factor (VIF), tolerance, and condition index (CI) were examined to assess multicollinearity among independent variables. The findings showed that VIF values from 1.16 to 1.34, tolerance values from .75 to .86, and condition index values from 15.80 to 21.02. These results meet the recommended threshold criteria of $\text{VIF} < 10$, $\text{tolerance} > .10$, and $\text{CI} < 30$, indicating no multicollinearity among the variables (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). Harman's one-factor test indicated that the first factor explained 30.83% of the total variance, suggesting that common-method bias was not a major influence.

As presented in Table 1, career sustainability was positively associated with person-job fit ($r = .30$), occupational self-efficacy ($r = .60$), and professional identity ($r = .44$). Person-job fit was positively associated with both occupational self-efficacy ($r = .31$) and professional identity ($r = .32$). Finally, occupational self-efficacy is positively associated with professional identity ($r = .47$). All coefficients were significant at $p < .001$.

3.2 Serial indirect effects of person-job fit and career sustainability

Table 2 shows the serial mediating roles of occupational self-efficacy and professional identity on the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability.

In the first model, there was a positive and statistically significant relationship between person-job fit and occupational self-efficacy ($\beta = .31$, $t = 6.51$, $p < .001$). The second model shows that both person-job fit ($\beta = .20$, $t = 4.21$, $p < .001$) and occupational self-efficacy ($\beta = .40$, $t = 8.72$, $p < .001$) are positively and significantly related to professional identity. The proportion of variance explained by the model was 25% ($F = 64.78$, $p < .001$). In the third model, occupational self-efficacy ($\beta = .49$, $t = 10.74$, $p < .001$) and professional identity ($\beta = .19$, $t = 4.20$, $p < .001$) are positively associated with career sustainability. In contrast, the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability was not statistically significant ($\beta = .08$, $t = 1.89$,

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

Variable	a	b	c	d
a: Career sustainability	1			
b: Person-job fit	.30**	1		
c: Occupational self-efficacy	.60**	.31**	1	
d: Professional identity	.44**	.32**	.47**	1
Mean	45.71	16.02	22.64	63.04
Standard Deviation	11.83	2.45	3.28	8.78
Condition Index	1	15.80	19.31	21.02
Variance Inflation Factor	-	1.16	1.33	1.34
Tolerance	-	.86	.75	.75
Skewness	-.34	-.95	-.63	-.17
Kurtosis	-.47	2.98	1.13	-.16

** $p < 0.01$.

$p > .05$). The model explained 40% of the variance in career sustainability ($F = 86.23$, $p < .001$). A summary of the current model is presented in Figure 2.

Table 3 shows that the direct relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability is not statistically significant ($B = .39$, 95% CI $[-.016, .790]$). In contrast, the total indirect effect was significant ($B = 1.04$, 95% CI $[.648, 1.493]$). Among the indirect pathways examined, the strongest indirect relationship was found in the pathway from person-job fit $\rightarrow$ occupational self-efficacy $\rightarrow$ career sustainability ($B = .74$, 95% CI $[.416, 1.090]$). In addition, the relationships person-job fit $\rightarrow$ professional identity $\rightarrow$ career sustainability ($B = .18$, 95% CI $[.070, .346]$) and the serial mediation path person-job fit $\rightarrow$ occupational self-efficacy $\rightarrow$ professional identity $\rightarrow$ career sustainability were significant ($B = .12$, 95% CI $[.050, .212]$).

4 Discussion

Serial multiple mediation analysis showed that the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability was mediated by occupational self-efficacy and professional identity among teachers. Correlations showed that all bivariate relationships between person-job fit, occupational self-efficacy, professional identity, and career sustainability were positive and statistically significant. Person-job fit had a positive relationship with occupational self-efficacy in the first step; together, person-job fit and occupational self-efficacy explained 25% of the variance

in professional identity in the second step. Finally, whereas occupational self-efficacy and professional identity showed significant relationships with career sustainability, the direct effect of person-job fit on career sustainability became non-significant in the third step. The total model explained 40% of the variation in career sustainability. Whereas the direct relationship is not statistically significant, the significant indirect relationships indicate that occupational self-efficacy and professional identity are associated with the relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability.

Among the three indirect paths tested, the highest coefficient was observed along the “person-occupation fit $\rightarrow$ occupational self-efficacy $\rightarrow$ career sustainability” path. This path was followed, in order, by the single indirect path via professional identity and the three-stage sequential path (person-job fit $\rightarrow$ occupational self-efficacy $\rightarrow$ professional identity $\rightarrow$ career sustainability). The indirect relationship observed through occupational self-efficacy is stronger than other indirect relationships, which underscores the importance of occupational self-efficacy in the model. Occupational self-efficacy is not only directly related to career sustainability but also shows a meaningful indirect relationship through professional identity. The three-variable sequential mediation model yielded a smaller but statistically significant coefficient. This finding indicates that professional identity is involved in a significant sequential mediating relationship with occupational self-efficacy and career sustainability.

Our findings are consistent with the Person-Environment Fit Theory, Self-Efficacy Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory,

TABLE 2 Findings of the Hayes model 6 analysis.

Predictors	Model 1 (OS)		Model 2 (PI)		Model 3 (CS)	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Person-job fit	.31	6.51***	.20	4.21***	.08	1.89
Occupational self-efficacy (OS)			.40	8.72***	.49	10.74***
Professional identity (PI)					.19	4.20***
R^2	.10		.25		.40	
F	42.39***		64.78***		86.23***	

$n = 390$, CS, career sustainability.
*** $p < 0.001$.

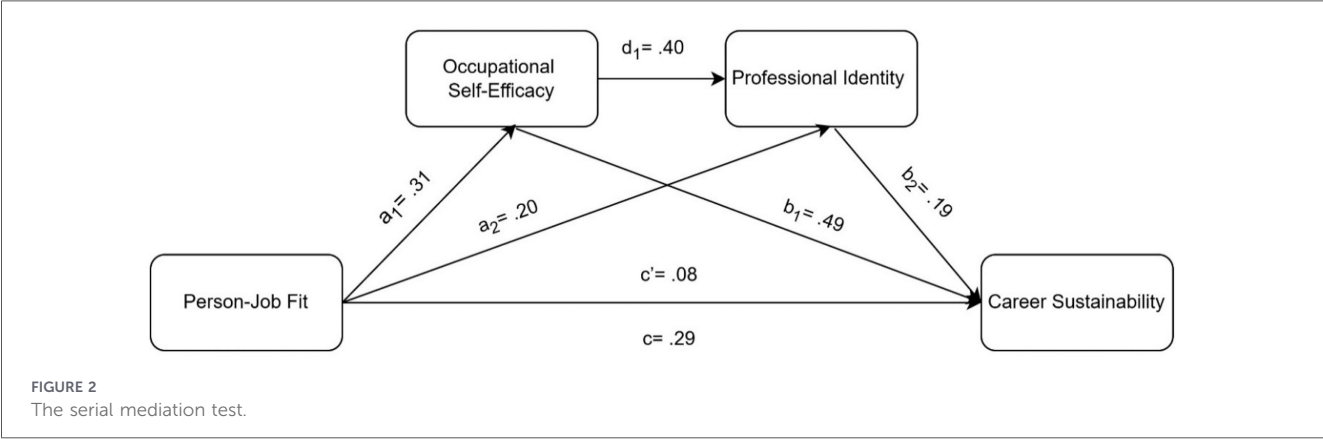


TABLE 3 Direct and indirect effects within the framework of the hayes model 6.

Path	Effect size	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Direct effect	.39	.21	−.016	.790
Total indirect effect	1.04	.21	.648	1.493
Person-job fit→ Occupational self-efficacy→ Career sustainability	.74	.17	.416	1.090
Person-job fit→ Professional identity → Career sustainability	.18	.07	.070	.346
Person-job fit→ Occupational self-efficacy→ professional identity →career sustainability	.12	.04	.050	.212
Total effect	1.42	.23	.962	1.884

and the Sustainable Career Model. For example, the Person-Environment Fit Theory posits that the alignment between an individual and a job serves as a psychological resource that supports career development (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Langgeng et al., 2021). In this regard, the alignment between teachers’ knowledge, skills, values, and interests and the characteristics of teaching can be considered a fundamental psychological resource related to teachers’ beliefs in their own ability to successfully fulfill their professional duties (Cable and DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Higher person-job fit is associated with numerous positive outcomes among various occupations, such as motivation, performance, and job satisfaction (e.g., Alqhaiwi et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2025; Van Iddekinge et al., 2023).

From the Self-Efficacy Theory perspective (Bandura, 1997), a work environment that aligns with an individual’s competencies can be evaluated in relation to mastery, which are closely linked to self-efficacy beliefs (Jiang et al., 2025; Wilson et al., 2020). In addition, positive relationships between occupational self-efficacy and professional identity can also be explained within the framework of the Social Cognitive Career Theory, which posits that individual behavior is shaped by the mutual interaction of personal factors, environmental influences, and actions (Bandura, 1986; Luszczynska and Schwarzer, 2020; Scott et al., 2024; Woodcock and Tournaki, 2023). By incorporating self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal selection, the Social Cognitive Career Theory provides a robust foundation for understanding the development of professional identity (Damodar et al., 2024; Lent et al., 1994; Lent and Brown, 2019; Wang et al., 2022). Current findings linking teachers’ professional identity to career sustainability align with the Sustainable Career Model proposed by De Vos et al. (2020). This model states that a sustainable career is feasible by maintaining a balance among health, happiness, and productivity over time and that finding meaning in one’s work is the cornerstone of the process. Teachers with stronger professional identity are likely to be more resilient in the face of professional challenges, and such an identity instills

perseverance and a clear sense of direction (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Wu et al., 2024). Therefore, professional identity can be regarded as a key component within the meaningful indirect relationship between occupational self-efficacy and career sustainability.

This study makes a field-specific contribution by examining occupational self-efficacy and professional identity, which are typically treated as independent constructs (e.g., Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Beijard et al., 2004; Canrinus et al., 2012; Klassen and Chiu, 2010). By investigating these variables within a sequential model, this study makes a unique contribution to the field. Furthermore, it builds upon previous studies demonstrating the relationship between person-job fit and professional attitudes among teachers (Ellis et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2023; Kristof-Brown et al., 2005; Van Woerkom et al., 2024; Xiao et al., 2021) and serves as a valuable test of De Vos et al.’s (2020) theoretical model within an evidence-based mediation framework.

The lack of statistical significance for the direct effect conveys a critical message: Organizational practices that focus solely on person-job fit may overlook other important factors related to career sustainability. Educational administrators, program developers, and career counselors should consider feedback mechanisms related to teachers’ perceptions of success, occupational self-efficacy, and person-job fit. In addition, it may be helpful to consider occupational self-efficacy and professional identity together in long-term professional development and in-service training programs.

In conclusion, this study has shown that the direct relationship between person-job fit and career sustainability among teachers is not statistically significant; however, the sequential indirect relationship, mediated by occupational self-efficacy and professional identity, is. These findings suggest that it may be beneficial to consider factors related to occupational self-efficacy and professional identity, in addition to person-job fit, when developing organizational policies and practices aimed at career sustainability.

4.1 Limitations and future research

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. First, because the study used a cross-sectional design, the observed relationships among variables should not be interpreted as cause-and-effect or temporal sequences; rather, they should be understood as theoretically grounded correlational trends. Longitudinal or experimental designs will more clearly identify causal mechanisms between variables in future research. Second, all data collected simultaneously from teachers’ self-reports may introduce common method bias (CMB). Although Harman’s one-factor test indicated that CMB was unlikely, it cannot be completely ruled out. To strengthen the methodology, future research could incorporate multiple data sources, such as assessments by principals or superintendents and objective performance metrics. Third, convenience sampling and the lack of detailed geographic data limit how well the sample reflects the broader teaching population and constrain the generalizability. Future studies should use sampling methods that better represent various

geographic areas and school types. Fourth, the examined framework does not encompass all individual and organizational factors likely to be related to career sustainability. Including variables such as organizational support, burnout, or job stress as moderators or control variables in future studies will deepen the model's explanatory power.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Bayburt University (Decision No.: 72; Date: 6 May 2026). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

MD: Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Software, Writing – original draft. İY: Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. KD: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. MB: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Data curation.

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