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Motivation and Equity Disposition Profiles among Pre-service Teachers: A Cross-National Latent Profile Analysis

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This study examines how pre-service teachers' motivations for entering the teaching profession are profiled and how these profiles relate to equity disposition profiles across two national contexts. Latent profile analysis was used to identify separate latent profiles of motivation and equity-disposition for a cross-national sample of 540 pre-service teachers from Romania (n = 295) and the United States (n = 245). Motivations were measured with items from the FIT-Choice framework and equity dispositions were measured with the Multicultural Teacher Disposition Scale, which captures social awareness, advocacy for students, and meekness. Three motivation profiles and two equity-disposition profiles emerged in Romania, with a dominant Passion-Led group. In the US, two motivation profiles and three equity-disposition profiles were identified, with the larger group being characterized by high intrinsic motivation. The associations between motivation-profile and equity-disposition profile membership were stronger and more consistent in the Romanian sample than in the more variable U.S. sample. The results show that the relationship between motivation and equity dispositions is not linear but depends on how intrinsic, altruistic and extrinsic motivations are combined.

Keywords: teacher motivation, equity dispositions, latent profile analysis, pre-service teachers, person-centered approach, teacher education, cross-national comparison

INTRODUCTION

Teacher preparation programs play a central role in shaping how future educators understand and enact equitable teaching practices. These programs not only prepare teachers with pedagogical knowledge but also build capacity for diverse classrooms through the development of equity dispositions, including social awareness, advocacy for marginalized groups, and a critical understanding of structural inequalities (Dyches & Boyd, 2017; Jensen et al., 2023). At the same time, pre-service teachers enter these programs with varying motivations for choosing the teaching profession, including intrinsic interest, altruistic commitments, and extrinsic considerations such as job stability or external influence (Watt & Richardson, 2007). These motivations shape how they engage with teacher education and how they position themselves in relation to equity and social justice.

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Prior research has typically examined the relationship between teacher motivations and equity-related beliefs using variable-centered approaches. Intrinsic and altruistic motivations are often associated with stronger commitments to inclusive and socially responsive teaching, while extrinsic motivations show more variable associations (Heinz, 2015). However, these approaches assume population homogeneity and may obscure meaningful subgroups of pre-service teachers who combine motivations in different ways. Emerging work suggests that motivation is multidimensional, with individuals endorsing multiple motives to varying degrees (Thommen et al., 2021). In this view, a person-centered approach is needed to help provide a more appropriate framework for examining how profiles of motivations relate to professional dispositions.

Research on equity dispositions indicates that these beliefs are unevenly developed among pre-service teachers. While some demonstrate strong commitments to recognizing structural inequities and engaging in advocacy, others adopt more procedural understandings of inclusion that do not fully engage structural critique (Gorski, 2017). Although these dispositions can be shaped through teacher education experiences (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), the extent to which different motivational patterns correspond to distinct equity orientations remains underexplored.

What remains unresolved is whether different patterns of motivation among pre-service teachers are related to different orientations toward equity-dispositions, and whether these relations are similar or different across national contexts of teacher education. Against this background, the present study adopts a person-centered approach (latent profile analysis - LPA), to examine the relationship between pre-service teachers' motivations and their equity-oriented dispositions. This study aims to identify motivational and equity-disposition profiles among pre-service teachers in the United States and Romania, and to examine how motivation-profile membership associates with equity-disposition profile membership within each national context.

Three research questions guided this work:

(a) How do the number, composition, and prevalence of latent profiles differ between pre-service teachers in the U.S. and Romania based on motivations and equity dispositions?

(b) What latent profiles can be identified across the combined sample?

(c) To what extent is motivation-profile membership associated with equity-disposition profile membership across contexts?

Teacher Motivations and Professional Orientation

Teacher motivation research commonly identifies three primary drivers influencing entry into the teaching profession: intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic motivations (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Intrinsic motivation refers to personal interest and fulfillment derived from teaching, whereas altruistic motivation reflects a desire to contribute to the

well-being of others. Extrinsic motivation includes external considerations such as job stability, financial security, and career-related benefits (Han & Yin, 2016).

Empirical evidence suggests that intrinsic and altruistic motivations are generally associated with stronger engagement in teacher education, persistence, and student-centered orientations, while altruistically motivated individuals often express commitments to supporting students and addressing broader social concerns (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014). Extrinsic motivations show more variable associations and have been linked to lower engagement in reflective practice and weaker alignment with equity-oriented teaching when they dominate (Struyven et al., 2013). However, intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic motivations often coexist, and therefore their combined configuration may be more informative than any single dimension (Jugović et al., 2012). Treating these motivations as independent predictors can limit explanations about how pre-service teachers orient toward teaching.

This perspective highlights the heterogeneity of motivational patterns among pre-service teachers, suggesting that motivation operates as a structured configuration rather than independent predictors (Watt & Richardson, 2007), and may evolve in response to teacher education experiences and broader contextual influences (Day et al., 2006).

Equity Dispositions in Teacher Education

Dispositions in teacher education are commonly understood as enduring patterns of professional thought, belief, and action that shape how teachers interpret and respond to classroom situations (Osguthorpe, 2008; Sockett, 2009). These orientations influence instructional decision-making and interactions with students and are distinct from discrete knowledge and skills, representing deeper professional commitments. Although relatively stable, dispositions can be developed through teacher education, reflection, and experience (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Among these are equity dispositions, which refer to beliefs and orientations that guide commitments to fairness, inclusion, and social justice in educational settings (Gorski, 2017). These dispositions involve teachers' willingness to examine their own beliefs and take purposeful action to support students in their institutions. Recent research has identified three key dimensions of equity dispositions that are used within this study: social awareness, advocacy for students, and meekness (Jensen et al., 2023). Social awareness involves recognizing how structural and institutional factors shape educational opportunities and outcomes (Dyches & Boyd, 2017). Advocacy for students refers to a willingness to act in support of equitable conditions, including challenging exclusionary practices (Athanases & Martin, 2006). Meekness reflects intellectual humility and openness to learning from students and communities (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016). At the school level, Euscategui and Saavedra (2024) showed that inclusive coexistence structures which include equity-oriented teachers tend to shape students' capacity for participation and rights recognition in classrooms.

Pre-service teachers vary widely in these dispositions. While some demonstrate strong commitments to equity and structural understanding, others adopt more procedural approaches emphasizing interpersonal respect without engaging broader systemic issues

(Gorski, 2017). In fact, these dispositions do not hold distinct dimensions as teachers can possess a higher level of empathy and at the same time be bad at inclusive-oriented teaching. Targeted preparation, including critical reflection and engagement with diverse learners, can strengthen these dispositions over time (Fajardo-Dack et al., 2024).

Linking Teacher Motivations and Equity Dispositions

Understanding the relationship between teacher motivations and equity dispositions is important because these domains jointly shape how teachers interpret their professional roles and respond to diverse learners and structural inequalities (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2015; Sleeter, 2017). Intrinsic and altruistic motivations have often been associated with stronger commitments to inclusive and equitable teaching, as individuals driven by personal interest and social contribution may be more receptive to equity-oriented perspectives (Watt et al., 2012).

However, this relationship is not straightforward, as motivations may shape whether individuals approach teaching as a technical task or as a practice requiring responsiveness to students' social realities (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). This distinction is particularly relevant in teacher education, where pre-service teachers enter with differing motivations that influence engagement with coursework and reflection. For example, pre-service teachers who choose to teacher primarily to shape the future of society or give back to their communities are more likely to exhibit stronger equity dispositions (Watt et al., 2012). Adversely, a pre-service teacher motivated by a sentimental desire to "rescue" children often enter classrooms with a romanticized view of marginalization (Matias, 2013). Even more important is that the dimensions of both motivation and equity dispositions do not reveal a clearly defined relationship. The relationship between altruistic motivation and an equity disposition like empathy may not direct. Although teacher education programs can support equity dispositions, these orientations do not develop uniformly and may depend on underlying motivational configurations (Garmon, 2004).

Need for a person-centered approach

Although prior research has provided important insights into the relationship between teacher motivations and equity dispositions, most studies have relied on variable-centered approaches such as regression and factor analysis, which estimate associations across a population and may obscure meaningful heterogeneity in how motivations and dispositions are combined (Bauer & Shanahan, 2007). These approaches do not reveal whether specific subgroups of pre-service teachers configure motivation and equity differently, or whether population-level associations indicate any meaningful pattern.

By contrast, person-centered approaches such as latent profile analysis (LPA) identify subgroups based on shared patterns across multiple characteristics, capturing within-person configurations that variable-centered methods may overlook (Spurk et al., 2020). Given that pre-service teachers often hold multiple coexisting motivations, examining these configurations provides a more precise understanding of professional orientation. Person-centered analyses are also well suited to exploratory contexts where relationships between constructs are not fully established (Howard & Hoffman, 2018).

This approach is particularly relevant in cross-cultural contexts, as teacher motivations and equity dispositions are shaped by sociopolitical and institutional conditions that may differ across national settings (Watt & Richardson, 2012). The two countries compared in this study, Romania and the United States, differ substantially in how teacher education is structured and how equity is institutionally supported. While the United States has embedded equity and inclusion as explicit teacher education expectations, Romania operates within a central system where preparation discourse centres primarily on subject knowledge and pedagogical competence, making the comparison theoretically productive for understanding how context shapes the motivation-equity relationship

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design using secondary data from a previously collected dataset of pre-service teachers. A prior analysis of this dataset examined motivations and equity dispositions using factor analysis and regression but did not account for heterogeneous subgroups. The present study uses the same data to extend that work analytically, with LPA applied as a distinct and complementary method rather than a replication. This study applies LPA to identify unobserved subgroups based on patterns of motivational and equity-disposition responses. Separate LPAs were conducted within each national sample, and the association between motivation-profile and equity-disposition profile membership was examined using a three-step approach to account for classification uncertainty (Spurk et al., 2020).

Participants and Instrument

The analytic sample included 540 pre-service teachers enrolled in university-based teacher preparation programs in Romania (n = 295) and the United States (n = 245). The sample included students preparing for elementary, secondary, and early childhood education careers. The majority of participants identified as female, reflecting the gendered nature of the profession. The Romanian sample was primarily ethnically Romanian, while the U.S. sample was predominantly White. Socioeconomic differences were observed, with a higher proportion of Romanian participants reporting lower maternal education levels (see Table 1).

Table 1
Participant characteristics by national context

		Romania (n=295)	United States (n=245)
Gender	Female	252 (85.4%)	225 (91.8%)
	Male	24 (8.1%)	14 (5.7%)
	Other	3 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Mother's Education	Less than high school	38 (12.9%)	3 (1.2%)
	High school	119 (40.3%)	15 (6.1%)
	Some college	39 (13.2%)	71 (29.0%)
	Bachelor's degree	57 (19.3%)	116 (47.4%)
	Graduate degree	17 (5.8%)	31 (12.7%)
Ethnicity (Romania)	Romanian	261 (88.5%)	-
	Hungarian	13 (4.4%)	-
Ethnicity (United States)	White	-	207 (84.5%)
	Other categories	-	28 (11.4%)

Participants were recruited voluntarily through a web-based survey administered during a teacher education course. Equity dispositions were assessed using 19 items from the Multicultural Teacher Disposition Scale (MTDS), measuring social awareness, advocacy for students, and meekness on a six-point scale (Jensen et al., 2023). Teacher motivations were measured using 11 Likert-scale items assessing intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic reasons for entering the profession, adapted from the FIT-Choice framework (Watt & Richardson, 2007). All scales used in this study achieved adequate factorial validity and reliability, above recognized standards, to warrant being used in this study. Analytic sample sizes varied slightly across models due to missing data, with no systematic patterns of missingness observed across key variables. Both samples met the minimum threshold recommended for LPA with this number of indicators, though the small size of certain extracted profiles is acknowledged as a limitation of the analytic solution

Initial Analysis

Following descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) models were conducted in the prior study to assess the structure of the equity disposition items. The initial model included all items, and items with weak loadings or poor fit were removed based on model diagnostics. Model fit was evaluated using χ^2, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR. The final three-factor model (social awareness, advocacy, meekness) demonstrated acceptable fit across samples. This provided support for the use of the 16-item version of the MTDS in the present study (see Table 2).

Table 2
Model fit summary for equity disposition measurement models

		χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Combined	Initial model	3.73	0.82	0.79	0.07	0.06
	Reduced model (final)	2.85	0.89	0.87	0.06	0.05
United States	Initial model	2.2	0.86	0.84	0.07	0.07
	Reduced model (final)	1.9	0.91	0.90	0.06	0.06
Romania	Initial model	2.35	0.81	0.79	0.07	0.06
	Reduced model (final)	1.93	0.88	0.86	0.05	0.05

Data Analysis Procedure

LPA models were estimated using Mplus version 8 (Muthén et al., 2017). Model selection was based on multiple criteria, including Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), sample-size adjusted BIC, entropy, and the bootstrapped likelihood ratio test (BLRT). Lower AIC and BIC values indicated better model fit, while entropy values closer to 1 indicated higher classification accuracy.

In addition to statistical criteria, model selection considered class size, interpretability, and theoretical coherence. Solutions with very small classes (less than 1% of the sample) were not retained. In cases where statistical indices favored more complex models, more parsimonious solutions were selected when additional classes did not yield stable or interpretable profiles. Some higher-order models resulted in estimation issues, including non-positive definite matrices, indicating potential instability. These models were not retained. Profile characteristics were examined using mean response patterns across indicators. To evaluate cross-national comparability, sequential multi-group LPA models were estimated across both samples simultaneously, incrementally increasing the number of profiles and comparing solutions using AIC, BIC, SSABIC, and entropy to determine whether comparable profile structures emerged across contexts.

Association Between Motivation and Equity-Disposition Profiles

To examine the association between motivation profiles and equity-disposition profiles while accounting for classification uncertainty, a bias-adjusted three-step approach was used. First, separate latent profile models were estimated for motivation and equity-disposition indicators. Second, participants were assigned to their most likely profiles, and the classification-error matrices were retained. Third, the association between motivation-profile membership and equity-disposition-profile membership was estimated using a multinomial logistic model adjusted for classification error. This approach preserves the measurement model for each profile solution while reducing bias that would result from treating modal profile assignments as perfectly observed.

FINDINGS

Motivation Profiles and Equity-Disposition Profiles

The latent profile analyses revealed key patterns for both motivation and equity-disposition profiles. Motivational profiles differed in number and composition across

the two national samples. On the other hand, equity-disposition profiles showed cross-national variation in both structure and prevalence. For motivations, a three-profile solution was retained for Romanian pre-service teachers, whereas a two-profile solution was selected for the U.S. sample. For equity dispositions, a two-profile solution was retained for Romania and a three-profile solution for the U.S. These selections reflected a balance of statistical fit, class size, and interpretability (see Supplementary Tables 1 and 2).

Table 3
Motivations of pre-service teachers (reasons for choosing the profession)

	Romania			US	
	Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3	Profile 1	Profile 2
	(n=56,21.7%)	(n=23, 8.9%)	(n=178,69.2%)	(n=199, 86.9%)	(n=30, 13.1%)
	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)
Intrinsic	3.28 (.60)	4.56 (.14)	4.60 (.22)	4.57 (.05)	4.33 (.14)
	3.28 (.65)	4.31 (.17)	4.36 (.18)	3.97 (.07)	3.60 (.19)
	2.82 (.43)	4.00 (.19)	3.49 (.13)	3.92 (.08)	3.55 (.20)
	3.22 (.28)	3.96 (.20)	4.13 (.10)	4.39 (.06)	4.27 (.14)
Extrinsic					
Good career	2.41 (.58)	3.79 (.22)	3.80 (.17)	2.65 (.08)	2.74 (.22)
Accident	1.78 (.24)	1.59 (.23)	1.30 (.09)	1.19 (.03)	3.32 (.11)
Vacation	2.21 (.48)	2.61 (.30)	2.04 (.17)	2.57 (.09)	3.08 (.24)
Secure job	2.91 (.35)	4.52 (.14)	3.94 (.11)	3.16 (.08)	3.31 (.19)
Runs in family	1.12 (.05)	3.47 (.17)	1.18 (.03)	1.77 (.08)	2.01 (.21)
Altrustic					
School not good	3.21 (.60)	3.39 (.27)	3.29 (.13)	1.89 (.09)	1.97 (.22)
Foster marginal	3.04 (.31)	4.18 (.18)	4.33 (.11)	3.94 (.07)	3.60 (.20)

All class-specific indicator means were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Table 3 above presents the motivation profiles across both samples. In the Romanian sample, three distinct profiles emerged. Profile 1, labeled Support-Driven Seekers (21.7%), was characterized by relatively low intrinsic and extrinsic motivation but moderate altruistic motivation, suggesting an orientation toward helping others without strong personal or career-driven commitment. Profile 2, All-In Enthusiasts (8.9%), showed consistently high levels across all three motivational dimensions. Profile 3, Passion-Led Contributors (69.2%), was the largest group and displayed high intrinsic motivation alongside moderate altruistic and extrinsic motivations, suggesting a primary orientation toward personal fulfillment. Across these profiles, the key distinction is how intrinsic motivation is present and how it is weighted relative to altruistic commitment.

In the U.S. sample, two profiles were identified. Profile 1, labeled Fulfillment-Oriented Teachers (86.9%), showed high intrinsic motivation with moderate altruistic and extrinsic endorsement, reflecting a strong personal investment in the teaching role. Profile 2, labeled Situational Decision-Makers (13.1%), showed lower intrinsic

motivation but higher extrinsic motivation, suggesting that external factors such as job stability or convenience played a more prominent role in career choice.

Table 4
Equity dispositions of pre-service teachers

	Romania			US	
	Profile 1	Profile 2	Profile 3	Profile 1	Profile 2
	(n=56,21.7%)	(n=23, 8.9%)	(n=178,69.2%)	(n=199, 86.9%)	(n=30, 13.1%)
	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)	M (SE)
Intrinsic	3.28 (.60)	4.56 (.14)	4.60 (.22)	4.57 (.05)	4.33 (.14)
	3.28 (.65)	4.31 (.17)	4.36 (.18)	3.97 (.07)	3.60 (.19)
	2.82 (.43)	4.00 (.19)	3.49 (.13)	3.92 (.08)	3.55 (.20)
	3.22 (.28)	3.96 (.20)	4.13 (.10)	4.39 (.06)	4.27 (.14)
Extrinsic					
Good career	2.41 (.58)	3.79 (.22)	3.80 (.17)	2.65 (.08)	2.74 (.22)
Accident	1.78 (.24)	1.59 (.23)	1.30 (.09)	1.19 (.03)	3.32 (.11)
Vacation	2.21 (.48)	2.61 (.30)	2.04 (.17)	2.57 (.09)	3.08 (.24)
Secure job	2.91 (.35)	4.52 (.14)	3.94 (.11)	3.16 (.08)	3.31 (.19)
Runs in family	1.12 (.05)	3.47 (.17)	1.18 (.03)	1.77 (.08)	2.01 (.21)
Altrustic					
School not good	3.21 (.60)	3.39 (.27)	3.29 (.13)	1.89 (.09)	1.97 (.22)
Foster marginal	3.04 (.31)	4.18 (.18)	4.33 (.11)	3.94 (.07)	3.60 (.20)

All class-specific indicator means were statistically significant at $p < .001$.

Table 4 presents equity-disposition profiles. In Romania, two profiles were identified. Profile 1, labeled Limited Engagement (21.7%), showed lower levels across social awareness, advocacy, and meekness, indicating weaker engagement with equity-related issues. Profile 2, Equity-Focused (78.2%), showed consistently high levels across all three dimensions, reflecting strong alignment with equity-oriented teaching practices.

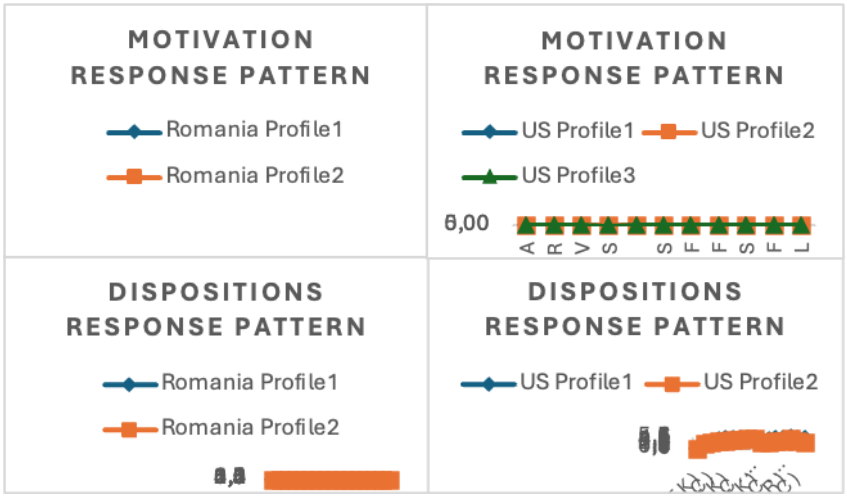
In the U.S. sample, three profiles emerged. Profile 1, Moderate Awareness (52.9%), reflected moderate levels across all dimensions, suggesting general support for equity without strong engagement. Profile 2, Minimally Engaged (9.8%), showed the lowest levels across all indicators, indicating limited attention to equity-related concerns. Profile 3, Strong Equity Advocates (37.1%), demonstrated the highest levels of social awareness, advocacy, and openness, reflecting strong commitment to equity-oriented practice.

Multi-group and Cross-National Patterns

Sequential multi-group LPA models were estimated across both samples to examine the comparability of profile structures across contexts (see Supplementary Tables 3 and 4). A three-profile motivation structure was examined across both countries, revealing differences in distribution. Romanian pre-service teachers were more concentrated in a single dominant profile, whereas U.S. participants showed a more balanced distribution across profiles.

Figure 1

Item-level response patterns for motivation and dispositional domains among pre-service teacher profiles in Romania and the US



For equity dispositions, a two-profile structure was retained across both samples. In both contexts, the majority of participants were classified into a profile characterized by stronger equity dispositions, while a smaller proportion demonstrated lower engagement.

Figure 1 illustrates item-level response patterns across profiles. Profiles characterized by stronger equity dispositions consistently showed higher scores across indicators of social awareness, advocacy, and openness. In contrast, lower-engagement profiles showed reduced endorsement of items related to structural inequality, privilege, and active advocacy.

Notably, while similar profile structures were observed across contexts, differences emerged in the intensity and distribution of responses. Romanian participants in higher-equity profiles tended to show more consistent alignment across items, whereas U.S. participants displayed greater variability within profiles, particularly among lower-engagement groups. These patterns suggest that while comparable profiles can be identified across contexts, their internal composition and prevalence differ, indicating that profile labels do not carry identical meaning across national settings.

Association Between Motivation and Equity-Disposition Profiles

The three-step analysis examined associations between motivation profiles and equity-disposition profiles (see Table 3; Figure 2). In the Romanian sample, motivation profiles showed relatively consistent alignment with equity dispositions. Individuals in the Support-Driven Seekers profile were more likely to belong to the Limited Engagement group, indicating weaker alignment with equity-oriented dispositions. In contrast, those in the All-In Enthusiasts profile were more likely to belong to the Equity-Focused group, suggesting that high levels across motivational dimensions

corresponded with stronger equity orientations. The strongest alignment was observed among Passion-Led Contributors, who showed the highest likelihood of belonging to the Equity-Focused group.

In the U.S. sample, the relationship between motivation and equity dispositions was less consistent. Individuals in the intrinsically oriented profile were distributed across multiple equity-disposition groups, including a substantial proportion classified within the Minimally Engaged group. This suggests that intrinsic motivation alone did not correspond consistently with stronger equity dispositions. The Situational Decision-Makers profile displayed a split pattern, with comparable likelihood of belonging to both higher and lower equity-disposition groups, indicating divergent pathways associated with extrinsic motivations.

Most important is that similar motivational profiles do not guarantee similar equity dispositions. Romanian profiles showed more consistent alignment between motivation and equity orientation, whereas U.S. profiles exhibited greater variability. This cross-context divergence indicates that the translation of motivation into equity engagement is shaped by conditions that extend beyond individual motivational configuration.

Figure 2
Relationship between motivation profiles and disposition profiles among pre-service teachers in Romania and the US

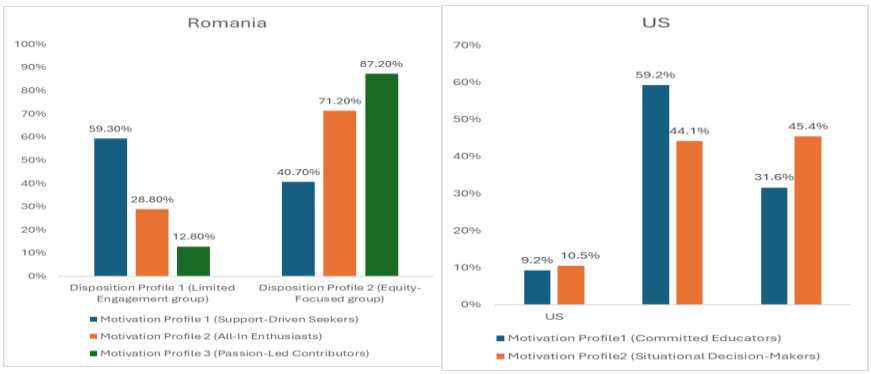


Table 5
Latent profile analysis (LPA) model fit indices for identifying motivation profiles predictive of dispositional class membership

								Class No. & Probabilities		
Number of latent classes	Number of parameters estimated	AIC	BIC	SSABIC	BLRT	BLRT P-Value	Entropy	Class1	Class2	Class3
Romania										
1	54	21287.61	21483.11	21311.89	n/a	n/a	n/a	279	n/a	n/a
2	82	20716.52	21013.39	20753.38	627.09	0.0000	0.859	79	197	n/a
3	110	20533.77	20932.01	20583.22	238.75	0.0000	0.879	59	99	118
4	NON-POSITIVE DEFINITE FIRST-ORDER DERIVATIVE PRODUCT MATRIX.									
US										
1	54	17433.75	17620.79	17449.63	n/a	n/a	n/a	236	n/a	n/a
2	82	16908.77	17192.80	16932.89	580.98	0.0000	0.804	132	104	n/a
3	NON-POSITIVE DEFINITE FIRST-ORDER DERIVATIVE PRODUCT MATRIX.									

DISCUSSION

Adopting a person-centered approach, this study examined how pre-service teachers' motivations for entering teaching are organized and how these configurations relate to equity-oriented dispositions. Rather than assuming uniform relationships, the findings indicate that both motivation and equity dispositions are structured in distinct patterns, and that these patterns are associated with different orientations toward equity in practice.

Interpreting Motivation–Equity Profiles

The findings indicate that rather than operating as isolated predictors, motivations appear to function as configurations, with their combined patterns producing different equity outcomes. Instead of individual motivational dimensions operating independently, different combinations of intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic motivations correspond to distinct patterns of equity orientation. This supports the view that teacher motivation is internally structured, with multiple motives coexisting and interacting within individuals, as emphasized by Kaplan and Garner (2017).

A central finding is that intrinsic motivation does not consistently align with stronger equity dispositions. In the Romanian sample, profiles characterized by strong intrinsic motivation were more likely to correspond with equity-focused dispositions. However, this pattern did not hold in the U.S. sample, where a substantial proportion of intrinsically motivated pre-service teachers were classified within lower-engagement equity profiles. This suggests that personal fulfillment and commitment to teaching do not necessarily translate into attention to structural inequities. As Cochran-Smith et al. (2016) argue, teaching can be experienced as meaningful without requiring critical engagement with broader systems of inequality. Similarly, Sleeter (2017) notes that commitment to teaching does not automatically include a social justice orientation.

The findings related to altruistic motivation further illustrate this complexity. Altruism is often assumed to support equity-oriented teaching, yet its influence depends on how it

combines with other motivations. In the Romanian sample, moderate altruistic motivation unaccompanied by strong intrinsic motivation was associated with lower equity engagement. Profiles that combined strong intrinsic and altruistic motivations were more consistently aligned with equity-focused dispositions. This pattern reflects the distinction Sanger and Osguthorpe (2015) draw between care-oriented altruism and justice-oriented commitment, and it aligns with Gorski's (2016) argument that helping individuals and engaging structural inequities represent meaningfully different orientations.

Extrinsic motivation showed a variable pattern, particularly in the U.S. sample. Profiles with stronger extrinsic motivations were associated with both high and low levels of equity engagement, suggesting that external considerations do not determine equity orientation in a uniform way. This aligns with Jugović et al. (2012) who argue that motivations are not mutually exclusive and can shift over time.

Across both contexts, profiles combining intrinsic and altruistic motivations were most consistently associated with stronger equity dispositions, extending arguments by Richardson and Watt (2016).

Contextual Variation in Motivation–Equity Relationships

A second key finding is that the relationship between motivation and equity dispositions varies across contexts. While similar motivational profiles were identified in both Romania and the United States, their association with equity dispositions differed in important ways, indicating that the translation of motivation into professional orientation is shaped by contextual conditions.

In the Romanian sample, motivational profiles showed relatively consistent alignment with equity dispositions. Profiles characterized by stronger intrinsic and altruistic motivations were more likely to correspond with equity-focused orientations, while profiles with weaker or less integrated motivations aligned with lower levels of equity engagement, suggesting a more stable relationship between motivation and equity within this context.

In contrast, the U.S. sample demonstrated greater variability. Profiles characterized by strong intrinsic motivation did not consistently correspond to higher equity engagement, and profiles with stronger extrinsic motivation were associated with mixed outcomes, indicating that similar motivational configurations can correspond to different equity orientations within the same context.

These differences suggest that context shapes how motivations are translated into professional beliefs and dispositions. Flores (2016) demonstrates that professional identity is shaped by institutional structures and expectations. Tatto et al. (2006) also indicates that national context shapes the priorities that are inherently embedded in teacher preparation programs. Romania's more centralized teacher education structure likely produces greater homogeneity in professional socialization, while the decentralized U.S. system generates substantial institutional variation in how equity is framed and taught. The current findings extend this work by showing that even when

similar motivational profiles exist, their implications for equity dispositions differ across contexts.

In both contexts, some pre-service teachers demonstrated strong alignment across social awareness, advocacy, and openness, while others expressed more limited engagement. In the U.S. sample in particular, lower-engagement profiles appeared to reflect a procedural orientation toward inclusion, emphasizing respectful interaction without sustained engagement with structural inequities. Gorski (2016) describes this as a distinction between surface-level diversity approaches and deeper equity literacy, while Souto-Manning and Martell (2019) highlight differences between procedural inclusion and critical engagement.

Across both contexts, stronger equity dispositions were associated with higher levels of openness and humility, reflected in meekness, aligning with the concept of cultural humility (Hook et al., 2013).

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Several limitations should be considered. The cross-sectional design limits conclusions about how motivations and equity dispositions develop over time. Both constructs are dynamic and may change through teacher education experiences (Watt & Richardson, 2007), requiring longitudinal research. The study also relies on self-reported measures, which may be influenced by social desirability, particularly for equity-related constructs. Pre-service teachers may endorse equity-oriented beliefs without fully enacting them (Laughter, 2011; Silverman, 2010). Third, although cross-national, the study did not examine other program-level features, so interpretations regarding contextual differences remain indirect. The samples were also drawn from university-based teacher preparation programs in two specific national contexts, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings beyond comparable settings. Future research would need to incorporate observational or qualitative approaches to fully understand the connection between motivation and equity dispositions. Furthermore, longitudinal methods can be used to better understand change in profile association and possible causalities over time.

Despite these limitations, the findings made in this study have very important implications. Motivation alone is not a reliable indicator of equity orientation. The U.S. data showed that intrinsically motivated pre-service teachers appeared across all three equity-disposition profiles, including the Minimally Engaged group, indicating that teacher education programs should not assume that intrinsically or altruistically motivated candidates will develop equity-focused practices without targeted support. Structured opportunities for critical reflection and engagement with systemic inequities remain essential, particularly for pre-service teachers in the Support-Driven Seekers profile, whose altruistic orientation did not consistently translate into equity engagement (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Garmon, 2004). The identification of distinct profiles, including Situational Decision-Makers and Minimally Engaged groups, further confirms that pre-service teachers enter programs with meaningfully different orientations, indicating the need for differentiated approaches rather than uniform training models. The observed cross-context variation, where Romanian profiles

showed more consistent motivation-equity alignment than U.S. profiles, highlights the importance of examining how institutional conditions shape the development of equity dispositions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how pre-service teachers' motivations are configured and how these configurations relate to equity-oriented dispositions across two national contexts. The findings demonstrate that motivational configurations, rather than individual motivational types, predict equity-related dispositions, and that this relationship does not hold uniformly across different national contexts.

Importantly, comparable motivational profiles produced different equity-oriented values in pre-service teachers in the two national contexts, indicating that the dimensions of motivation are not definite lines for engagement with equity-related issues. These results highlight the importance of examining within-person configurations and considering contextual influences in understanding teacher development. Overall, the study shows that the link between motivation and equity is structured, variable, and context dependent.

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