

AGE AND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL MOTIVATION

WIEK A MOTYWACJA ZAWODOWA NAUCZYCIELI

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Abstract: The aim of this quantitative study was to determine the correlation between teachers' age and their level of motivation.

Material and methods: A post-positivist paradigm was employed. The study was conducted in a survey format using a self-made questionnaire. The number of respondents was 120, with an average age of 44.28 years. Statistical analysis was performed, and the results showed a negligible correlation between age and motivation.

Results: Our study showed that age is not statistically associated with teacher motivation. Respondents demonstrated a higher level of commitment than motivation. Intrinsic motivation proved to be slightly greater than extrinsic motivation, which may indicate the significant role of individual factors related to job satisfaction.

Conclusions: The obtained results show that efforts aimed at strengthening teachers' motivation should focus on internal aspects, regardless of age.

Key words: age, motivation, teachers' motivation, teaching, polish school system

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego badania ilościowego było ustalenie korelacji między wiekiem nauczycieli a ich poziomem motywacji.

Materiał i metody: Zastosowano paradygmat postpozytywistyczny. Badanie przeprowadzono w formie ankietowej, wykorzystując autorski kwestionariusz. Liczba respondentów wyniosła 120, a ich średni wiek wynosił 44,28 roku. Przeprowadzono analizę statystyczną, a uzyskane wyniki wykazały znikomą korelację między wiekiem a motywacją.

Wyniki: Nasze badanie wykazało, że wiek nie jest statystycznie powiązany z motywacją nauczycieli. Respondenci wykazali wyższy poziom zaangażowania niż motywacji. Motywacja wewnętrzna okazała się nieco silniejsza od motywacji zewnętrznej, co może wskazywać na istotną rolę czynników indywidualnych związanych z satysfakcją z pracy.

Wnioski: Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że działania mające na celu wzmocnienie motywacji nauczycieli powinny koncentrować się na aspektach wewnętrznych, niezależnie od wieku.

Słowa kluczowe: wiek, motywacja, motywacja nauczycieli, nauczanie, polski system szkolnictwa

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Introduction

Teachers' professional motivation is one of the key factors determining the quality of school education. It is precisely their level of commitment, willingness to take on teaching challenges, and sense of purpose in their work that largely determine the effectiveness of the teaching and educational process. Contemporary schools face numerous challenges – rising social expectations, dynamic changes in the education system, and increasingly diverse student needs which makes the issue of teacher motivation particularly significant for both educational theory and practice.

At the same time, the teaching community is internally diverse, in part due to age, which may be associated with different professional experiences, career stages, and individual value systems. Beginning teachers may have different sources of motivation than those with many years of experience, for whom job stability, a sense of purpose in their work, or the need for recognition may be important. In turn, teachers in the middle of their careers often balance routine with the need for professional growth. Age, understood not only as a biological category but also as an indicator of a specific stage of life and career, can therefore provide an important interpretive context for the analysis of professional motivation.

In light of the above, the main research aim of this article is to describe and interpret studies on teachers' professional motivation, taking age differences into account.

Theoretical framework

Motivation is one of the key concepts in the social sciences and pedagogy, referring to the processes that initiate, direct, and sustain an individual's activity. Contemporary approaches emphasize its dynamic and multidimensional nature, indicating that it results from interactions between individual and environmental factors. According to Deci and Ryan, "human motivation concerns energy, direction, persistence and equifinality" (Ryan, Deci, 2020, p. 2). In the educational context, motivation plays a particularly important role because it influences both teacher engagement and the effectiveness of the learning process (Schunk, DiBenedetto, 2020).

One of the most influential contemporary theories of motivation is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan. Within this framework, motivation is perceived as a continuum ranging from amotivation, through different forms of extrinsic motivation, to intrinsic motivation (Ryan, Deci, 2020). A key assumption of SDT is the existence of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Ryan and Deci state that "social contexts supportive of autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster the most volitional and high quality forms of motivation and engagement". The fulfillment of these needs promotes the internalization of motivation, long-term engagement, and psychological well-being. Recent studies confirm that teachers whose psychological needs are satisfied demonstrate higher job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout (Ryan, Deci, 2020, p. 5).

Motivation is also analysed through other theoretical perspectives, including expectancy-value theory and goal-attainment theory. Eccles and Wigfield emphasize that individuals are more likely to engage in activities they perceive as meaningful and achievable (Eccles, Wigfield, 2020). According to expectancy-value theory, motivation depends both on the subjective value attributed to a task and on beliefs regarding one's own competence. Similarly, goal-attainment theories

underline the importance of self-efficacy, achievement expectations, and personal goals in shaping engagement and professional activity (Schunk, DiBenedetto, 2020).

Traditionally, a distinction has been made between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in activities for inherent satisfaction, enjoyment, or personal interest, whereas extrinsic motivation involves acting to obtain rewards or avoid punishment. However, contemporary approaches stress the importance of the internalization of external motives. Ryan and Deci (2020) argue that even externally regulated behaviours may become more autonomous when individuals identify with the personal significance of a task. This perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of motivational processes in educational environments.

Teachers' motivation is considered a multifactorial phenomenon shaped by both personal and contextual variables. Recent research indicates that factors such as self-efficacy, job satisfaction, emotional resilience, and perceived professional value significantly influence teachers' motivation (Han, Yin, 2016). At the same time, contextual variables including working conditions, institutional support, leadership style, and organizational climate, play an equally important role (Klussmann et al., 2008; Pyżalski, Merecz, 2010). Supportive educational environments enhance professional engagement and psychological well-being, whereas excessive workload and lack of support may contribute to stress and burnout (Pyżalski, Merecz, 2010).

Another important area of contemporary research concerns the relationship between teacher motivation and student outcomes. Studies indicate that highly motivated teachers are more likely to employ autonomy-supportive teaching strategies, encourage student participation, and create positive classroom environments (Reeve, 2024). Reeve argues that autonomy-supportive teaching positively influences both students' engagement and teachers' professional satisfaction. Therefore, teacher motivation should be viewed not only as an individual characteristic but also as a factor influencing the broader educational process.

In the context of rapid social and technological changes, increasing attention is being paid to the relationship between teacher motivation and digital competence. Research indicates that the implementation of digital technologies may strengthen teachers' sense of competence and professional effectiveness, but insufficient support and inadequate preparation may also generate stress and reduce motivation (Trust, Whalen, 2020). Consequently, teachers' readiness to implement innovative teaching methods is closely related to institutional support and opportunities for professional development.

In summary, motivation is a complex, multidimensional, and dynamic construct whose analysis requires consideration of both individual and contextual determinants. Contemporary theories, particularly Self-Determination Theory, emphasize the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the foundations of sustained engagement and professional effectiveness. Current research confirms that teacher motivation is strongly associated with organizational conditions, psychological well-being, and the quality of the educational process.

Methodology

Based on an analysis of the available literature, the following research questions and research hypotheses were formulated:

P1 *What is the relationship between teachers' age and their level of motivation?*

H01 *There is statistically no significant correlation between the age of primary school teachers and their motivation*

H11 *There is a statistically significant relationship between primary school teachers' age and their level of motivation.*

P2 *What is the relationship between teachers' length of service and the intrinsic dimension of their motivation?*

H02 *Length of service shows no statistical relationship with the intrinsic dimension of primary school teachers' motivation.*

H12 *Length of service shows a statistical relationship with the intrinsic dimension of primary school teachers' motivation.*

To address research questions a quantitative questionnaire-based study was conducted. The study involved 132 teachers from the Silesian Voivodeship who are actively teaching in primary schools. The study was carried out in September 2025. Twelve questionnaires were rejected because they had not been fully completed. The minimum teachers experience must have been at least 2 years. Teachers were recruited using a purposive sampling method: questionnaires were distributed directly in schools to ensure that respondents met the inclusion criteria. Because of the use of non-probability purposive sampling method for sample recruitment, the ability to generalize these results to the entire Polish population of primary teachers is structurally limited. The respondents' ages ranged from 25 to 64, with a mean age of 44.28 (SD=11.9). Of the 120 participants 76 were female and 44 were male teachers.

Table 1. Basic descriptive statistics

	Age	Motivation total score	Length of service
Valid	120	120	120
M	44.275	9.992	18.450
SD	11.890	2.052	9.320
Min.	25.000	6.000	2.000
Max.	64.000	14.000	41.000

Sources: own study.

The original questionnaire designed for the study included demographic questions as well as a simplified model of motivation. This scale was of a pilot nature and encompassed three fundamental dimensions of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and engagement. The development of a new tool was in order to create a very concise and low-burden instrument ideal for the specific context of school teachers. Our aim was to create a tool that minimizes participants fatigue during busy school hours. The used scale consists of core thematic target statements evaluating distinct features of professional drive and alignment. It is a structural, simplified model adopted for diagnostic purposes. It captures three dimensions of professional drive. Each dimension is operationalized through very concentrated target statement. Respondents provide answers using a 5-point Likert scale framework: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Hard to Say / Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) was 0.71,

confirming that the developed index is internally consistent. The sampling method employed was purposive.

Table 2. Structural design of the questionnaire

Target Dimension	Questionnaire Item	Score
Intrinsic Motivation	„I feel satisfaction and a sense of meaning in performing the work of a teacher”.	1 - 5 points
Extrinsic Motivation	„My work is appreciated by the management and colleagues”.	1 - 5 points
Workplace Engagement	„I have the desire to take on new initiatives and improve my teaching methods”.	1 - 5 points

Sources: own study.

The total motivation score was calculated by adding the 3 separate scores. This gave a range from 5 to 15 points. Below we present an interpretation for the results: 3-7 points: low overall motivation; 8-11 points: moderate overall motivation; 12-15 points: high overall motivation. To separate age from tenure progression, a parameter – professional seniority (total years of active professional service) has been calculated.

To evaluate the psychometric properties of this new tool, we performed validation procedures. Content validity was also established through a panel of three independent specialists who evaluated the questions designed for each dimension. To ensure item comprehensibility small pilot study was conducted (n=10, it was excluded from the final sample).

The study was conducted while maintaining complete anonymity for the participants and adhering to ethical standards. Participants were informed of the scientific objective of the study and were provided with guidelines for correctly completing the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and anonymity was strictly maintained. All collected data were securely stored and protected from unauthorized access. These measures ensured that participants' rights and well-being were respected at all stages of the study.

The collected empirical data were subjected to statistical analysis using the JASP software package. First, a Shapiro-Wilk test was performed, which revealed a deviation from normality for the overall motivation variable ($0.958 < .001$).

Table 3. Shapiro-Wilk test

	W	p
Motivation	0.958	<.001

Sources: own study.

Consequently, Spearman's rho coefficient was utilized for the correlation analysis. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation were calculated for overall motivation and each dimension. The Spearman correlation analysis yielded a rho value of -0.037 and a p-value of 0.687, indicating a very weak negative relationship between teachers' age and their level of motivation. This value was not statistically significant, suggesting that, in the studied group, age is not a factor differentiating the level of motivation.

Table 4. Spearman's Correlation test

	Age	
	rho	p
Motivation	-0.037	.687

Sources: own study.

Additionally analysis was conducted to evaluate the separate interaction weights of length of service. Test demonstrates that age itself does not diminish a teacher's professional energy. Instead, it is the accumulation of structural factors within the school environment that negatively impacts motivation. To counteract this, systemic updates are required in the Polish schooling system.

Table 5. Summary of research hypotheses and results of Spearman's correlation analysis

Research question	Variables	Hypothesis	Test	Spearman's rho (ρ)	p-value	Results
P1: What is the relationship between teachers' age and their level of motivation?	Age $\times$ Motivation total score	H01: No statistically significant relationship between age and motivation H11: There is a statistically significant relationship between age and motivation	Spearman's Correlation	-0.037	0.687	H01 supported H11 not supported No significant correlation
P2: What is the relationship between teachers' length of service and the intrinsic dimension of motivation?	Length of service $\times$ Intrinsic motivation	H02: No statistically significant relationship between length of service and intrinsic motivation H12: There is a statistically significant negative relationship between length of service and intrinsic motivation	Spearman's Correlation	-0.284	0.002	H12 supported H02 not supported Significant negative correlation

Sources: own study.

Discussion

The results indicate that the motivation level of teachers in the studied group is moderate, with external motivation being clearly the weakest component. At the same time, the correlational analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between age and motivation level, suggesting that age does not serve as a differentiating factor in this regard.

With regard to the research hypotheses formulated in the introduction, the first hypothesis (H01) assumed the absence of a statistically significant correlation between the age of primary school teachers and their level of motivation. The results of Spearman's rank correlation analysis confirm this hypothesis: the relationship between age and motivation proved not only statistically non-significant but also negligibly weak. This finding is consistent with theoretical approaches indicating that contextual factors – such as organizational climate, quality of educational

leadership, and access to institutional support – determine teachers' professional motivation to a greater extent than demographic variables. As Day and Gu (2010) emphasize, teachers' professional trajectories are strongly moderated by the work environment, which may explain the absence of any differentiating role of age in the studied group.

The second hypothesis (H12) assumed the existence of a negative statistical relationship between length of service and the intrinsic dimension of primary school teachers' motivation. The results of the Spearman correlation analysis fully supported this assumption leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This finding is highly coherent with the professional life cycle literature, which suggests that while biological age itself may not diminish professional drive, the accumulation of years spent within the school environment can lead to a gradual decline in pure intrinsic satisfaction. Over time, factors such as systemic pressure, routine, and increasing occupational fatigue tend to erode the baseline enjoyment teachers derive from their work, especially if they lack adequate institutional support.

The absence of a significant correlation between age and motivation may indicate that demographic factors are less important than contextual and environmental ones. This result is consistent with theoretical approaches emphasizing the role of working conditions, organizational climate, and institutional support as key determinants of teachers' professional motivation. In this context, the low level of external motivation recorded in the study appears particularly noteworthy. It may suggest an insufficient sense of being valued, a lack of feedback, or limited support from school management and colleagues.

An interesting finding is also the relatively higher level of engagement alongside the lower level of external motivation. This may indicate that teachers, despite limited external support, still demonstrate a readiness to take action and initiative. Such a situation can be interpreted as a manifestation of an internal sense of professional responsibility or teaching ethos; however, in the long term, it may lead to overload and a decline in job satisfaction.

The findings regarding intrinsic motivation, oscillating around a moderate level, point to a degree of ambivalence in the perception of teaching as a profession. On the one hand, a sense of meaning and satisfaction emerges; on the other, the presence of responses suggesting a lower level of intrinsic motivation may indicate professional burnout or fatigue resulting from the everyday challenges of teaching work.

The obtained results highlight the need for further, in-depth analyses incorporating a broader range of variables, such as years of service, school type, workload, and access to institutional support. Exploring the qualitative aspects of teachers' motivation seems particularly warranted, as it would allow for a better understanding of their experiences and the mechanisms underlying the observed results.

These findings are worth examining in relation to the theoretical frameworks discussed in the theoretical section of the article. Self-Determination Theory (Deci, Ryan, 2000) posits that high-quality professional motivation requires the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The low level of external motivation recorded in the present study may indicate that at least one of these needs- most likely the need for relatedness and being valued- is not sufficiently met in the working environment of the teachers studied. This finding corresponds with the observations of Roth et al. (2007), who demonstrated that the autonomous motivation of teachers by school management fosters the internalization of motivation

in students- meaning that the quality of institutional support matters not only for teachers' well-being but also for learning outcomes.

These results resonate strongly with the most recent national and international evidence on teachers' professional motivation. The Polish edition of the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS 2024), conducted by the Educational Research Institute, reveals a strikingly similar pattern: Polish teachers report high levels of intrinsic motivation and a strong sense of the social usefulness of their profession, yet at the same time feel markedly undervalued, with only a small fraction believing that their work is appreciated by society, the media, or policymakers, and around one in two encountering a lack of recognition from parents or students in everyday practice (IBE, 2025). This convergence between the present pilot study and a large-scale, nationally representative survey lends external validity to the conclusion that low external motivation – understood here as a deficit in recognition and institutional feedback – constitutes one of the most pressing challenges facing the Polish teaching profession at present, rather than an artefact specific to the sampled group.

This picture is further corroborated by recent research on teachers' occupational well-being. Collie (2023), studying a large sample of Australian teachers, found that job resources – including relatedness with colleagues and students – predicted teachers' well-being and turnover intentions beyond the role of demographic and personality characteristics, a conclusion directly reflected in the present study's absence of an age effect and in the salience of context-dependent, external motivation deficits. Similarly, Han and Yin's (2016) review of the evolution of teacher motivation research indicates that the field has progressively shifted away from static, trait-based accounts toward dynamic, context-sensitive models – a shift the present findings support empirically. Taken together, this body of research suggests that relatedness – support from supervisors, colleagues, and the wider institutional environment – is among the most fragile of teachers' basic psychological needs, closely mirroring the low external motivation identified in the present sample.

Broadening the theoretical lens beyond Self-Determination Theory also proves instructive. Situated Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles, Wigfield, 2020) suggests that teachers' engagement depends not only on the satisfaction of basic psychological needs but also on their subjective valuation of teaching-related tasks within a specific socio-institutional context, which may help explain why intrinsic motivation in the studied group remained only moderate rather than uniformly high despite the relatively strong engagement reported. From the perspective of social cognitive theory, Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) point to self-efficacy beliefs as a further determinant of sustained motivation, complementing the SDT-based interpretation and suggesting that interventions aimed solely at improving external recognition, without also strengthening teachers' sense of competence, are unlikely to yield lasting improvements. This is consistent with the refined understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation proposed by Ryan and Deci (2020), who argue that the two dimensions should not be treated as opposite poles of a single continuum but as relatively independent processes- an interpretation that accounts for the coexistence, observed in the present study, of only moderate intrinsic motivation, markedly low external motivation, and comparatively high engagement.

An equally interesting result is the relatively higher level of engagement alongside the low level of external motivation. This can be interpreted as a manifestation of professional ethos and an internal sense of mission- a phenomenon closely related to what Day (2004) describes as a "passion

for teaching". However, the ambivalence of this situation must be acknowledged: a teacher who sustains engagement over time despite inadequate external support is at risk of gradual emotional exhaustion leading to professional burnout. This is confirmed by the findings of Klusmann et al. (2008), who demonstrated that teachers' self-regulation patterns – including the capacity to draw intrinsic satisfaction from their work – significantly moderate the relationship between working conditions and teaching quality. Burnout is therefore not merely an individual problem for the teacher, but also a systemic organizational risk.

The absence of a significant correlation between age and motivation does not mean that age is an entirely irrelevant factor. This result should be read in the context of the concept of the professional life cycle: individual career phases may be associated with distinct motivational challenges, but – as Day and Gu (2010) indicate – these trajectories are strongly moderated by contextual factors such as school climate, access to social support, and the quality of educational leadership. It is possible that motivation differences related to career stage exist within the studied sample but were obscured by the dominant influence of environmental factors common to all respondents – which is itself a diagnostically valuable finding.

In summary, the conducted study suggests that teachers' professional motivation is not significantly determined by age, while the low level of external motivation remains the key area requiring attention. This finding has both diagnostic and practical significance – it identifies specific areas in which institutional interventions could bring measurable improvements to teachers' professional well-being and the quality of their teaching practice.

Practical Implications

The research findings carry significant implications for educational practice, school management, and educational policy. The recorded low level of external motivation points to the need to reframe the model of institutional support for teachers – both at the school level and within the broader education system. In accordance with the assumptions of Self-Determination Theory (Deci, Ryan, 2000), meeting teachers' need for relatedness and a sense of being valued by management may constitute an important factor in strengthening the quality of pedagogical engagement. In practice, this means implementing a culture of regular, constructive feedback and creating space for professional dialogue between teachers and school leadership.

The results also suggest the need for systemic action at the level of educational policy. Within the Polish professional advancement system, described by Śliwerski (2009) as one that tends to orient teachers toward formal requirements at the expense of authentic development, it would be worth considering the introduction of mechanisms that strengthen teachers' professional autonomy and sense of agency. This could include intergenerational mentoring programs – particularly valuable in light of the concept pointing to distinct motivational dynamics across different career phases – as well as programs supporting psychological and pedagogical well-being, burnout prevention, and the development of self-efficacy. Research by Pyżalski and Merecz (2010) on the psychosocial working conditions of Polish teachers indicates that occupational stress and lack of social support are widespread phenomena in this group – making systemic interventions not only desirable but urgent.

From the perspective of teachers' professional development, the study's results advocate for expanding training provision to include modules devoted to personal resource management, reflection on teaching practice, and the cultivation of intrinsic work motivation. Research by Roth et al. (2007) shows that autonomously motivated teachers are more effective at fostering autonomous motivation in their students – demonstrating that investing in teacher well-being is simultaneously an investment in educational effectiveness. Pelletier et al. (2002) confirm that administrative pressure exerted on teachers – both externally and from within the school – weakens their intrinsic motivation and limits methodological flexibility. This conclusion should prompt school management to consciously reduce excessive control in favor of supporting professional pedagogical autonomy.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide valuable insights for various stakeholders within the education system. A teacher's professional motivation is not solely a private matter: it is co-shaped by the institutional and organizational context, and supporting it – through actions both at the school level and within the education system – is in the interest of the entire educational community.

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