Personality Characteristics in Schoolteachers' Occupational Motivation

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Abstract
Because schoolteachers' high occupational motivation is an essential prerequisite for their good performance, it is important to understand the personality characteristics that determine it. The present study involved 188 primary and secondary schoolteachers from three regions of Ukraine. Data collection relied on Zamfir's Motivation for Professional Activities technique, the General Self-Efficacy Scale, the Personal Orientation Inventory, the communicative inclinations sub-test of the method identifying communicative and organisational inclinations, the Professional Self-Fulfilment Questionnaire and the Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey. The data obtained showed that nine out of 10 personality characteristics used in our study significantly influenced schoolteachers' occupational motivation. Of these, seven variables had a positive effect, contributing to schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation, but two indicators of occupational burnout (personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion) had a negative effect, reducing motivation. The most significant personality characteristics were communicative inclinations (explaining 16.6% of the variation in intrinsic motivation), personal accomplishment (9.3%) and self-efficacy (6.0%). Six additional indicators – three indicators of professional self-fulfilment and individual indicators of time competence, emotional exhaustion and inner-directed support – explained schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation within 2.7–4.3% limits. A multiple regression analysis revealed that the set of 10 personality characteristics used in our study was highly informative (R = .503; R2 = .253), explaining 25.3% of schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation. The results open up new perspectives to increase and stabilise schoolteachers' occupational motivation.

Keywords: schoolteachers; occupational motivation; personality characteristics; communicative inclinations; self-efficacy

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1. Introduction

The schoolteacher profession has great social importance (Benevene et al., 2019; Korobeinikova et al., 2023; Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2021). As Javorčíková et al. (2021) aptly emphasise, teaching is a specific profession with a specific mission, aiming, in contemporary society, at the development of a harmonious personality, knowledge, wisdom, goodness and

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creativity in students. In this sense, the role of the teacher extends far beyond the transmission of knowledge—it involves the cultivation of human potential and the shaping of future citizens.

At the same time, teaching is one of the most demanding occupations (Kokun et al., 2021; Minkkinen et al., 2020). It requires constant professional growth, the development of personal skills, emotional intelligence, empathy and the ability to manage stress (Javorčíková et al., 2021). Teachers are considered a particularly vulnerable professional group, exposed to numerous challenges that may adversely affect their psychological well-being, professional performance and motivation (Franco et al., 2010; Gluschkoff et al., 2016; Mearns & Cain, 2003).

In the face of such complex demands, the professional motivation of schoolteachers plays a critical role. Teaching motivation is regarded as one of the core components of teacher professionalism (Thommen et al., 2021), which significantly affects the quality of teaching and learning. A high level of professional motivation not only ensures teacher effectiveness but also contributes to job satisfaction and professional longevity. Although many studies have explored how external factors influence teacher motivation, relatively few have examined how personality traits may be associated with professional motivation. For this reason, the main aim of the present exploratory study is to determine a set of possible personality characteristics affecting schoolteachers' occupational motivation.

2. Literature Review

The importance of teaching motivation has been well documented in recent research. It is viewed as a core element of teacher professionalism (Thommen et al., 2021), and one of the most influential contributors to teacher performance (Filak & Sheldon, 2003; Kokun, 2023; Pourtousi & Ghanizadeh, 2020; Royaei & Ghanizadeh, 2016). Abdullah and Ismail (2020) emphasise the specific impact of teaching motivation in the field of education, noting its role in sustaining teacher engagement and instructional quality. A number of studies report strong correlations between schoolteachers' professional motivation and their teaching effectiveness, including those by Fernet et al. (2008), Lazarides and Schiefele (2021), and Royaei and Ghanizadeh (2016). However, some studies suggest a more complex relationship—for example, Thommen et al. (2021) reported that the link between teaching motivation and teaching quality in their research was less clear than expected.

A wide range of external factors can negatively affect schoolteachers' motivation. These include a negative school climate (Gray et al., 2017), increasing administrative burdens and bureaucracy (Mearns & Cain, 2003; Okeke & Dlamini, 2013), lack of collegial support (Kovess-Masfety et al., 2007), and challenging student behaviour such as disrespect, inattentiveness, and classroom discipline problems (Collie et al., 2012; Okeke & Dlamini, 2013; Romera et al., 2019). Other detrimental influences include an overwhelming number of school-related responsibilities, time pressure, work overload (Kongcharoen et al., 2020; Martín, 2015; Gluschkoff et al., 2016; Zhang, Bai & Li, 2020), effort–reward imbalance (Gluschkoff et al., 2016; Gray et al., 2017), and a lack of professional recognition and adequate benefits (Mearns & Cain, 2003). More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has added another layer of complexity, introducing new stressors and accelerating burnout among teachers (Aperribai et al., 2020; Dagistan, 2022; De la Fuente et al., 2021; Galli et al, 2023; Toska et al., 2023).

Despite these obstacles, several factors have been identified as key positive predictors of professional motivation among schoolteachers. These include:

- Interpersonal relationships, such as a positive workplace atmosphere, a strong work team, a supportive supervisor (Abdullah & Ismail, 2020; Javorčíková et al., 2021; Nordhall et al., 2020), encouraging colleagues and family (Harja et al., 2021), and the principal's personality (Paulus & Marhamah, 2020);
- Work-related values, including the perceived significance of teaching, a sense of achievement, empowerment, career development, and professional status (Abdullah & Ismail, 2020; Rasheed et al., 2010);
- Student achievement as a motivating factor (Rasheed et al., 2010);
- Working conditions, including the physical environment and organisational policies (Abdullah & Ismail, 2020);
- Financial compensation, such as a fair evaluation system and adequate salary (Abdullah & Ismail, 2020; Javorčíková et al., 2021).

While these external determinants of motivation have been studied extensively, there remains a notable lack of research on internal (psychological or personality-based) factors influencing teacher motivation. One of the few exceptions is the work of Javorčíková et al. (2021), which investigated the impact of self-sufficiency and involvement on teacher motivation. However, a broader understanding of personality characteristics—and how they shape professional motivation—is still lacking in the literature.

Given this gap, the present study aims to explore a broader range of internal personality traits that may influence occupational motivation in schoolteachers. Understanding the role of such traits can help researchers and practitioners develop more targeted strategies to support teacher well-being and motivation in increasingly challenging educational environments.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

The study involved 188 primary and secondary school teachers from the Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Lviv regions of Ukraine. The sample consisted of 165 women and 23 men aged between 22 years and 73 years (M = 42.70 years, SD = 13.07 years). The age distribution (34% ≤ 35 years, 30% 36–49 years, 36% ≥ 50 years), teaching experience distribution (33% ≤ 8 years, 34% 8–20 years, and 33% ≥ 21 years) and gender distribution (88% female) were comparable to the national age and gender distributions among teachers in Ukraine. The participants had between one year and 48 years of teaching experience (M = 16.48 years, SD = 12.50 years).

3.2 Measures

The participants' *occupational motivation* was assessed using the Ukrainian adaptation of Zamfir's Motivation for Professional Activities technique (Tsarapkina et al., 2021), which is based on the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivation (IM) concerns cases when an activity itself is important to an individual. If the motivation for a professional activity is the desire to meet other external needs related to the activity content (such as social prestige or salaries), an individual is led by extrinsic motivation (EM). Extrinsic motives can be positive or negative, and extrinsic positive motives (EPM) are more effective and desirable from the point of view of professional self-realisation than extrinsic negative motives (ENM).

The participants rated seven occupational motives on a five-point Likert scale (1 = 'insignificant', 2 = 'slightly significant', 3 = 'somewhat significant', 4 = 'rather

significant' and 5 = 'very significant'). Two of the occupational motives reveal IM (work satisfaction as satisfaction gained from a work process and its results and self-realisation), three reflect EPM (salary, career growth and social status as an orientation towards prestige and other people's respect) and two express ENM (avoiding problems with the administration and colleagues as avoiding criticism from colleagues and management).

The *personality characteristics* that could potentially influence schoolteachers' occupational motivation were assessed using the Ukrainian adaptations of five measures.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) evaluates a person's perception of his or her personal competence in effectively managing different stressful situations. The instrument consists of 10 statements rated on a four-point Likert scale from 'completely wrong' (1) to 'completely correct' (4). Possible GSE scores range from 20 to 100. The statements in the GSE include 'If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want', 'If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution' and 'I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough'.

The Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) (Shostrom, 1977) measures self-actualisation. It consists of 150 items containing two statements describing values or behaviours. For each item, the participant selects the statement that best describes him or her. The POI is scored for two major scales: the inner-directed support scale measures the degree to which the respondent provides his or her own support (as opposed to turning to others), and the time-competence scale measures the degree to which the respondent lives in the present.

The 'communicative inclinations' sub-test of the method identifying communicative and organisational inclinations (Sinyavsky & Fedorishin, 2002) contains 20 questions (10 direct questions and 10 reverse questions) that must be answered with 'yes' or 'no'. One point is scored for each answer that matches the cue. Possible scores range from zero to 20. The statements in the subtest include 'Do you want to study people and meet different people?', 'Are you having a hard time getting used to the new team?' and 'Do you feel at ease entering an unfamiliar company?'.

The Professional Self-Fulfilment Questionnaire (PSFQ) (Kokun, 2022) is a 30-item self-report measure. The respondents are asked to rate each item using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from A to E. For each answer, option A corresponds to 0 points, option B to 1 point, option C to 2 points, option D to 3 points and option E to 4 points. Based on the assessments made with the questionnaire, 13 quantitative indicators are calculated. Of these, 10 are the baseline, that is, the quantitative indicators for each of the 10 attributes of internal and external professional self-fulfilment. Three additional indicators are summarising; they demonstrate the levels of internal and external professional self-fulfilment and, together, reflect a respondent's overall level of professional self-fulfilment. Examples of items in the PSFQ include 'Do you work a lot to improve your professional level?', 'Do you have a plan for your future professional development?', 'How successfully do you manage to combine professional work with other areas of life?', 'How quickly do you reach your professional goals?' and 'How do you evaluate your professional achievements?'.

Finally, the Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey (MBI-GS) (Maslach et al., 2017) is a psychological assessment instrument comprising 22 symptom items reflecting occupational burnout. The measure contains three subscales: emotional exhaustion (EE; nine items), depersonalisation (DP; five items) and personal accomplishment (PA; eight items). All MBI-GS items are scored on a seven-point Likert scale measuring frequency (0 = 'never', 1 = 'several times a year or less', 2 = 'once a month or less', 3 = 'several times a month',

4 = ‘once a week’, 5 = ‘several times a week’ and 6 = every day’). Higher scores on each subscale indicate higher results for each construct.

3.3 Data Collection

The research data were collected during 2018 and 2019. After the school principal’s approval to carry out the research was received, the teachers were informed of the aim and procedure of the study. All questionnaires were completed individually with paper and pencil.

All procedures contributing to this work comply with the ethical standards of the relevant national and institutional committees on human experimentation and the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2008. The studies were conducted with the approval of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the participants’ consent. The participants were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and were encouraged to respond candidly. Complete confidentiality was assured.

3.4 Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 22.0.0.0) was used for the statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis), independent sample t-tests, Spearman’s correlation coefficient and a multiple linear regression analysis (enter method) were used to analyse the data.

4. Results

The descriptive statistics for all variables obtained in the study are presented in Table 1. The teachers’ characteristics in terms of age and experience were described earlier in the ‘Participants’ section. Excluding intrinsic motivation, all variables were approximately normally distributed (skewness and kurtosis < 1). Only one diagnostic variable (inner-directed support) out of 10 in the sample significantly differed between men and women. Given this, we performed further statistical procedures on the entire sample without dividing the participants based on gender.

We note a significant predominance of intrinsic motivation, the most favourable type of occupational motivation in teachers, over extrinsic positive motivation. In turn, extrinsic positive motivation was predominant over negative motivation, the most unfavourable type of occupational motivation. The significant predominance of intrinsic motivation over extrinsic positive and negative motivations in teachers, with the vast majority of them scoring the maximum of five points (n = 125), explains the significant deviation from the normal distribution obtained for intrinsic motivation.

Table 2 presents the correlations between the study variables. There were no links between schoolteachers’ intrinsic motivation and extrinsic positive motivation. Additionally, extrinsic negative motivation was positively related to the two other motivational indicators ($p < .001$; $r = .26 – .30$).

The results show that intrinsic motivation, the most favourable type of occupational motivation, has the largest number of reliable correlations with schoolteachers’ personality characteristics: 8 of the 10 personality indicators used in the study correlated significantly ($p < .05–.001$) with intrinsic motivation. Of these eight indicators, six had positive correlations with intrinsic motivation ($p < .01–.001$; $r = .23–.46$), and two indicators of occupational burnout (emotional

exhaustion and personal accomplishment) correlated negatively ($p < .01–.001$; $r = -.23–-.40$). Intrinsic motivation correlated the most with communicative inclinations ($p < .001$; $r = .46$), personal accomplishment ($p < .001$; $r = -.40$) and self-efficacy ($p < .001$; $r = .31$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all variables

Variables	***M***	***SD***	***Skewness***	***Kurtosis***	***t***	***p <***
Intrinsic motivation	4.36	0.89	-2.07	3.59	-	-
Extrinsic positive motivation	3.47	0.97	-0.76	1.22	-	-
Extrinsic negative motivation	3.08	1.24	-0.26	-0.66	-	-
Self-efficacy	31.39	4.51	-0.77	2.32	-	-
Inner-directed support (women)	8.39	2.81	-0.10	-0.07	2.90	0.01
Inner-directed support (men)	6.55	2.59	-0.08	-0.05		
Time competence	43.73	8.43	0.21	-0.22	-	-
Communicative inclinations	12.72	4.09	-0.21	-0.89	-	-
Overall professional self-fulfilment	85.73	11.24	-0.19	-0.43	-	-
Internal professional self-fulfilment	44.71	6.11	-0.18	0.01	-	-
External professional self-fulfilment	41.02	6.18	-0.03	-0.26	-	-
Emotional exhaustion	18.42	7.10	-0.06	-0.28	-	-
Depersonalisation	6.91	4.14	0.51	0.07	-	-
Personal accomplishment	15.95	6.26	0.18	-0.49	-	-

Table 2. Bivariate correlations between the study variables

Variables	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**
1. Intrinsic motivation	–													
2. Extrinsic positive motivation	-.01	–												
3. Extrinsic negative motivation	.25***	.30***	–											
4. Age	-.04	.01	-.22**	–										
5. Work experience	-.12	.09	-.20**	.81***	–									
6. Self-efficacy	.31***	.16*	.18*	-.02	.01	–								
7. Inner-directed support	.13	-.18*	.01	-.06	-.07	.26***	–							
8. Time competence	.23**	-.18*	-.02	-.13	-.12	.32***	.58***	–						
9. Communicative inclinations	.46***	-.08	.19*	-.32***	-.29***	.39***	.27***	.38***	–					
10. Overall prof. self-fulfilment	.26***	.05	.13	.13	.11	.50***	.17*	.24***	.18*	–				
11. Internal prof. self-fulfilment	.27***	.05	.15*	.05	.06	.51***	.15*	.25***	.21**	.91***	–			
12. External prof. self-fulfilment	.23***	.04	.08	.20**	.16*	.41***	.17*	.21**	.13	.92***	.69***	–		
13. Emotional exhaustion	-.23***	.25***	-.04	.11	.18*	-.21**	-.20**	-.22**	-.35***	-.17*	-.18*	-.13	–	
14. Depersonalisation	-.01	.08	.01	.06	.05	-.06	-.05	-.05	-.23**	.03	.01	.07	.46***	–
15. Personal accomplishment	-.40***	.01	-.09	.21**	.28***	-.44***	-.12	-.33***	-.56***	-.24***	-.30***	-.15*	.22**	.10

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

Extrinsic positive and negative motivations had fewer reliable correlations (four and two, respectively) with schoolteachers' personality characteristics, which were also significantly weaker than the correlations for intrinsic motivation ($r_{max} = .25$). We should also note that intrinsic motivation and extrinsic positive motivation did not correlate with age and work

experience. Extrinsic negative motivation is inversely associated with age ($p < .01$; $r = -.22$) and work experience ($p < .01$; $r = -.20$).

To determine the influence of personality characteristics on schoolteachers' occupational motivation, we used multiple regression analysis (Table 3). Because of the results of the correlation analysis, we decided to use only intrinsic motivation (the most favourable type, as previously mentioned) as a dependent variable.

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis of the influence of personality characteristics on schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation

Variables	***R²***	***Beta***	***t***	***p***
Communicative inclinations	.166	.406	4.64	< 0.001
Personal accomplishment	.093	-.305	-3.34	< 0.001
Self-efficacy	.060	.244	3.40	< 0.001
Internal professional self-fulfilment	.043	.208	2.87	0.005
Overall professional self-fulfilment	.039	.198	2.73	0.007
External professional self-fulfilment	.035	.186	2.57	0.011
Time competence	.033	.182	2.47	0.015
Emotional exhaustion	.033	-.180	-2.41	0.018
Inner-directed support	.027	.165	2.23	0.027
Depersonalisation	.001	.003	0.30	0.976

The results in the table show that 9 of the 10 personality characteristics used in our study significantly influenced the schoolteachers' occupational motivation ($p < .05–.001$). Of these, seven variables had a positive effect, contributing to the schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation, and two indicators of occupational burnout (personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion) had a negative effect, reducing motivation.

The most significant personality characteristics were communicative inclinations (explaining 16.6% of the variation in intrinsic motivation), personal accomplishment (9.3%) and self-efficacy (6.0%). Six more indicators – three indicators of self-fulfilment, as well as time competence, emotional exhaustion and inner-directed support – explained the schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation within 2.7–4.3% limits. Additionally, the multiple regression analysis revealed that the set of 10 personality characteristics used in our study was highly informative ($R = .503$; $R^2 = .253$) for the determination of schoolteachers' occupational motivation, explaining 25.3% of their intrinsic motivation.

5. Discussion

Regarding the main goal of our study, the results have shown convincingly that personality characteristics can largely determine the most important and favourable type of schoolteacher occupational motivation, intrinsic motivation. Of the 10 personality variables used in the study, eight correlated significantly ($p < .05–.001$) with intrinsic motivation, explaining between 2.7% and 16.6% of the schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation separately and 25.3% together.

The most important personality characteristic influencing the schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation was the level of communicative inclinations, which explained 16.6% of such

motivation. Our explanation for the importance of communicative inclinations for schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation is as follows. Communicative inclinations are one of the most professionally important qualities in schoolteachers and largely determine their performance (García-Martínez et al., 2021). Accordingly, schoolteachers who perform better feel higher satisfaction with the process and results of their work, which helps to increase their intrinsic motivation (Baleghizadeh, & Gordani, 2012; Parr et al., 2021).

A similar mechanism underlies the dependence of schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation on their self-efficacy, which explains 6.0% of this motivation. Indeed, self-efficacy is also one of the most important qualities for schoolteachers' performance. This is supported by modern studies by Lazarides and Schiefele (2021), Sopiah et al. (2021) and Thommen et al. (2021), which found credible correlations between schoolteachers' self-efficacy and various components of their occupational motivation, such as interest, goal-oriented performance and internal motivation.

Another five personality characteristics (all three indicators of professional self-fulfilment, as well as time competence and inner-directed support) also positively determined the schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation within 2.7–4.3% limits. This is consistent with the findings of Stężycka and Etherington (2020).

Conversely, two personality characteristics of the schoolteachers related to occupational burnout (personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion) negatively affected intrinsic motivation, explaining 9.3% and 3.3% of the decrease, respectively. This also seems natural because occupational burnout, which is characterised by emotional exhaustion and personal and professional degradation, leads to both a decreased ability to carry out one's work effectively and a decreased desire to perform one's duties (Maslach et al., 2017). In particular, Karimi and Fallah (2021) found a strong negative relation ($p < .001$; $r = -.55$) between teachers' academic burnout and intrinsic motivation. Nordhall et al. (2020) reported an analogous negative relation ($p < .001$; $r = -.33$) between teachers' exhaustion and work self-determined motivation.

Additional research results may also be of scientific interest. A lack of significant gender differences in the manifestations of schoolteachers' occupational motivation was found, as well as a significant predominance of intrinsic motivation over extrinsic positive and negative motivations in teachers. The study also revealed significantly closer links between schoolteachers' personality characteristics and intrinsic motivation than between extrinsic positive and negative motivations. Additionally, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic positive motivation did not appear to depend on the teachers' age and work experience, and extrinsic negative motivation, the most unfavourable type of professional motivation (Ilyin, 2000), was inversely associated with the teachers' age and work experience.

The results of our study, which show that schoolteachers' occupational motivation depends on some of their personality characteristics, open new perspectives for improving practical psychological work aimed, in particular, at increasing and stabilising schoolteachers' intrinsic motivation. For example, communicative inclinations and self-efficacy, which are the most important factors for intrinsic motivation, can be purposefully developed via special training. This training should start during the teachers' professional training. Similarly, training activities may be effective in preventing the development of occupational burnout in teachers. This type of training is needed first for teachers who have some insufficiently developed crucial personality characteristics and show the most pronounced signs of occupational burnout. Practical psychological work of this kind will have a modest positive impact on schoolteachers' occupational motivation but also a pronounced positive impact on their performance in general as it will develop relevant personality characteristics.

The study's *limitations* primarily concern the specifics of the sample (Ukrainian schoolteachers). In addition, the list of personality characteristics that may determine schoolteachers' occupational motivation is much longer than the one that was used in our study. Despite these limitations, the present study's findings expand our understanding of how and to what degree personality characteristics can determine schoolteachers' occupational motivation.

6. Conclusion

The present study provides strong empirical evidence that schoolteachers' occupational motivation—particularly intrinsic motivation—can be significantly influenced by their personality characteristics. Among the ten traits examined, eight were meaningfully associated with intrinsic motivation, with communicative inclinations and self-efficacy emerging as the most powerful predictors. These findings align with previous research on teacher effectiveness and motivation, reinforcing the view that personality factors not only shape individual motivation but also contribute to professional performance and satisfaction.

Importantly, the study revealed that intrinsic motivation was significantly more prominent among schoolteachers than extrinsic positive or negative motivation, and it exhibited stronger correlations with personality traits. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation appeared to be stable across gender, age, and work experience, whereas extrinsic negative motivation declined with increasing age and experience, highlighting potential developmental shifts in motivational orientation over time.

Negative predictors, such as emotional exhaustion and reduced sense of personal accomplishment—components of occupational burnout—were also shown to diminish intrinsic motivation. This underscores the importance of proactive measures to mitigate teacher burnout through early detection and psychological support.

Taken together, these results offer valuable insights for applied educational psychology. They suggest that targeted training programmes focusing on the development of communicative inclinations and self-efficacy, as well as burnout prevention, could help enhance and stabilise teachers' intrinsic motivation. Such interventions should ideally be introduced during teacher education and sustained throughout professional careers to ensure long-term effectiveness and well-being.

While the study's scope was limited to Ukrainian schoolteachers and a specific set of personality traits, the findings open promising directions for future cross-cultural and longitudinal research. Exploring a broader range of personality variables and replicating the study across different educational systems could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role personality plays in shaping and sustaining professional motivation in teachers.

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