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MANAGING TEACHER MOTIVATION IN GENERAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS: A SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: The article addresses the problem of managing teacher motivation in general education schools from the standpoint of self-determination theory (SDT). The relevance of the study is determined by the direct influence of teacher motivation on the quality of education, on teachers' psychological well-being, and on the retention of teaching staff in the context of ongoing educational reforms. The purpose of the study is to theoretically substantiate and develop a model of motivational management applicable to a general education school. The research methods include systematic analysis of scientific literature, generalization, classification, and pedagogical modeling. The paper reveals the structure of teacher work motivation, identifies the key factors that support or undermine autonomous motivation, and proposes a four-stage managerial model (diagnostics of the motivational profile — design of the motivational environment — implementation of need-supportive mechanisms — monitoring and feedback) aimed at satisfying teachers' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The practical significance of the study lies in the possibility of using the proposed model and recommendations by school principals and deputy heads in everyday managerial practice.

Keywords: teacher motivation; motivational management; general education school; self-determination theory; autonomous motivation; basic psychological needs; school principal.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of a national education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers, and the quality of teaching, in turn, largely depends on the level and character of teacher motivation. A motivated teacher demonstrates higher professional commitment, uses more effective teaching practices, supports students' own motivation, and is less exposed to professional burnout and turnover intentions [6, 8]. At the same time, international and national studies report a worrying decline in the prestige of the teaching profession, increased workloads, and a growing number of teachers who experience emotional exhaustion and consider leaving the profession [8]. Under these conditions, the management of teacher motivation ceases to be an optional element of school administration and becomes one of the central functions of educational management.

The theoretical foundations of motivation were laid in the works of A. Maslow, F. Herzberg, D. McClelland, V. Vroom, and J. Adams; however, in recent decades self-determination theory developed by R. Ryan and E. Deci has become the most influential framework for studying motivation in education [1]. Within this theory, a substantial body of research has accumulated on students' motivation, whereas the motivation of teachers as an object of purposeful management in general education schools remains insufficiently studied. Existing works mainly examine individual aspects: teachers' autonomous motivation during professional learning [2], the motivating style of school

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principals [3], motivational factors of primary school teachers [4], the well-being of early career teachers [5], and the application of SDT to effective teaching [6]. A holistic managerial model that would translate these findings into the everyday practice of a school principal is still lacking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-determination theory proceeds from the assumption that human motivation is not a single construct but a continuum of behavioral regulations, ranging from amotivation through external, introjected, identified, and integrated regulation to intrinsic motivation [1]. Regulations located closer to the intrinsic pole form autonomous (self-determined) motivation, which is associated with persistence, creativity, psychological well-being, and high-quality performance, while controlled motivation, based on external rewards, sanctions, and pressure, produces short-term compliance at the cost of reduced engagement and well-being [1, 6]. According to SDT, the development of autonomous motivation depends on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy (the experience of volition and ownership of one's actions), competence (the experience of effectiveness and mastery), and relatedness (the experience of belonging and connectedness with significant others) [1].

Applying this framework to the teaching profession, K. Power and K. Goodnough showed that professional learning environments that support teachers' autonomy foster their autonomous motivation, whereas top-down, compliance-oriented professional development undermines it [2]. G. Wu and colleagues demonstrated that the motivating style of school principals stimulates teachers' job crafting — the proactive redesign of one's own work — through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, which confirms the cross-level influence of leadership on teacher motivation [3]. V. A. Yıldız and D. Kılıç, studying primary school teachers, identified both intrinsic motivational factors (love of teaching, professional identity, students' progress) and extrinsic ones (salary, working conditions, administrative support), emphasizing the leading role of autonomous forms of motivation in job satisfaction [4].

A. J. Hobson and B. Maxwell extended SDT by showing that the school environment can both support and inhibit the well-being of early career secondary school teachers; among the inhibiting factors they named excessive bureaucracy, controlling management, and the lack of collegial support [5]. E. M. Skaalvik and S. Skaalvik established stable relationships between school context variables (relations with the principal, collegial support, time pressure), teacher stress, job satisfaction, and the motivation to remain in the profession [8]. The positive effect of principals' empowering behavior on teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and stress reduction was demonstrated as early as in the study by J. Davis and S. M. Wilson [9]. Finally, D. Tessier, C. Ginoux, and R. Shankland provided experimental evidence that teacher training combining SDT-based and positive psychology interventions improves teachers' motivation and well-being and, through them, students' outcomes [10]. T. K. F. Chiu showed that school support for technology integration increases teachers' autonomous motivation to use digital tools [7], which is particularly relevant in the context of the digital transformation of schools.

The analysis of the literature allows us to conclude that the SDT conceptual apparatus is well developed and empirically verified, but its findings are fragmented across separate managerial situations. The task of the present study is to integrate them into a holistic model of motivational management in a general education school.

METHODOLOGY

The study is theoretical in nature and was carried out using methods of systematic and comparative analysis of scientific literature, generalization, classification, and pedagogical modeling.

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The empirical basis of the analysis consisted of peer-reviewed studies on teacher motivation, school leadership, and teachers' well-being published between 2000 and 2025 in international journals, as well as classical works on motivation theory and educational management. The selection of sources was guided by three criteria: (1) the study addresses the motivation of school teachers rather than students; (2) the study examines managerial or contextual factors of motivation; (3) the study is based on an explicit theoretical framework, primarily self-determination theory. The model presented below is the result of the synthesis of the analyzed findings and is designed as a managerial algorithm that can be implemented by the administration of a general education school.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The structure of teacher work motivation as an object of management

Teacher work motivation is understood in this article as a dynamic system of internal and external factors that initiate, direct, and sustain a teacher's professional activity toward the achievement of personal and organizational goals. Its structure includes: (a) motives proper — professional vocation, interest in the subject and in teaching, the desire for self-realization, material and social motives; (b) goals and expectations regarding professional growth, recognition, and remuneration; (c) emotions and evaluative attitudes — job satisfaction, professional self-efficacy, organizational commitment; and (d) behavioral manifestations — engagement, initiative, readiness for innovation and professional development [4, 6].

From the standpoint of SDT, the qualitative characteristics of this system are more important for management than its quantitative "strength": two teachers with equally intense motivation may differ radically in its quality — one acts out of interest and professional conviction (autonomous motivation), the other out of fear of sanctions or dependence on remuneration (controlled motivation). Only autonomous motivation ensures sustainable professional behavior, creativity, and resistance to burnout [1, 8]. Therefore, the strategic goal of motivational management in school is not simply to "increase" motivation, but to shift its quality toward autonomous regulation.

2. Factors supporting and hindering autonomous motivation of teachers

The generalization of the analyzed studies makes it possible to systematize the factors of the school environment according to the three basic psychological needs.

Factors supporting autonomy include: teachers' participation in managerial decision-making; professional freedom in choosing methods and materials; delegation of authority and empowerment by the principal [9]; minimization of excessive reporting and bureaucratic control [5]; support of teacher initiative and job crafting [3]. Autonomy is hindered by a controlling management style, total accountability regimes, high-stakes external evaluation in which sanctions are contingent upon results, and the lack of teachers' voice in school policy [1, 5].

Competence is supported by: accessible and high-quality professional development designed with teachers' needs in mind [2, 10]; mentoring and induction support for beginning teachers [5]; constructive, informational (rather than controlling) feedback from the administration; a fair and transparent system of attestation; opportunities to master new technologies with appropriate school support [7]. Competence is undermined by time pressure, role overload, the absence of feedback, and by evaluation systems perceived as unfair [8].

Relatedness is fostered by: a favorable socio-psychological climate and collegial cooperation; professional communities and collaborative planning; recognition of teachers' achievements by the administration, colleagues, students, and parents; trust-based relations with the principal [8].

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Relatedness is weakened by an atmosphere of competition instead of cooperation, by conflicts left unmanaged, and by the social isolation of the teacher within the school.

It should be emphasized that material incentives occupy a specific place in this system. According to SDT, external rewards can either support or undermine autonomous motivation depending on how they are perceived: as informational feedback acknowledging competence, or as a controlling instrument of pressure [1]. This explains the contradictory results concerning the motivational role of teacher pay and indicates the need for a balanced combination of material and non-material incentives within a single managerial model.

3. A model of managing teacher motivation in a general education school

On the basis of the analysis, a four-stage cyclical model of motivational management is proposed.

The first stage — diagnostics of the motivational profile of the teaching staff. The administration conducts surveys, interviews, and observations aimed at identifying the prevailing types of regulation (autonomous vs. controlled), the degree of satisfaction of the basic psychological needs, the level of job satisfaction, and the symptoms of emotional exhaustion in individual teachers and in the staff as a whole [8]. The result of the stage is a "motivational map" of the school and the identification of risk groups (for example, early career teachers [5]).

The second stage — design of the motivational environment. On the basis of the diagnostics, the principal and the management team formulate target benchmarks (the desired quality of staff motivation), select need-supportive mechanisms corresponding to the identified deficits, and fix them in local acts: regulations on incentives, professional development plans, mentoring programs, and procedures of collegial decision-making. The key principle of this stage is the participation of teachers themselves in designing the system, which in itself supports the need for autonomy [3, 9].

The third stage — implementation of need-supportive mechanisms. It includes three blocks of managerial actions: (1) autonomy support — expanding teachers' participation in school governance, delegating authority, reducing excessive control; (2) competence support — organizing practice-oriented professional learning, mentoring, informational feedback, and fair evaluation [2, 10]; (3) relatedness support — developing professional communities, recognition practices, and a cooperative climate. Material incentives are integrated into the system in an informational, achievement-oriented form rather than as an instrument of pressure.

The fourth stage — monitoring and feedback. The administration regularly measures the dynamics of motivational indicators, compares them with the target benchmarks, discusses the results with the staff, and adjusts the system, which turns the model into a continuous improvement cycle rather than a one-time campaign.

The expected results of the model's implementation are the growth of autonomous motivation and job satisfaction among teachers, a decrease in emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions [8], an increase in teachers' readiness for innovation and professional development [2, 7], and, as an indirect consequence, an improvement in the quality of teaching and in students' motivation [6, 10].

CONCLUSION

The study leads to the following conclusions. First, teacher motivation in a general education school is a manageable phenomenon: it is shaped to a significant extent by contextual factors — the principal's leadership style, evaluation and incentive systems, professional learning opportunities, and the socio-psychological climate — which are subject to purposeful managerial influence. Second, the

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strategic criterion of the effectiveness of motivational management should be the quality, not merely the intensity, of motivation: the shift from controlled toward autonomous regulation, since only autonomous motivation is associated with sustainable performance, well-being, and resistance to burnout. Third, the proposed four-stage model (diagnostics — design — implementation — monitoring), built around the satisfaction of teachers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, provides school leaders with a practical algorithm that integrates the fragmented findings of contemporary research. The prospects for further research are connected with the empirical verification of the model in specific schools, including pre-test and post-test measurement of motivational indicators, as well as with the adaptation of the model to national education systems undergoing large-scale reforms.

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