



**DESK RESEARCH REPORT ON
EDUCATION RESEARCH**

**Teacher recruitment, retention and
motivation in Europe**



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INTRODUCTION

This review briefly considers recent research on the recruitment, retention, attrition and motivation of teachers. These are not separated, as motivation itself is an ill-defined construct. Rather than attempt to specify a particular focus in detail and delimit it from other closely related areas, the individual and the environment in which they work are taken as being largely inseparable. As a result, rather than treating teaching as separated from the context in which it takes place, this paper takes these to be interlinked, with context central in shaping teachers working lives.

In this paper, I adopt a reflexive definition of motivation, as that which attracts, retains and drives teachers to improve their practice; this is to avoid over-theorised speculation, which would distract from pragmatic concerns of reducing teacher shortages and increasing teacher quality.

Teacher shortages across Europe

The need to address teacher motivation derives from a teacher shortage reported by many EU countries. In 2013, the European Commission (2013) described a shortage of qualified teachers in Europe, which they put down to an incapacity to attract the best candidates, because of declining prestige, deteriorating working conditions and lower remuneration compared with equivalent professions. This, they added, was compounded by an ageing teaching population, with many teachers soon to retire. Concern was expressed at some of the unsustainable solutions adopted by different countries. As most tenured teachers had no intention of changing their profession, the growing shortage was often addressed through longer working hours for teachers, higher pupil-teacher ratios and an increase in the retirement age. To develop more sustainable solutions, it is important to recognise how to attract people into teaching and retain them as teachers.

The commission repeated its concerns about teacher shortages and the ageing teacher population in its most recent report on teaching careers in Europe (European Commission, 2018), adding that almost half of the countries in Europe are faced with an ageing teacher population.

In an extensive review of 130 studies including 117 journal articles, seven book chapters, four monographs and two research reports, mainly published between 1980 to 2015, Han and Yin (2016) identify a number of possible causes for this shortage, including not only the ageing teaching force, but also early teacher attrition, an imbalance of high demands coupled with less reward, limited career opportunities, less job security and low prestige. These are important, as they suggest teacher motivation is associated more with environmental factors, including student motivation, educational reform, teaching practice and teachers' well-being, than with individual capabilities and attributes.

This review

There is a long history of widespread and extensive research on the factors which affect teacher motivation and approaches that can increase it. Studies often replicate the findings of previous work in different contexts, and there is much which offers little that is new to the field. For this reason, in this review I will mostly consider work published in the past 5 years, and the majority of empirical work discussed will be taken from the European context, although some larger studies from further afield are included.



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TEACHER RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND MOTIVATION IN EUROPE

Pre-service teachers' motivation to teach

Across time and place, the main reasons for wanting to teach remain a wish to work with children and engage in some form of service to society, often accompanied by the desire for intellectual fulfilment. Like many other studies, the European Commission (2013) found that the primary reasons for becoming a teacher are altruistic, and recently, an extensive review of research in the United States confirmed most people enter teaching to make a difference to the lives of others (Fray & Gore, 2018).

Teachers balance these personal desires with external factors including their view of the nature of teaching work, the attractiveness of working conditions and how it fits with other aspects of their lives. However, there is no single pattern of reasons, for and against teaching as these are socio-culturally situated, depending on national and local context, and also relate to the age, gender, ethnicity, class origin and other characteristics of teachers themselves (Kyriacou & Kabori, 1998; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Sinclair, 2008; Watt & Richardson, 2007; 2008).

Using a large scale survey at two points during the first two years of their initial teacher education, König, Rothland, Tachtsoglou and Klemenz (2016) found that student teachers' intrinsic motivation, their inner drive, increases during this time, whereas their extrinsic motivation fuelled by the perceived rewards of teaching does not change. However, changes in motivation are influenced by in-school opportunities to learn and develop as teachers. Interestingly, the European Commission (2013) found that many teachers felt under-prepared by their initial education for professional practice, and that the best models allowed practical and academic learning to occur concurrently. Two years later, they reported that a number of countries were taking measures to raise the quality of teaching by enhancing initial teacher education programmes (European Commission, 2015). Most recently, the commission reported that about one third of European education systems offer alternative pathways to a teaching qualification alongside the mainstream programmes, usually designed around short professional-oriented programmes, employment-based training or both (European Commission, 2018).

The retention of beginning teachers

A longstanding problem in the teacher workforce is the continuing and substantial numbers of qualified teachers who leave the profession within five years. Perryman and Calvert (2019) used surveys of teacher education graduates over five years in the United Kingdom, and found that despite claiming to be aware of the challenges of workload before entering teaching, workload was the most frequently cited reason for having left, or for leaving in the future. The data spoke to the reality of teaching being worse than expected, and the nature (rather than the quantity) of the workload, linked to notions of performativity and accountability, being a crucial factor.

Given the dangers of early attrition identified by Han and Yin (2016), The European Commission (2013) recommended that recruitment to initial teacher education should be widened, and student teachers should be made aware of real-life teaching requirements. The commission also recognised early career support as essential to retention (European Commission, 2013). They suggested early career support programmes should be provided for beginning teachers for the first two or three years of their careers, and that they should have reduced contact hours. In their most recent report on this, the commission indicate that induction and mentoring for new teachers are widely legislated across most European countries (European Commission, 2018).

Several studies support such approaches. The findings of an extensive review by den Brok, Wubbels and van Tartwijk (2017) suggest that attrition among beginning teachers in the Netherlands, with a



percentage close to 15%, is somewhat lower than in countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia. Yet, causes for attrition are comparable to those reported elsewhere. High-quality coaching and supervision, reducing workload, and organizing a social network for beginning teachers may be important factors in reducing attrition. These findings are confirmed by Thomas, Tuytens, Moolenaar, Devos, Kelchtermans and Vanderlinde (2019) in the Netherlands, who agreed that high levels of support increased teacher retention.

A survey of 143 beginning teachers in the Netherlands found negative perceptions of students related strongly to experiences of stress, responses to perceived tension, discontent and negative emotions. These, in turn, were negatively associated with observed teaching behaviour and indicated possible attrition (Harmsen, Helms-Lorenz, Maulana & van Veen, 2018).

Brunetti and Marston (2018) conducted interviews with 53 teachers who had graduated from a teacher education programme in western United States over a 10-year period. They taught students ages 5-13. Six themes were identified in supporting their retention: their validation as competent classroom practitioners; their work with others; their relationships with others; their continuing professional engagement; opportunities for them to take on leadership roles; and their ability to maintain a work life balance. Their study reveals a trajectory for professional development that teachers experience as they become increasingly able practitioners; one which is related to the development of their identity and agency as teachers.

In-service teacher motivation

The importance of professional support is not confined to beginning teachers. A strong professional community and exciting working environment, along with stimulating and challenging colleagues, has also long been considered important (Carson & Chase, 2009; Mani, 2002; Peterson & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 2003), providing an opportunity for institutional support and personal fulfilment (Praver and Oga-Baldwin, 2008). The European Commission has recommended teachers undertake regular continuing professional development, that they are encouraged to work collaboratively, and that those in difficulty should receive support and coaching (European Commission, 2013). In 2015, the commission reported the call from many teachers for more professional development linked to tailoring, diversifying, and innovating teaching practices, greater collaboration to share and diversify teaching practices; both professional development and collaborative work were linked to increased job satisfaction (European Commission, 2015). Similarly, a study of 213 teachers in the United States found that ongoing engagement in teacher learning opportunities over the working life course increase teacher motivation and retention (Durksen, Klassen & Daniels, 2017). Presently, teachers have an obligation to take part in continuing professional development in most countries, and schools usually participate in defining training and development needs and priorities (European Commission, 2018).

However, external factors are also important. Financial benefits such as salary, pension and insurance are often mentioned as extrinsic factors motivating in-service teachers. That such factors are closely interrelated is seen in Sinclair (2008), who identifies overlapping categories of 'the perceived benefits or convenience of teaching', 'the nature of teaching work' and 'the status of teaching'. In 2013, the European Commission called for better pay, especially for the most effective teachers (European Commission, 2013).

Teacher autonomy also contributes to their retention, and to the quality of their work. It has long been recognised that teacher motivation is enriched when teachers are able to choose teaching materials, programmes and teaching methods, and determine classroom organization and discipline (Kaiser, 1981). However, using an extensive online survey in the Netherlands, Klaijnsen, Vermeulen and Martens (2018) found the relation between teachers' innovative behaviours, seen as central to tackling some of the complex challenges they face, and their general motivation to be weak. More important



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was their confidence in facing the challenges of their work. As in other areas, a high degree of support enhanced this.

In-service teacher demotivation

There is a long and substantive literature confirming that the most significant demotivating factors for teachers include stressful working environments, high amounts of administration, limited teacher autonomy, repetitive teaching and poor student attitudes and behaviours, coupled with inadequate career structures, few opportunities for personal development and low salaries (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Kiziltepe, 2006). Craig (2017) identifies growing international concerns about escalating rates of teacher attrition that result, along with its calculable and incalculable effects.

In Norway, an extensive analysis of existing data by With (2017) showed that early career attrition has declined over time, whereas the incidence of early retirement increased. Using a survey of 760 Norwegian teachers in grade 1–10, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018) analysed how teacher perception of job demands and job resources in the school environment were related to teacher well-being, engagement and motivation to leave the teaching profession. Higher demands, particularly time pressures, were strongly associated with lower teacher well-being, whereas levels of resources were more moderately associated. Teacher wellbeing was in turn predictive of higher engagement and lower motivation to leave the profession.

An extensive analysis of working teachers complaining of illness in Germany by Dudenhöffer, Claus, Schöne, Letzel, & Rose (2017) found this was associated with their reporting little support from or cooperation with supervisors, with whom there were regular conflicts, less respect and support from parents, little recognition of their performance, and little autonomy. They also felt their workload was excessive and work life balance was imbalanced, and complained of having too much administration, an unpleasant work schedule, insufficient and interrupted breaks and of suffering from exhaustion and fatigue. Similarly, a study of Australian 215 secondary teachers found that non-teaching-related workload was a stronger predictor of burnout than teaching-related-workload, whilst perceived organisational support tempered this relationship (Lawrence, Loi & Gudex, 2019).

Following an analysis of interviews with 39 teachers and 6 school leaders across England and Wales, Skinner, Leavey and Rothi (2019) argue that teachers' commitment is being eroded by the impact of bureaucratic changes at management level, such as the setting of performance targets, increased workload, increased accountability and changes in the curriculum. This can negatively affect their mental health and well-being. They suggest managerialism is demotivating, eroding commitment, professional identity and self-confidence, and bringing a vulnerability to stress, anxiety and depression. In an extensive study in the United States, Ryan, von der Embse, Pendergast, Saeki, Segool & Schwing (2017) have established test based accountability as a particularly strong influence in damaging teacher retention. The European Commission (2018) has reported that most education systems in Europe now have management-led performance and promotion regimes, based on teacher competence frameworks varying in their detail. Teacher appraisal is regulated and a common practice in most countries, although in some countries it is not a regular exercise. It is generally based on a discussion with the school leader as well as on classroom observation. It is not always linked to identify professional development needs, and the school leaders involved in appraising teachers are trained to do so in only one third of countries.

A study by Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) in the United States, found that schools where teachers rated their working conditions as more satisfactory had lower attrition rates, and also were schools with higher rates of low-income and/or minority students. This suggests working conditions are in a complex interplay with school demographics in influencing teacher attrition.



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Kelchtermans (2017) suggests that there are a number of lessons that can be learnt from a review of current studies on teacher attrition. First, relationships play a central role in maintaining teacher commitment, as does social recognition and a sense of belonging. Second, performativity policies impact negatively and increase teacher attrition. Finally, from the perspective of career and teachers' work lives, there are few possibilities in teaching to gain vertical promotion. In fact, one of the only upward career steps in teaching is moving into school leadership and becoming a principal. Yet, formal leadership is so fundamentally different from being a teacher, that it is more like a career switch rather than a promotion. Nevertheless, many teachers are interested in taking on educationally relevant responsibilities, which may imply that they spend less time in a classroom working with their students, but these are not always available.

However, See and Gorard (2019) analysed official data in the United Kingdom and found that teacher shortages are less an issue of teacher motivation than the unintended consequences of government policies themselves, especially those related to teacher selection for initial education, school funding, the statutory education and training leaving age and increases in the number of small schools.

Teacher motivation, student motivation and student performance

Studies suggest motivated teachers are more likely to engage with deep rather than surface learning goals (Retelsdorf & Günther, 2011) and students report higher interest and enjoyment in learning (Wild, Enzle, Nix & Deci, 1997). This helps form a virtuous circle, as highly motivated students also enthuse teachers (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008; Bernaus, Wilson, & Gardner, 2009). However, low teacher motivation leads to highly controlled, teacher rather than student-centred teaching and an underestimation of student capabilities (Hein et al., 2012; Kiziltepe, 2006, 2008).

Mahler, Großschedl and Harms (2018) suggest teacher motivation is a useful predictor of student learning, although the process by which this happens is unclear. This study was conducted a study with 48 secondary science teachers and their 1036 students in Germany, using a variety of tests for teacher motivation and student achievement. No relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and students' performance was found, but a significant positive relationship between teachers' enthusiasm for the subject itself and for teaching the subject and students' performance. An extensive study of mathematics teachers and students in the United States (Lazarides, Buchholz & Rubach, 2018) supports this.



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CONCLUSION

Summary

There is widespread concern about teacher shortages and an ageing teacher population in Europe. A continuing and substantial number of qualified teachers leave the profession within five years, often citing excessive workload linked to notions of performativity and accountability.

Teacher motivation, which attracts, retains and drives teachers to improve their practice, is associated more with environmental factors, including educational reform, teaching practice, student motivation and teachers' well-being, than with individual capabilities and attributes.

The primary reasons for becoming a teacher are altruistic, balanced with external factors including views of the nature of teaching and the attractiveness of working conditions.

High-quality support and professional development, opportunities to work with others and take on leadership roles, and the ability to maintain a work life balance can increase the retention of both beginning and longer serving teachers. Financial benefits such as salary, pension and insurance are also important.

The degree of autonomy afforded to teachers contributes both to their retention and to the quality of their work.

Stressful working environments have a significant demotivating effect on teachers. High amounts of administration, overbearing bureaucracy, managerialism including the setting of performance targets, increased accountability and limited teacher autonomy, having to deal with constant change, repetitive teaching and poor student attitudes and behaviours all contribute to this. Inadequate career structures, limited career progression possibilities, few opportunities for personal development and low salaries also play their part.

Test based accountability is a particularly strong influence in damaging teacher retention.

Excessive workload and time pressures are strongly associated with low teacher well-being.

Teacher motivation is a useful predictor of student learning, and low teacher motivation leads to highly controlled, teacher rather than student-centred teaching and an underestimation of student capabilities.

Future developments

Han and Yin (2016) identify a number of limitations with theorisations of motivation, which capture neither the complex and interrelated nature of this construct, nor the range of contextual factors which influence and shape it in different contingent circumstances. To acknowledge such concerns, this review has brought recent research on the recruitment, retention, attrition and motivation of teachers together. Of particular importance in the focus of future research should be the two-way relationship between teacher motivation and student learning, where one supports the development of the other in a virtuous circle. An analysis of situational contingencies should be central to this.



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