Exploring the Impact of Teacher Social Identity on Motivational Enhancement

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Abstract

In the field of psychology, motivation is viewed as the process through which individuals prioritize incoming messages based on their needs and subsequently engage in behaviour accordingly. When exploring factors contributing to teachers' motivation, it becomes crucial to emphasize the role of teachers' social identity. Teachers with elevated social identity and group belonging levels often integrate didactic and innovative methods in their teaching practices, driven by their confidence in their abilities. These methods not only foster students' independence and autonomy but also enhance the learning environment.

As part of the study, 405 teachers from both private and public schools in five diverse cities across Georgia took part in the quantitative survey. The convenience sampling method was employed throughout the research process; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the population of teachers in Georgia.

The study reveals that teachers perceive themselves and their colleagues similarly, indicating a strong collective identity within the teaching community, regardless of individual differences. Demographic factors such as teacher status, income, city, and education do not significantly affect this sense of belonging. Identified regulation emerges as the primary form of motivation among teachers, reflecting their perception of the importance of their profession. Moreover, there is a positive correlation between social identity and teacher motivation, suggesting that a stronger sense of belonging corresponds to higher motivation levels.

Keywords*: teacher, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, motivation, social identity*

INTRODUCTION

Motivation lies at the core of human behavior, driving individuals towards goals and aspirations. Psychologists have long sought to understand the intricate mechanisms underlying motivation, tracing its roots back to pioneering theories by scholars like Sully (1884) and Maslow (1955). While early perspectives highlighted intrinsic and extrinsic drivers, contemporary theories delve deeper into the nuanced interplay between individual and contextual factors.

In parallel, the Theory of Social Identity, introduced by Tajfel (1979), introduces a novel perspective on motivation, emphasizing the role of group affiliation in shaping individual identity. This theory underscores the dynamic nature of social categorization, wherein individuals derive identity and belonging from their association with various social groups.

Against this backdrop, the realm of teacher motivation emerges as a focal point of inquiry, spurred by global concerns surrounding dwindling teacher numbers and job satisfaction. Sinclair (2008) presents a multifaceted framework for understanding teacher motivation, encompassing factors ranging from autonomy in teaching to social connections and professional growth opportunities. However, challenges arise in categorizing these determinants, with overlapping domains complicating the delineation of distinct motivational factors.

Of particular interest is the exploration of teacher social identity, shedding light on the collective identity forged within the teaching community. Research indicates that a strong sense of group identification among teachers correlates with heightened engagement, job satisfaction, and overall well-being (Christ et al., 2003; van Dick & Wagner, 2001; van Dick & Wagner, 2002). Furthermore, interactions within the teaching community foster the development and consolidation of social identity, exerting profound implications on teacher performance and achievement.

TEACHER MOTIVATION AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

Motivation, as defined by various psychologists, encompasses the desire preceding and driving behaviour, whether stimulated by internal or external factors (Sully, 1884; Maslow, 1955). Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-determination Theory distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with intrinsic motivation rooted in personal enjoyment or interest. However, extrinsic motivation often predominates, driven by external rewards or avoidance of negative outcomes.

Psychological theories categorize motivation into content and process theories. Content theories, exemplified by Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs and Alderfer's (1969) ERG theory, focus on hierarchical needs guiding behaviour. Herzberg's (1959) Two-factor theory differentiates between motivational and hygiene factors, emphasizing internal versus external sources of motivation.

Contrastingly, process theories view motivation as a rational process. Adams' (1965) Equity Theory posits that individuals assess fairness in social interactions, influencing their motivation. Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory suggests that motivation hinges on the expectation of future rewards based on effort. The Porter-Lawler Model (1968) builds upon Vroom's theory, incorporating multiple variables such as perceived effort-reward probability and satisfaction, within a dynamic framework.

On the other hand, the Theory of Social Identity, introduced by Henry Tajfel (1979), emphasizes self-perception and identity shaped by group affiliation, values, and emotional ties. Unlike other socio-psychological theories, social identity theory focuses on group characteristics rather than individual traits. Tajfel (1979) highlights the dynamic nature of belonging to social categories, which evolves with new information. Consequently, attitudes toward oneself and the group, as well as other groups, may shift, sometimes leading individuals to leave their own group.

Since the 1990s, there has been significant research activity on teacher motivation worldwide, spurred by a decrease in the number of teachers in European countries, the US, and Australia. This interdisciplinary field encompasses psychological, social, economic, political, and cultural perspectives. Sinclair (2008) defines teacher motivation as a blend of factors influencing both the choice of the teaching profession and its continuation. These factors include autonomy in teaching, social connections with colleagues, opportunities for professional growth, work environment, and income. Sinclair (2008) categorizes the determinants of teacher motivation into ten main groups, including teacher calling, altruism, and perceived benefits. However, some scholars (Han & Yin, 2016) find this classification problematic due to overlapping categories, such as teaching process, teacher status, and financial benefits. Research indicates that factors like loss of autonomy and excessive control from leadership can diminish teacher self-efficacy, social identity and motivation (Pelletier, Séguin-Lévesque & Legault, 2002).

The concept of teacher social identity, while relatively new in research, plays a vital role in understanding teacher behavior (Mavor et al., 2017). Research indicates that a strong group identification among teachers predicts higher engagement (Christ, van Dick, Wagner & Stellmacher, 2003), job satisfaction (van Dick & Wagner, 2001), and overall well-being (van Dick & Wagner, 2002). For instance, teachers' identification with their colleagues influences their behaviours both within and outside of school settings (Mutjaba & Reiss, 2013). Interactions with fellow teachers contribute to the development and strengthening of social identity, which, in turn, can impact teacher performance and achievement (Haslam, 2017). Although research in this area remains limited, studies such as Canrinus and colleagues' (2011) investigation of Dutch teachers highlight the link between social identity and teacher motivation and emotional involvement.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed quantitative research methods, utilizing a teacher survey conducted via convenience sampling in Georgian schools. A questionnaire comprising three scales and demographic variables was developed to gather data. Demographic variables encompassed gender, age, place of residence, education level, years of teaching experience, salary, and other relevant factors.

Teacher motivation was assessed using the Work Task Motivation Scale of Teachers (WTMST) developed by Fernet and colleagues (Fernet et al., 2008). This scale traditionally evaluates

teacher motivation across five dimensions, but our study focused on four: class preparation, teaching, evaluation of students, and completing administrative tasks. The fifth dimension, involving complementary tasks like leading committee meetings or participating in community projects, was excluded from the Georgian version of the questionnaire due to its limited relevance. Each dimension of the questionnaire comprises 15 items, totalling 60 items overall, rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The WTMST includes five sub-scales: intrinsic motivation, identified regulation (extrinsic motivation based on the job's importance), introjected regulation (extrinsic motivation influenced by feelings of guilt, shame, or anxiety), external regulation (extrinsic motivation driven by a sense of responsibility), and amotivation.

The Teacher Social Identity Scale, was developed based on Weinreich's (1980) identity measurement approach, consisted of 13 antonymous adjectives representing characteristics of teachers, e.g.: active, motivated, professional, confident, organized, strict, energetic, competent, independent, satisfied, successful, sociable and creative. Participants rated themselves and their colleagues separately on a 5-point Likert scale.

Prior to data collection, the English instruments underwent double translation into Georgian and back into English to ensure accuracy. Pilot testing with 110 teachers refined linguistic aspects of the questionnaire, with minor changes incorporated into the final version.

The survey included 405 teachers from 29 schools across five cities in Georgia, predominantly female (93%) in line with national statistics. Teachers' ages ranged from 21 to 68 years *(M=43.75, SD=11.5),* with teaching experience spanning from 1 to 47 years *(M=16.37, SD=11.2).* Most respondents (68%) held a master's or equivalent degree, with 27% having a bachelor's degree. The majority (81%) taught in public schools, with primary school teachers (16%) being the most common, followed by Georgian language and literature (12%) and mathematics (12%) teachers. Half (50%) of respondents were engaged in additional tutoring activities, and 80% had passed teacher certification exams in Georgia. Their monthly salaries varied, with 44% earning 701-1000 GEL and 43% earning below 700 GEL. Overall, the sample exhibited diversity in age and experience but was homogeneous in education level, school type, certification status, and monthly income.

RESULTS

The study examined teachers' social identity and motivation, revealing noteworthy findings. Teachers showed a strong sense of belonging to their social group, as evidenced by the lack of significant differences between self-assessment and peer group assessment of social identity *(M=55.69, SD=7.73 vs. M=55.51, SD=8.02).* The primary focus of the study, the teacher motivation scale, is segmented into five sub-scales, each indicating the prevailing type of motivation among teachers. The findings from the research demonstrate that identified regulation emerged as the dominant type of motivation *(M=71.26, SD=13.14)*, followed closely by intrinsic motivation *(M=68.82, SD=12.14)*, while amotivation scored the lowest *(M=36.73, SD=18.64).* Gender did not influence social identity or motivation levels.

However, age and experience yielded significant differences. Social identity was lowest among teachers aged 31-40 *(M=1.3, SD=0.64)* and those with less than 5 years of experience *(M=0.5, SD=0.54),* while it peaked among teachers over 61 *(M=2.68, SD=0.22)* and those with 21-25 years of experience *(M=1.5, SD=0.04).* Similarly, motivation was highest among teachers aged 41-50 *(M=268.62, SD=46.13)* and those with 11-15 years of experience *(M=272.96, SD=38.45).* Mentor teachers displayed significantly higher motivation than practicing teachers *(M=311.75, SD=6.13 vs. M=238.68, SD=50.02).*

Salary also impacted motivation levels. Teachers earning 1600 GEL or more monthly showed the highest motivation *(M=287.00, SD=34.66),* while those earning up to 400 GEL had the lowest *(M=240.75, SD=40.61).* However, intrinsic motivation did not significantly differ between low-earning *(M=65.34, SD=14.32)* and high-earning *(M=68.67, SD=3.14)* teachers. These findings underscore the intricate relationship between demographic factors and teacher motivation, shedding light on areas where interventions may be beneficial.

It's important to note that a positive relationship was noted between the principal study factors and their internal measurements. The level of surveyed teacher intrinsic motivation increases

with the increase of their social identity *(r = .415**, n=402, p <.01).* Also, a positive correlation was observed between social identity and identified regulation *(r = .338**, n=402, p <.01),* the type of motivation based on conscious valuing and importance placed on the profession. Additionally, low positive correlation was observed between social identity and motivation in general *(r = .385**, n=402, p <.01),* when excluding amotivation sub-scale. Relatively low, 3.4% of teacher motivation variability is explained by their social identity level *(R2ADJ=.032, F (1,398) =14.05, p <.01),* however, it is a reliable determinant of motivation *(β = 1.21, p <.01).*

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that despite minor distinctions, the surveyed teachers attribute diverse characteristics equally to themselves and their peers. From the gathered data, it can be inferred that teachers perceive themselves as integral members of a unified, extensive community of educators, as they don't perceive notable discrepancies between themselves and their colleagues. Regardless of gender, teachers exhibit high levels of similarity and sense of belonging to their social group. It's unsurprising that as teachers' age and experience increase, so does their sense of social identity. Additionally, there exists a moderate positive association between social identity and motivation, indicating that teachers with elevated levels of social identity tend to display high motivation. Moreover, a notably stronger positive correlation was identified between intrinsic motivation and social identity, indicating that teachers with high social identity also tend to exhibit high intrinsic motivation. However, there was no correlation observed between social identity and amotivation.

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