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A Study on the Work Motivation Status of Chinese Kindergarten Teachers

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Abstract. This paper studies the work motivation of kindergarten teachers in China under the background of declining birthrate. It uses SDT to examine not only the general situation of teachers' motivation, but also the factors related to the differences of teachers' motivation. I adopted the research design of mixed method, investigated the work motivation of 196 teachers through Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale (MWMS), and conducted semi-structured interviews on the survey results. From the results, we can see that the internal motivation and identity adjustment are higher than the external adjustment and amotivation, which indicates that the internal motivation structure has different motivations depending on teaching experience, marital status and kindergarten. Teachers in public kindergartens and teachers with more years' experience reported higher motivation scores than teachers in private kindergartens. The interview data also show that motivation is influenced by many different background factors, such as perceived pressure, working conditions and fear of unemployment due to demography. By putting teachers' motivation into the demographic transformation framework and using numbers and words, it increases the content of the literature. This shows that system support, working conditions and policy intervention are necessary conditions to motivate preschool teachers.

Keywords: work motivation, self-determination theory, kindergarten teachers

1. Introduction

In recent years, the birth rate in China has been declining, which has gradually changed the population structure in China. A direct effect of this trend is that fewer children will attend preschool education (mainly kindergartens). According to the China Population Forecast Report 2023 Edition released by the YuWa Population Research Think Tank, a Chinese public interest organization in the field of population research, the number of births in a year will soon drop below 7 million if the family planning policy is not changed. More importantly, according to the 2021 edition, with the decrease of the birth population in China, the number of children under the age of 3-5 is also expected to decrease, as shown by the orange dotted line representing the number of births in 2019-2029. As a result, not only the number of kindergartens has decreased, but also the number of students. According to the data of "Statistical Bulletin of National Education Development in 2022" published by the Ministry of Education, there are 5,610 kindergartens nationwide, and the

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enrollment rate of preschool children has also decreased by 1,776,600, a decrease of about -3.70%. Chongqing is similar, and its local data also shows a downward trend year by year.

The same pattern can also be seen in Chongqing. According to the data of Guangjuntong, a cloud-based platform that provides data support for governments, businesses, and individuals, the number of kindergarten students in 2013-2022 continued to decrease.

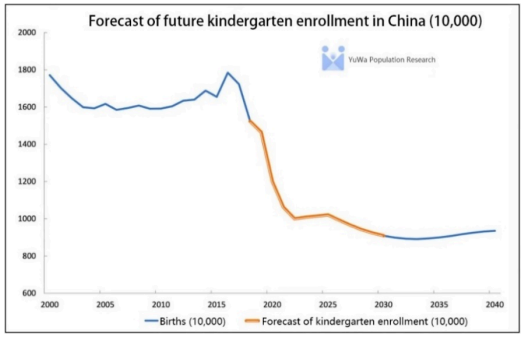


Figure 1. Forecast of future kindergarten enrollment in China (10,000)

(Source: YuWa Population Research, 2022 [1])

These changes may have different meanings for kindergarten teachers. On the other hand, fewer people will lead to the streamlining or even closure of institutions, making our work uncertain. On the contrary, the competition for a few jobs is becoming more and more fierce, and the possible salary reduction and career development choices will also bring pressure to educators. As time goes by, it will affect teachers' professional experience and their enthusiasm for work.

EC (early childhood, kindergarten in China) teachers are considered as the foundation of the success of the education process [2]. The reason is that because it is generally believed that "improving the quality of teachers is the core of improving the whole education system", the quality of teachers must be the priority of the education department [3]. In view of this, it is very important to know how kindergartens cope with the current demographic data and institutions.

This paper has made contributions in two aspects. First of all, it puts kindergarten teachers' work motivation in the context of the demographic changes in China, which is a topic that scholars pay less attention to. Second, through the combination of quantitative and qualitative data, we can better understand how different people and situations motivate teachers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Self-determination theory and motivation types

Teachers' motivation is very important for teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Whether teachers actively participate in CPD is often related to various conditions, including what kind of professionals they are, how confident they are in themselves, and where CPD is organized. Among all these factors, motivation seems to be the most relevant, because it not only affects whether teachers are willing to participate, but also affects how they use what they have learned, and ultimately affects students' learning [4]. Therefore, teachers with more motivation can often do better in supporting students' autonomy and encouraging students' intrinsic motivation [5]. As for the field of teachers' professional development: "What motivates teachers to participate in this professional development [6]?" It is by no means insignificant, but it will actually determine whether these professional developments are meaningful and efficient.

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Cultivating and maintaining a high level of motivation is not always that simple. According to SDT [7], if a person does something from his inner interest or relatively free commitment, he will be more likely to have a strong motivation. SDT does not regard motivation as one thing, but specifies different kinds of motivation and shows how each motivation becomes stronger or weaker. Generally speaking, it discusses three different categories. The first one is called amotivation, which means that a person has amotivation at all and they are not interested. The second is intrinsic motivation, that is, doing things themselves is interesting and enjoyable. The third is external motivation. Action is taken for some instrumental reasons, such as getting good things or recognition, avoiding bad things or disapproval, maintaining your reputation, or getting something you really care about.

Since external motivation may come from different reasons, SDT is further divided according to the influence degree of external factors in a person's life. In this case, internalization refers to what we accept based on values/guiding behavior before getting out of control. It is also adjusting for us now [8]. External adjustment is the most inhuman, because most behaviors are to get rewards and avoid punishment. As for introjected adjustment, this kind of stress feeling is a little different: it is internal, but it is still controlling, mainly because of feeling guilty or embarrassed or something related to your self. Self-endorsement is a recognized rule. Here, a person does something because he realizes that it is valuable and has personal significance to him. This kind of participation may not be based on enjoying activities, but it is no longer because others tell them to do something. This is because they believe that what they do is very important [9].

SDT also explains these types of incentives on the continuum between control and autonomy, and how much regulation acts on oneself [10]: In other words, it is like regulating external or external regulation, and internal motivation (or intrinsic motivation) may be the best example of self-motivated individuals, rather than being controlled by others. Other types, such as introduction, identification and integrated supervision, are in between. When people begin to think that something is valuable, they are more likely to internalize this value and act according to their own will. Even so, we can't assume that this tendency of autonomy is self-generated: they often grow more complete in an environment conducive to learning, growth and becoming themselves.

2.2. Previous research on motivation

SDT is one of the most widely used theory to study motivation, particularly in educational contexts. A growing body of empirical research has shown that intrinsic, or more autonomous, forms of motivation are closely linked to academic success. In a study conducted across different high schools, Froiland and Worrell [11] found that students with stronger intrinsic motivation were generally more engaged in learning, and this higher level of engagement was associated with better academic achievement. Evidence from meta-analytic research also points in the same direction, suggesting a positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and academic performance [12].

In formal educational settings, researchers have also paid considerable attention to the relationships among teacher–student interaction, student motivation, and teacher motivation. For example, Radel et al. [13] showed that whether teachers adopt an autonomy-supportive or controlling approach can make a noticeable difference to students' intrinsic motivation and the way they make decisions. In a similar vein, Oga-Baldwin et al. [14] reported that when Japanese students' intrinsic motivation and autonomy were strengthened, their engagement in language learning also increased.

Teacher motivation, meanwhile, has become an increasingly important concern in the field of professional learning. Since Guskey drew attention to the need to consider teachers' motivation in

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this area, its significance for Continuing Professional Development has been more widely acknowledged [15]. Research by Gagné established a positive connection between teachers' motivation and their learning outcomes [16]. Wal et al. stated that "school teachers with more autonomous profiles got more involved in professional development programs as they valued and enjoyed the activities per se more and they were conscious of the significance of those programs [17]". Evidence has also suggested that teachers who are more autonomously motivated are generally more willing to take part in Continuing Professional Development [18]. In a related discussion, Liu et al. argued that lasting intrinsic motivation can provide important support for teachers' higher-level development, especially when their personal aspirations are closely connected with their professional growth and inner values [19].

Beyond the broader discussion of teacher motivation, an increasing number of studies have turned to kindergarten teachers in different national settings. In Indonesia, researchers have explored how kindergarten teachers' performance may be shaped by work motivation, achievement motivation, and professional competence [20,21]. In Albania, Kume reported clear connections among job satisfaction, work motivation, and work engagement among kindergarten teachers [22]. Czajka, meanwhile, looked at a motivational system applied to teachers in both public and private kindergartens and examined teachers' responses to its effectiveness [23]. Relevant research has also emerged in China. One study examined the motivational profiles of kindergarten teachers in ethnic minority areas and considered how these profiles were related to work engagement, workplace well-being, and retention intention [24]. The results suggested that teachers with different motivational profiles tended to show different outcomes, while work engagement and workplace well-being appeared to play a mediating role in the relationship between motivation profiles and retention intention.

2.3. Research questions

Although motivation has been widely discussed in relation to teacher performance and professional development, studies that address this issue in the Chinese context are still relatively limited. China is experiencing marked demographic change, especially in relation to declining birth rates. This broader shift has already affected early childhood education, as reflected in the reduction of kindergarten enrollment and, in some areas, the shrinking number of kindergartens. Under these circumstances, it is worth asking how such changes may be influencing kindergarten teachers' work motivation. In response to this issue, the present study addresses two research questions:(1) What is the current status of work motivation among Chinese kindergarten teachers?(2) What factors may be associated with differences in their work motivation?

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Participants

The survey initially included 213 teachers from both public and private kindergartens. After data screening, 17 responses were excluded because they had been completed in less than 90 seconds, which suggested that they were unlikely to be valid. The remaining responses were retained for analysis. A summary of the sample is presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Sample description and distribution

Demographic variables	Categorical groups	N	%
Gender	Female	190	96.94%
	Male	6	3.06%
Age_group	18-24	21	10.71%
	25-32	136	69.39%
	33-40	35	17.86%
	> 40	4	2.04%
Teaching_years	< 3	31	15.82%
	3-5	55	28.06%
	6-10	89	45.41%
	> 10	21	10.71%
Marital_status	Married	113	57.65%
	Single	82	41.84%
	Others	1	0.51%
Education_background	Under bachelor	77	39.29%
	Bachelor	110	56.12%
	Master or above	3	1.53%
	Unknown	6	3.06%
Type_of_affiliation	Public	145	73.98%
	Private	51	26.02%

As shown in Table 1, female teachers made up the overwhelming majority of the sample, accounting for 190 participants (96.94%), while male teachers accounted for only 6 participants (3.06%). This distribution is broadly consistent with the gender composition commonly seen among kindergarten teachers in China.

As far as the age and teaching experience of the sample are concerned, it is quite young: teachers over 40 account for only a very small proportion of the participants, while almost all of them are under 40. Most teachers said that their teaching experience is between 6-10 years (45.41%) or 3-5 years (28.06%), which means that quite a few people in the sample already have average professional experience.

With regard to marital status, there are 16% more married teachers than unmarried teachers. About 95% of the participants have received undergraduate education or below.

As for the institutions to which these teachers belong, we can see that a large number of kindergarten teachers belonging to public kindergartens participate, which is nearly three times more than the number of private kindergarten teachers.

3.2. Research instruments

This is a semi-structured interview using both questionnaires and interviews. For the quantitative aspect of this study, it is mainly based on the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale. As for the quality part, I used interviews with kindergarten teachers.

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The questionnaire consists of 19 questions, including seven dimensions: internal motivation, identity adjustment (adjustment), introduction adjustment (proximity), introduction adjustment (avoidance), external adjustment substance, external adjustment society and non-motivation. Everyone has two or three things. In order to adapt to the current research, the initial questions were changed to Chinese, and then revised as needed, so that they are still consistent with the motivation category and also suitable for the local research environment. Use the 7-point Likert scale, in which 1-disagree very much and 7-agree very much. We also collected the background information of the participants through the questionnaire (see Table 1).

In order to better understand the pattern shown by my quantitative research results, I asked five teachers to do some semi-structured interviews. Based on the situation of kindergartens in China, the interview paid more attention to three parts: the differences between public and private kindergartens, the differences related to teaching experience, and teachers' broader thinking and hope for the future. More precisely, I want to know whether there are differences in work motivation related to the teaching age and marital status of kindergarten types (public/private). It also provides an opportunity to see whether the decline in kindergarten enrollment in China has affected teachers' motivation, and to ask teachers' personal opinions and suggestions. The basic information of the interviewee can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Basic information about the interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Years of Teaching	Marital Status	Type of Kindergarten
Teacher Fan	Female	2	Single	Public
Teacher Yang	Female	4	Single	Public
Teacher Tang	Female	6	Single	Public
Teacher Xiao	Female	11	Married	Private
Teacher Hu	Female	9	Married	Private

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Prior to the formal data collection for the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with a small sample of five participants. Based on this pilot, minor adjustments were made before the questionnaire was formally distributed. The questionnaires were designed and created using the China Online Questionnaire System, Questionnaire Star.

Then, I formulate interview questions by looking at the results of my questionnaire, so that qualitative information will illuminate the patterns drawn from it. Five female kindergarten teachers were asked to talk more about their work and feel motivated. We use semi-structured interviews to explore all aspects of this topic, such as internal motivation, external motivation and non-motivation, and let participants express their opinions on how to improve their work motivation.

All the interviews were conducted at Tencent Conference, the China version of zoom, which lasted about 50 minutes. With the consent of all the participants, we recorded their meetings and transcribed them later. Before each interview, the interviewer will give a consent form, explaining the content of the study, the privacy of the information and who will handle it in the future. Only after obtaining the consent, do we interview, and there is no conflict of interest between the interviewer and the interviewee.

I did data visualization and statistical analysis with R.

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4. Findings and results

4.1. Motivational dimensions of kindergarten teachers

Table 3 summarizes seven motivating factors in the eyes of kindergarten teachers. As far as students' various types of motivation are concerned, intrinsic motivation is the highest when M=6.05, followed by recognition and adjustment when M=6.03. Other scores are relatively low. Internal regulation is in the middle of these three kinds of regulation, while external regulation includes physical regulation and social regulation. The number of teachers who feel very uninterested or unmotivated (M=2.33) is still quite low, so perhaps most teachers are not super bored.

Considering all these things, it shows that there is some kind of motivation pattern, which is mainly composed of internalized things. From the perspective of SDT, intrinsic motivation and certain rules are both more autonomous forms of understanding. From this perspective, the reason why teachers continue to teach is understandable. On the other hand, external driving factors do not seem to dominate.

Table 3. Distributive statistics for kindergarten teachers' motivation scores

Dimension	Items (n)	Minimum	Maximum	M	Median	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	SE
Amotivation	588	1.00	7.00	2.33	2.00	1.63	1.13	0.36	0.07
External regulation (material)	588	1.00	7.00	4.69	5.00	1.65	-0.62	-0.32	0.07
External regulation (social)	588	1.00	7.00	4.27	4.00	1.89	-0.35	-0.97	0.08
Identified regulation	588	1.00	7.00	6.03	6.00	1.15	-1.44	2.69	0.05
Intrinsic motivation	588	1.00	7.00	6.05	6.00	1.07	-1.42	3.26	0.04
Introjected regulation (approach)	392	1.00	7.00	5.65	6.00	1.38	-1.20	1.52	0.07
Introjected regulation (avoidance)	392	1.00	7.00	4.95	5.00	1.60	-0.90	0.38	0.08

4.2. Correlations between demographic variables and motivational dimensions

The questionnaire data point to three demographic factors that appear to be particularly relevant to kindergarten teachers' motivation: teaching experience, marital status, and kindergarten type.

4.2.1. Teaching experience

Teacher Fan, who has been teaching for two years, said that when she first started teaching, they had more to learn and more pressure than those old teachers. They must learn from good teachers on many levels. After all, it is really experience. Teacher Yang, who has been working for four years, also said the same thing: "We have to participate in these competitions and open classes every semester, which is really difficult for new teachers. During that time, I even dreamed of giving lectures to children."

These reports show how the fledgling teacher tries to adapt to the classroom routine and career expectations in order to gain some self-confidence. At this point, they seem to be more concerned about becoming capable and dealing with daily affairs than getting rewards or fame. They may also find that the higher stress they report will affect their experience of different motivations.

As we can see from Figure 2. Teachers who have been teaching for less than 3 years score significantly lower in all dimensions except one, which is a non-active dimension. This is especially obvious when it comes to external materials and rules. For this group of people, the internal

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motivation is relatively strong (M=5.8), the external material (M=4.3) and the social adjustment (M=3.9) are not as good.

Generally speaking, intrinsic motivation and certain rules are the most common in all experience groups. Then there is internal adjustment, and external adjustment is slightly lower, and non-initiative is the least. This has the same general pattern as the average reported in Table 3.

In addition, as teaching experience grows, the recognized rules are slowly increasing. Perhaps it is because more experienced teachers are more inclined to associate their work with themselves and find some meaning from it. Intrinsic motivation and two self-regulation sub-scales also showed an upward trend.

Another noteworthy feature is that teachers with "more than 10 years" experience have relatively high scores of introverted avoidance: it is also an incentive method, which is related to bad things such as not wanting to feel ashamed and embarrassed about themselves, so it does have an external flavor, because those social norms are part of the reason why you feel bad. The more experienced teachers are considered to have better professional ability and more work experience. With such expectations, they will also care about their public image, office image and people's ideas. In this way, it may also make people more motivated to avoid.

Teacher Xiao's interview offers a concrete example. With 11 years of teaching experience, she noted: "What upsets me most at work is when people talk behind my back and spread untrue rumors. I would prefer a more open and harmonious environment." When asked whether she cared more about personal growth or professional progress, she replied: "I definitely pay more attention to gaining the approval of parents and recognition from leaders. I work hard to earn these because it's harder to receive recognition from parents, as they often learn about a teacher's performance through their children rather than direct interaction." She also mentioned that maintaining a good professional reputation involves speaking and behaving carefully, regulating emotions, and working cooperatively with colleagues. In general, these remarks suggest that experienced teachers may carry not only a stronger sense of professional commitment, but also a heightened sensitivity to evaluation and recognition.

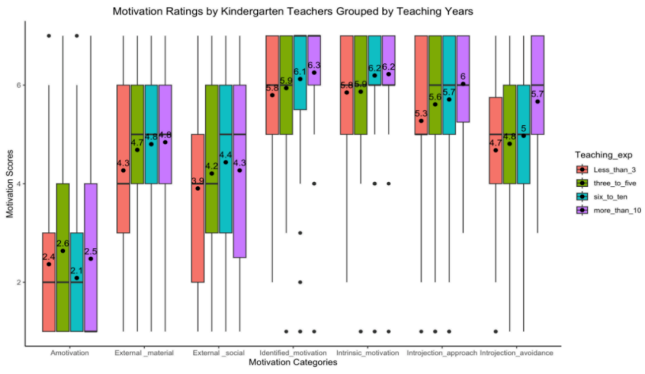


Figure 2. Motivation ratings by kindergarten teachers grouped by teaching years

To examine whether motivation scores differed significantly across groups with different lengths of teaching experience, a Tukey Honest Significant Difference (HSD) test was carried out. The results presented in Table 4 suggest that teachers with more teaching experience generally reported higher levels of motivation. In particular, statistically significant differences were found between the group with less than three years of experience and the groups with 6-10 years and more than 10 years of experience. By contrast, the difference between the 6-10 years group and the more than 10 years group was not statistically significant. This pattern may imply that motivation tends to rise

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with experience in the earlier stages of a teaching career, but that the effect becomes less marked after a certain point.

Table 4. Comparison of years in teaching on work motivation

Tukey multiple comparisons of means				
95% family-wise confidence level				
Fit: aov (formula = Scores of Teaching Experience, data = data2)				
Teaching Years	diff	lwr	upr	p adj
three to five-less than three	0.2232771	-0.01292857	0.4594828	0.0717858
six to ten-less than three	0.4167271	0.19738694	0.6360672	0.0000065
more than ten-less than three	0.5684476	0.26680504	0.8700901	0.0000079
six to ten-three to five	0.1934499	0.01306170	0.3738382	0.0299471
more than ten-three to five	0.3451705	0.07054700	0.6197939	0.0068369
more than ten-six to ten	0.1517205	-0.10853899	0.4119800	0.4385184

4.2.2. Marital status

Figure 3 illustrates that, except for the amotivation category, all other motivational dimensions show higher mean scores among married teachers compared to single teachers, which may reflect that married individuals generally have higher levels of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Additionally, for the external social and introjection avoidance categories, married teachers score slightly higher than their single counterparts, with a difference of 0.3 points in each category. It might be that the married, focusing on maintaining a stable life, may seek more professional recognition and development, and they are generally more conscientious about their work due to their heightened sense of responsibility and concern for others' evaluations.

For example, the married teacher Hu said, "since I got married and had children, I have been more focused on my work. Just like I am a mother, treating students will change your view of how parents look at things, thus making you want to gain their approval. After having children, I took this job seriously." Similarly, Mr. Xiao, who is married, said, "There are many single teachers; If they are not satisfied with their work, they will give up immediately. Unlike me, I strive for stability for a better future, so I work harder. I will also think of my family and children, as well as my boss and parents' views on my work, so this is a little different from my single colleague."

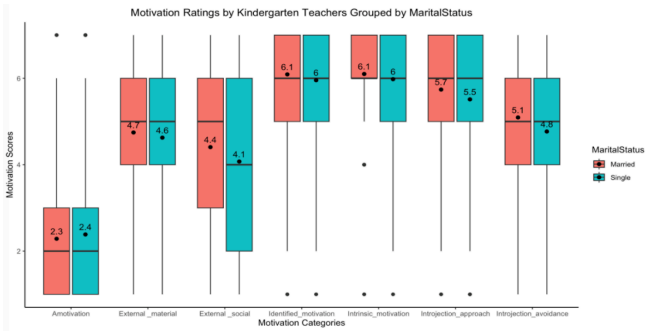


Figure 3. Motivation ratings by kindergarten teachers grouped by marital status

In order to know whether the motivation varies with marital status, an HSD test was conducted to compare the methods of single teachers and married teachers. From Table 5, we can see that the

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average difference is -0.2023, which means that single teachers often lack motivation compared with married teachers. The adjusted P value is 0.0007, and its confidence interval ranges from -0.3190 to -0.0855. Since all the intervals are less than zero, we can think that there are differences between the two groups. Generally speaking, this result may mean that there is some connection between being married and different levels of motivation, and married teachers are often more motivated.

Table 5. Comparison of marital status on work motivation

Tukey multiple comparisons of means				
95% family-wise confidence level				
Fit: aov(formula = Scores of Marital Status, data = data2)				
Marital Status	diff	lwr	upr	p adj
single-married	-0.2022313	-0.3189992	-0.08546336	0.0006929

4.2.3. Kindergarten type

Figure 4 appears to indicate a clear difference in motivation between teachers working in public kindergartens and those in private kindergartens. In other respects, teachers in public schools are more motivated than those in private kindergartens, which regard enthusiasm as their highest measure. It is very obvious in self-regulation, including approach type and avoidance type. Public kindergarten teachers are 0.7 points and 0.6 points higher respectively. There are also substantial differences in intrinsic motivation and external material rewards, with public kindergarten teachers scoring 0.5 and 0.4 points higher, respectively. One possible reason is that public kindergartens can provide more stable employment, more secure wages/benefits, more social recognition and better training/competition/career development opportunities. These conditions can help teachers get motivated in many ways. It is reported that the enthusiasm score of private kindergarten teachers is 0.5 points higher than that of public kindergarten teachers. It may be that working in a private enterprise is stressful and uncertain.

The interview data also points to the same thing. Almost all the teachers interviewed made it clear that they prefer public kindergartens. Teacher Tang said while working in a public kindergarten that he remembered, "I worked as an intern and then worked in a private kindergarten for more than a year before I found a job in a public kindergarten." I prefer public kindergartens, because they have more stable wages and greater income, a lot to learn, many training competitions and so on. On the contrary, in private kindergartens, teachers need to make more efforts to please their parents, and their salaries are not very stable, because they must attract parents to participate in different types of classes so that they can pay the course fees to maintain their income.

Teacher Fan, also from public kindergartens, said: "Most parents like quality education, and they will cooperate more with public kindergartens. Moreover, public kindergartens give regular winter and summer vacations. However, private kindergartens can only give short leave, or even no leave at all." Teacher Hu from a private kindergarten also said, "If I can, I hope to work in a public kindergarten, because the welfare will be better and more secure."

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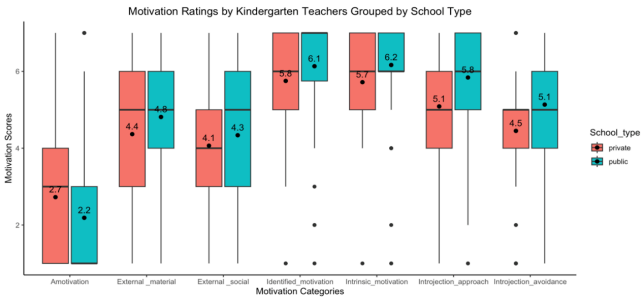


Figure 4. Motivation ratings by kindergarten teachers grouped by school type

To see if it was the type of kindergarten that led to differences in motivation, I used an HSD test on teacher's working in public versus private kindergartens. According to table 6, the average difference is 0.4701, that is, the score given by public kindergarten teachers is more than that of private kindergartens. The 95% confidence interval was between 0.3397 - 0.6004, therefore since it's all above zero we know that there is a difference. The adjusted p was less than 0.0001 too so there's a pretty big difference between the two groups: In short, all this means that the type of kindergarten is strongly associated with motivation of teachers and that the relatively more stable and supportive working conditions typical for public kindergartens explain some part of this difference.

Table 6. Comparison of kindergarten type on work motivation

Tukey multiple comparisons of means				
95% family-wise confidence level				
Fit: aov(formula = Scores of Kindergarten Type, data = data2)				
Kindergarten Type	diff	lwr	upr	p adj
public-private	0.4700776	0.3397156	0.6004397	0

4.3. Factors affecting kindergarten teachers' work motivation

In general, the vast majority of teachers reported a strong intrinsic motivation for their work. They derived a profound sense of joy and value from their genuine affection for their roles and their sincere pleasure in interacting with children. By integrating the findings from the questionnaire survey and the interviews, we identified that the type of kindergarten, years of teaching experience, and marital status are all closely linked to kindergarten teachers' work motivation. Other factors may also affect their motivation levels, as detailed below.

4.3.1. Aspects related to the kindergarten teachers themselves

Overall, all of the interviewed teachers described experiencing work-related stress to some extent, although the sources and intensity of that stress were not exactly the same and often depended on their particular roles and day-to-day responsibilities. A recurring impression from the interviews was that younger teachers tended to show a stronger desire to improve their professional abilities as well as their communication skills.

Several stressors were mentioned repeatedly by the teachers. One common issue was insufficient understanding or cooperation from parents, which could arise in situations involving child safety, daily management, or different expectations about children's education. Another source of pressure came from negative comments and criticism in the workplace. Teachers also referred to the demands

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of teaching itself, including tasks such as preparing for and delivering public classes. In addition, some interviewees spoke about the pressure of maintaining a positive professional image and avoiding unfavorable evaluations. Compared with novice teachers, experienced teachers appeared to be more strongly motivated by these concerns.

4.3.2. The context in which kindergarten teachers are situated

4.3.2.1. Demographic environment

The interview data suggest that recent demographic changes in China, including declining birth rates and reduced kindergarten enrollment, have not directly weakened teachers' motivation. Instead, some teachers reported feeling a stronger need to improve their professional skills and remain competitive in an uncertain environment.

Concerns about future career stability were frequently mentioned. Issues such as possible kindergarten closures, reduced enrollment, and the need to consider alternative career paths were especially salient among teachers in private kindergartens. Compared with those in public institutions, they tended to report higher levels of pressure and anxiety, as well as greater staff turnover in their workplaces.

4.3.2.2. Working environment

The interviews also indicate that teachers in private kindergartens have a stronger demand for improved working conditions, particularly in terms of facilities and infrastructure. Some participants noted outdated equipment, as well as the absence of dedicated office space and rest areas, which increased their sense of fatigue in daily work.

As far as career development is concerned, most teachers think it is very useful, but if it has more practical content, they can use it in class immediately, and some people will prefer it.

As for being managed by teachers, most people think it is an encouraging and decent evaluation and reward. Kindergartens follow the national curriculum most of the time, but they have also developed some school-based practices. They emphasized that different areas of children's development depend on their background.

4.3.2.3. Living environment

From the interview, it seems that many teachers try to find a balance between work development and personal development, but work often wins. Personal interests and personal development are often considered to be compatible with professional responsibilities, and the goals at that time depend on workload and family responsibilities. As far as busier time is concerned, teachers will spend more time and energy on their work, because they care about what others think of them and can also get a sense of accomplishment from the work itself. When the job requirements are not so high, they may consider developing themselves.

Married and married teachers tend to think that welfare is good for life and work, because there will be better economic conditions and more convenient daily life. Married teachers seem to pay more attention to job stability. They are often more interested in career development, work image and personal responsibility, which may be the reason why they score so high on these two motives.

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4.4. Implications

Salary is a common problem in interviews. Many preschool teachers feel that their current income is not commensurate with the time, energy and responsibility they have invested-talking and studying for a long time. This difference may also be one of the reasons why it is more difficult for private kindergartens to retain teachers, because their wages are often lower.

The interview pointed out that a better working environment is also important. Teacher Xiao noticed that there was no suitable office space, so he stayed in the classroom most of the time at school, with insufficient rest time. Teacher Yang said that we should establish a cooperative place for daily teaching and communication with other teachers, and it is also a more natural and ecological kindergarten.

Some teachers think it is also important for curriculum development and the reputation of the school. Teacher Tang said, improve professional courses and increase visibility, so that we can get more students.

Some teachers said that parents' awareness of early childhood education should also be improved. They believe that kindergartens play a vital role in the development of young children. Teachers need to give feedback on their children's progress, but they should also give meaningful explanations and provide specific suggestions to parents.

5. Conclusion

Based on the survey data and teachers' own words, this study investigates the work motivation of kindergarten teachers in China and its related factors.

Although fewer and fewer students are registered, most teachers still have enough motivation. Some people even think that this is an opportunity for them to further develop their careers. The uncertainty of kindergarten closure and unemployment have also brought greater pressure to teachers working in private kindergartens. Private kindergartens seem to be unstable and have a high turnover rate.

As far as motivation structure is concerned, the strongest is still intrinsic motivation, followed by identity regulation, internal regulation and external regulation, and the weakest is always unmotivated. Generally speaking, teachers' work motivation is related to kindergarten type, teaching experience, marital status and various work pressures, such as evaluation pressure, teaching pressure and the need to further improve professional skills.

The purpose is to expand the previous research on teachers' motivation under the situation of demographic decline. The research shows that kindergarten teachers still have good self-motivation despite structural problems. However, the differences between institutional environment and individuals show that people's enthusiasm is not the same.

Theoretically, the research results show that we can apply the theory of self-determination to try and explain teachers' motivation in the ever-changing environment. In action, these findings show that we should have a better working environment, more institutional help, and solve the unequal treatment between public and private kindergartens.

It is necessary to carry out further research in different regions and with larger samples, as the present study is based on a limited sample. Future work may also consider using diverse methods to better understand teachers' motivation.

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