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PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS FOR MANAGING THE MOTIVATION OF EDUCATORS IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: This article examines the psychological mechanisms involved in shaping and managing the professional motivation of educators in preschool educational organizations. It proposes the "Need – Autonomy – Competence – Recognition – Development – Belonging" (6E) model for managing educator motivation. Additionally, practical indicators and KPI criteria have been developed to systematically monitor the motivational state of educators.
Keywords: preschool education, educator, motivation, psychological mechanism, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, autonomy, competence, recognition, professional development, leadership, job satisfaction, psychological climate.

INTRODUCTION. Preschool education is considered a strategic sector of education, encompassing the initial stage of human personality development. At this stage, the educator's personality, professional competence, and attitude toward their work play a crucial role in fostering a child's social-emotional, linguistic, cognitive, and physical development.

It is insufficient to view the professional activity of a preschool educator merely as the fulfillment of job duties. An educator's interactions with children, organization of educational games, consideration of each child's individual characteristics, collaboration with parents, and continuous professional development are all directly linked to their intrinsic motivation.

The OECD emphasizes that educators and other staff are the primary driving force behind the quality of the preschool education system; consequently, attracting, developing, and retaining qualified personnel is a central objective of effective preschool education policy [2].

The results of the TALIS Starting Strong 2024 survey, published in 2025, also indicate that the motivation of preschool education staff depends on a balance of several factors. For instance, while interest in the profession, personal, financial, and social incentives, professional skill development, and career opportunities serve as factors that boost motivation, high workloads, stress, and poor physical and emotional well-being act as factors that diminish it [1].

E. Deci and R. Ryan's Self-Determination Theory holds particular significance in the study of motivation from a psychological perspective. The authors established that a person's sustained intrinsic motivation is linked to the satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (a sense of belonging) [3].

This approach is especially relevant for preschool educators, as opportunities for creativity, independent decision-making, the demonstration of professional expertise, and collaboration with the team play a crucial role in their work.

At the same time, linking motivation solely to material incentives is a one-sided approach. In addition to being satisfied with their salary, educators also value factors such as:

- appreciation of their work;
- recognition of professional achievements;
- support from leadership;
- opportunities for independent work;

- prospects for professional growth;

• the psychological climate within the team. The TALIS Starting Strong 2024 study notes that while the majority of early childhood education staff express satisfaction with their work, factors such as workload and stress impact their motivation and desire to remain in the profession [1].

Accordingly, the primary objective of this article is to provide a scientific rationale for the psychological mechanisms governing the motivation of educators in early childhood education institutions and to develop a practical motivational management model for institutional leaders.

Systematically supporting educators' needs for autonomy, competence, social belonging, recognition of their work, and professional development within early childhood education institutions can enhance their intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and professional engagement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS. The methodological basis of the study was formed by theoretical approaches regarding the psychology of motivation, educational psychology, management psychology, and educational management.

Self-Determination Theory. Self-Determination Theory, developed by E. Deci and R. Ryan, serves as a crucial theoretical framework for explaining human behavior and motivation.

According to the theory, an individual's psychological well-being and intrinsic motivation are linked to three fundamental needs:

1. Autonomy — making independent decisions regarding one's own activities to a certain extent;
2. Competence — feeling effective and capable;
3. Relatedness — maintaining positive social connections with others.

Deci and Ryan emphasize that a social environment supporting these needs fosters intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being; conversely, an environment that restricts them may be associated with a decline in motivation, performance efficiency, and well-being [3].

In the context of preschool education, this can be expressed as follows:

Autonomy → "I can make decisions."

Competence → "I can perform this task well."

Relatedness → "I am important to the team."

These three sentiments strengthen the educator's state of intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic and extrinsic types of motivation. Educator motivation can be categorized into two main groups. Intrinsic motivation

The educator finding meaning, interest, and satisfaction in the profession itself.

For example:

- witnessing a child's development;
- experimenting with new methods;
- organizing creative activities;
- deriving satisfaction from pedagogical outcomes;
- developing professional skills.

Extrinsic motivation

Support for the educator's work through external incentives:

- salary;
- bonuses;
- allowances/supplements;
- career advancement;
- certificates;
- letters of appreciation;
- public recognition.

While external incentives are necessary, it is not appropriate to view them as a complete substitute for intrinsic motivation.

An OECD analysis from 2025 also indicates that, while professional interest and intrinsic drives play a crucial role in the preschool education sector, financial and social incentives—as well as opportunities for professional growth—are also linked to motivation [1].

Research methods. The following methods were employed in the preparation of this article:

- theoretical analysis of scientific literature;
- comparative analysis;
- content analysis;
- systems approach;
- psychological modeling;
- generalization;
- expert approach;
- classification of motivational factors. One of the key empirical-analytical sources is the OECD's international study "TALIS Starting Strong 2024," which is a large-scale international survey focused on early childhood education staff and leaders [4].

RESULTS. Based on a synthesis of the research findings, the motivation of a preschool educator can be viewed as a system comprising the following five components:

Need → Goal → Motivation → Activity → Result

Where:

Need — the educator feels a need for something.

Goal — a goal is formed to satisfy that need.

Motivation — an internal or external drive to achieve the goal emerges.

Activity — the educator carries out specific actions.

Result — the outcome of professional activity is realized.

For example: need for professional growth → goal of professional development → intrinsic motivation → learning new methods → increased professional competence.

Autonomy is a crucial psychological mechanism in managing educator motivation.

Autonomy entails enabling the educator to:

- choose a teaching method;
- independently develop an educational game;
- test an innovative approach;
- determine a strategy for working with children;
- demonstrate professional initiative. However, autonomy does not mean an "absence of managerial oversight."

It must be based on the principle of: clear goal + clear standard + professional independence.

For instance, a director might adopt the following approach with an educator:

"You must achieve the established outcome of the lesson, but you are granted professional independence in choosing the method to reach it." Such an environment enables the educator to perceive themselves as an active participant within the organization.

The mechanism of feeling competent. An educator's confidence—the belief that "I can perform this task well"—influences their motivation.

To strengthen this sense of competence, the leader should:

1. assign clear tasks;
2. provide necessary resources;

3. offer methodological support;
4. provide constructive feedback;
5. acknowledge positive results.

Feedback serves as a crucial psychological mechanism in this process.

Incorrect:

"Your lesson was not good."

Correct:

"It is positive that you ensured the children's active participation. The results could be further improved if you incorporated more individual tasks in the next lesson."

The first approach may trigger a defensive reaction in the educator, whereas the second fosters motivation focused on professional growth.

The mechanism of social belonging

It is also vital for motivation that the educator feels like a valued member of the organization's team. The director can strengthen this sense of belonging through the following mechanisms:

- team projects;
- experience sharing;
- mentor-mentee systems;
- open pedagogical dialogue;
- joint methodological seminars;
- supporting educators' initiatives;
- recognizing team achievements. This mechanism must foster a psychological mindset of "I am contributing to the organization's development," rather than being limited to the mere feeling of "I work at the organization."

The mechanism for recognizing work. Recognition of an educator's work is a crucial factor in boosting motivation.

Recognition can take the following forms:

- material;
- moral/intangible;
- professional;
- social.

For example:

Form of Recognition	Psychological Impact
Reward	Extrinsic motivation
Letter of appreciation	Social recognition
Public recognition	Status
Sending for professional development	Professional growth
Leading a new project	Trust
Mentoring role	Competence and status

Most importantly, recognition must be based on fair and clear criteria.

Otherwise, the act of rewarding itself may foster a sense of injustice within the team rather than serving as a source of motivation.

The leader's role in managing psychological motivation: The director of a preschool educational organization is not the direct creator of an educator's motivation, but rather the primary architect of the organizational environment that supports it.

The following leadership behaviors influence the motivational climate:

Supportive leadership:

- listening;
- demonstrating trust;
- seeking input;
- encouraging initiative;
- fair treatment;
- constructive feedback.

Control-oriented leadership:

- constant criticism;
- excessive micromanagement;
- distrust;
- unilateral task assignment;
- focusing solely on shortcomings.

The first approach fosters autonomy and competence, whereas the second approach can negatively impact an educator's intrinsic motivation.

The OECD TALIS Starting Strong 2024 conceptual framework also views educators' well-being, job satisfaction, professional development, leadership, and working conditions as interconnected areas [4]. The "6E" Model for Managing Educator Motivation

As a result of the research, the following "6E" psychological motivation model was proposed for preschool educational organizations:

Need — Identifying needs

Identifying each educator's:

- material;
- professional;
- social;
- psychological;
- and creative needs.

Freedom — Autonomy

Granting the educator a certain level of independence to make professional decisions.

Maturity — Competence. Developing the educator's professional skills and strengthening the sense of "I can do it."

Recognition — Valuing work. Fairly and openly acknowledging the results of the educator's work.

Evolution — Professional development. Ensuring the educator's continuous professional growth.

Affiliation — Sense of belonging to the team. Involving the educator in the organization's overall goals and team projects. This model creates the following chain:

Need → Autonomy → Competence → Recognition → Development → Affiliation → Intrinsic motivation → High professional engagement. Algorithm for managing the motivational environment

The following algorithm is proposed for the director of a preschool educational organization:

Stage 1. Diagnosis

Assessing the current state of educator motivation.
Stage 2. Needs segmentation
Categorizing educators into:
- newly hired staff;
- experienced educators;
- high-performing educators; • Categorizing staff—such as those experiencing professional burnout—and assessing their needs.

Stage 3. Individual motivation plan. Defining goals and development paths for each educator.
Stage 4. Support. Mentoring, methodological assistance, professional courses, and psychological support.
Stage 5. Recognition.
Result-based financial and non-financial incentives.
Stage 6. Monitoring.
Re-evaluating motivation and satisfaction levels on a quarterly basis.
KPIs for assessing motivation.
The following KPIs can be used to manage educator motivation:

№	Indicator	Measurement method
1	Educator job satisfaction	Anonymous survey
2	Intrinsic motivation index	Psychological questionnaire
3	Participation in professional development	Percentage
4	Innovative initiatives	Number
5	Participation in open classes	Percentage
6	Participation in team projects	Percentage
7	Satisfaction with leadership	Survey
8	Educator turnover intention	Percentage
9	Professional stress level	Psychological assessment
10	Employee satisfaction with recognition	Index
11	Mentorship coverage	Percentage
12	Internal professional growth	Number/percentage

DISCUSSION. Research findings indicate that limiting the management of educators' motivation solely to rewards and material incentives is ineffective.
First, intrinsic motivation plays a crucial role in the professional practice of preschool educators. This is because the outcomes of pedagogical work often manifest only in the long term. Positive changes in a child's socialization, speech, independence, or emotional development can serve as a powerful source of intrinsic motivation for the educator.

Second, it is incorrect to view intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentives as mutually exclusive; effective management requires them to complement one another. An OECD analysis from 2025 also demonstrates that motivation in the preschool education sector depends on a complex balance between interest in the profession, financial and social incentives, opportunities for professional growth, and job demands [1].

Third, workload is a significant extrinsic factor affecting motivation. Excessive workloads and stress can diminish an educator's job satisfaction. OECD data also highlights the interrelationship between working conditions, well-being, stress, and the motivation to remain in the profession [5].

Fourthly, the leader's role is not to constantly tie the educator to external incentives, but rather to create a psychological environment that fosters intrinsic motivation.

The key components of this environment are: trust + autonomy + fairness + recognition + development + a sense of belonging.

Fifthly, managing motivation requires an individual approach. For instance, mentorship might be crucial for a newly hired educator, whereas autonomy and professional growth might be more important for an experienced one.

Therefore, it is advisable to use a model of "individual motivation based on needs" rather than a "one-size-fits-all incentive" model.

The psychological mechanism of managing educator motivation. Based on research findings, the following mechanism is proposed:

NEED
GOAL
AUTONOMY
COMPETENCE
RECOGNITION
BELONGING
INTRINSIC MOTIVATION
PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT
QUALITY OF EDUCATION

A distinctive feature of this mechanism is that the leader does not directly "create" motivation; instead, they manage the psychological and organizational conditions that allow motivation to develop.

Practical recommendations for the director of a preschool educational organization. The following practical measures are recommended for the director when managing educator motivation:

1. "Educator's Voice" survey. Conducted anonymously on a quarterly basis:
- what are you satisfied with?
- what are you dissatisfied with? • Conducting monitoring based on questions such as: "What kind of assistance is needed?", "What is your professional goal?", and "Which task is becoming an excessive burden for you?"

2. "One Educator — One Goal" Principle

Setting a single primary annual professional development goal for each educator.

3. "Weekly Recognition"

Publicly acknowledging the specific achievements of at least one educator before the team each week.

4. "Leader–Educator" 15-Minute Dialogue

Organizing a brief, one-on-one conversation between the principal and the educator every month.

5. "Organization Open to Initiative"

Supporting educators' new ideas through small grants, resources, or allocated time.
6. Mentorship System
Pairing a new educator with an experienced one.
7. Professional Growth Card
Developing a 1–3 year professional development trajectory for each educator.

CONCLUSION.

This study determined that the motivation of educators in preschool educational organizations is a complex psychological and organizational phenomenon. Educator motivation is shaped not only by salary or bonuses but also by the meaningfulness of the profession, autonomy, competence, a sense of belonging, recognition of work, professional growth, and the quality of leadership.

According to Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, an environment that supports an individual's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness fosters intrinsic motivation and well-being [3].

International research in the field of preschool education also indicates that educators' job satisfaction and motivation are intrinsically linked to working conditions, professional development, leadership, workload, stress, and incentives [1; 5].

On this basis, the "6E" model proposed in the article—Need → Freedom → Maturity → Recognition → Evolution → Valued Belonging—can be applied as a comprehensive psychological mechanism for managing educator motivation in preschool educational organizations.

Using this model, a director's activities can shift from merely "incentivizing employees" to "creating an environment that supports the educator's intrinsic motivation." In general, the fundamental formula for building a highly motivated pedagogical team in a preschool educational organization can be expressed as follows:

High motivation = meaningful work + autonomy + competence + fairness + recognition + professional growth + sense of belonging.

Therefore, managing educator motivation in preschool educational organizations should not be treated merely as an isolated incentive measure; rather, it must be implemented as an integral part of the organization's human capital, educational quality, and strategic development system.

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