



An Exploration of Kindergarten Teacher's Mastery Motivation in Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

Mastery motivation is an internal drive to master challenging tasks and achieve competence. In the context of early childhood teachers in Indonesia, studies on this topic remain limited. This research aims to explore the level of mastery motivation among kindergarten teachers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta and identify the factors that influence it. A qualitative, exploratory approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis with 15 teachers representing the five districts in Yogyakarta. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns of meaning and characteristics of mastery motivation. The findings reveal three levels of mastery motivation high, moderate, and low with most teachers falling within the moderate to high categories. Teachers with high motivation demonstrated strong learning orientation, persistence, and innovative behaviors in improving teaching practices. Meanwhile, moderate motivation tended to fluctuate, influenced by administrative burdens, limited time, and work demands. These findings highlight that mastery motivation is multidimensional and shaped by individual, social, and institutional factors. This study is expected to broaden understanding of professional motivation among early childhood teachers, provide empirical foundations for educational policies and sustainable teacher competency development programs, and open opportunities for further, more in-depth research.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are key actors in improving the quality of education at all levels, including Early Childhood Education (PAUD), which serves as the primary foundation for shaping children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and moral development. The role of PAUD teachers extends beyond teaching, encompassing the responsibility of creating a safe, enjoyable, and meaningful learning environment and optimally stimulating children's potential through developmentally appropriate activities. To effectively carry out this role, teachers need professional competencies encompassing pedagogical skills, mastery of teaching materials, and the ability to interact with children, parents, and colleagues (Fakhrudin et al., 2023; Hasanudin & Fakhrudin, 2024; Hidayat et al., 2025). However, professional competency is determined not only by knowledge and skills but also by internal motivational factors that encourage teachers to continue learning, innovating, and developing themselves throughout their careers (Ma'arif et al., 2022; Mayangsari et al., 2025). In the context of 21st-century education, teachers are expected to be reflective learners who are adaptive to change, think critically and creatively, and are committed to improving the quality of early childhood learning. Teachers with strong intrinsic motivation tend to be passionate about improving teaching practices, open to innovation, and committed to professional responsibility for their students' development. This aligns with the view that 21st-century teachers serve not only as instructors but also as facilitators and agents of change capable of integrating humanitarian values, creativity, and technology into the educational process (Husnawati, 2020; Lubis et al., 2024;



Made et al., 2023).

Therefore, understanding and strengthening the factors that influence teachers' internal motivation, particularly those related to the drive to master challenges and achieve success through mastery motivation, is a crucial aspect in efforts to improve the professionalism and quality of early childhood education in Indonesia. However, various studies show that many early childhood education (PAUD) teachers, including kindergarten teachers, still face complex challenges in maintaining professional enthusiasm and long-term learning motivation (Armoza-Levi & Rusu, 2023; Duraku et al., 2022). In practice, many teachers feel overwhelmed by high administrative demands, such as report preparation, child development reporting, and various assessment documents, which consume time and energy. This condition often shifts their focus from creative, meaningful learning activities to administrative tasks (Wardani et al., 2020; Zahurin et al., 2024).

Furthermore, limited institutional support, both from the institutions where they work and from the broader education system, also weakens the internal drive for continuous development (Armoza-Levi & Rusu, 2023; Kholifah et al., 2024; Supriadi et al., 2025). The lack of opportunities to participate in training, workshops, or professional capacity-building activities also poses a significant barrier to maintaining teacher motivation (Izzati et al., 2024; Leung & Lam, 2025; Rafiq et al., 2023). As a result of these pressures, many teachers become trapped in a monotonous teaching routine, performing pedagogical tasks merely as an obligation, without the drive to innovate and continuously improve their competencies. In the long term, this situation impacts not only the quality of classroom learning but also the teachers' psychological Well-being and job satisfaction. Salah satu konsep psikologis yang relevan untuk memahami dorongan intrinsik guru dalam mengembangkan diri adalah *mastery motivation*.

According to Morgan et al. (1990), Demir & Doner (2019), and Asry (2024), mastery motivation is an individual's internal drive to master challenging tasks and achieve competence. According to Morgan et al. (1990), G. Morgan et al. (2017), and Barrett & Morgan (2018), mastery motivation is typically reflected in the intensity and quality of an individual's efforts to achieve success. High levels (high mastery motivation) indicate high persistence, resistance to giving up, and enjoyment of challenges, and are generally associated with good self-confidence and self-efficacy (Kleppang et al., 2023; Umemoto & Inagaki, 2024). Moderate levels (moderate mastery motivation), try quite diligently but sometimes lose focus or motivation when facing difficulties (Honicke et al., 2020; Porter et al., 2020). Low levels (low mastery motivation), giving up quickly when facing difficulties, avoiding challenging tasks, or showing less initiative in learning (Bieg et al., 2017; Calchei et al., 2024).

In the context of teacher professionalism, mastery motivation is reflected in teachers' ongoing efforts to learn, experiment, and improve the quality of their teaching practices (Arlita et al., 2020; Lestari et al., 2022; Sholeh, 2023). This motivation encourages teachers not only to implement learning routines but also to actively seek new, more effective, and meaningful ways for their students. Teachers with high levels of mastery motivation typically demonstrate persistence in facing classroom challenges, including when managing student behavior, designing learning media, or adapting strategies to individual student needs (Daumiller et al., 2025; Putri & Azahra, 2023). They possess an intense curiosity about new methods and approaches and are willing to try innovations even when the results are not always perfect. Furthermore, teachers with this motivation tend to be reflective, able to reassess their teaching experiences to identify areas for improvement and future development (Amukune & Józsa, 2023; Ibrahim, 2024; Musyadad et al., 2022). A passion for mastering new skills is also a key characteristic, with teachers striving to broaden their horizons through training, reading educational literature, or discussing with colleagues (Dayagbil & Alda, 2024; Purwanti & Octavia, 2023). Thus, mastery motivation is a crucial foundation for teacher professionalism, as this internal drive keeps them growing, adapting, and staying relevant to the dynamic world of education.

Although mastery motivation has been widely studied among students and university students, research on this phenomenon in the early childhood education (ECE) teaching profession in Indonesia remains very limited. Most previous studies have focused on student learning motivation, rather than on how teachers maintain their internal drive for continued professional development. However, ECE teachers play a crucial role in shaping children's learning, making understanding their motivation highly relevant. Few studies describe how kindergarten teachers interpret and express mastery motivation in their daily practices, such as in lesson planning or self-development. A thorough understanding of this aspect is crucial for designing sustainable, context-specific teacher professional competency



improvement programs.

The Special Region of Yogyakarta is known as one of Indonesia's educational centers, with numerous early childhood education institutions actively promoting learning innovation (Agustiningish et al., 2024; Sani et al., 2022; Tohari & Machali, 2022). However, the condition and dynamics of kindergarten teacher mastery motivation in this region have not been clearly mapped. Given the diverse social, economic, and institutional backgrounds across regencies/cities in Yogyakarta, exploring teacher mastery motivation in this region can provide a comprehensive picture of the internal and external factors influencing PAUD teacher professionalism.

Based on the description above, this study aims to explore the level of mastery motivation among kindergarten teachers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. This research is expected to reveal how kindergarten teachers understand and actualize motivation to master professional skills, as well as the challenges and support they experience in this process. The results of this study are expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of mastery motivation studies in the context of the teaching profession, while also providing an empirical basis for designing training programs and professional development for early childhood teachers. Practically, these exploratory findings can serve as an initial reference for policymakers and teacher education institutions in creating an environment that supports achievement motivation and lifelong learning among early childhood educators.

METHOD

This study employed an exploratory qualitative approach. This approach is considered appropriate for investigating understudied phenomena (Moleong, 2017; Purba & Simanjuntak, 2011). The research focused on mastery motivation among kindergarten teachers, their interpretations of it, its influencing factors, and how this motivation manifests in their professional practice. The sample consisted of 15 teachers representing four regencies (Sleman, Bantul, Kulon Progo, and Gunungkidul) and one municipality (Yogyakarta). The sample was selected using a purposive stratified random sampling technique, with strata determined purposively based on the five administrative regions of the Special Region of Yogyakarta to ensure all regions were represented. After strata were determined, respondents from each region were randomly selected to ensure proportional representation and reduce potential bias. Using this selection technique, the sample is expected to reflect the population better and align with the Special Region of Yogyakarta graphic. The data collection technique in this study utilized in-depth interviews conducted directly with kindergarten teachers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. These interviews aimed to comprehensively explore the forms and characteristics of teachers' mastery motivation, the internal and external factors that influence it, and how this motivation is reflected in professional practice and self-development activities (Darlington & Scott, 2002; Given, 2008). Non-participant observation was also conducted to observe teacher behavior in the classroom. Document analysis of reflection notes, training results, and teacher portfolios was also conducted.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Majumdar, 2019) from the in-depth interviews with kindergarten teachers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The analysis process involved thoroughly reading the data, coding it, grouping the codes into themes, and interpreting their meanings in line with the research focus on the forms, factors, and manifestations of teacher mastery motivation. To ensure data validity, source triangulation was used, comparing information from various participants, school principals, and supporting documents. Member checking was used to ensure the results matched the participants' experiences. This method provided a deep and credible understanding of kindergarten teachers' mastery motivation in the Special Region of Yogyakarta.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that kindergarten teachers' mastery motivation in the Special Region of Yogyakarta falls into three main categories: high, moderate, and low. These patterns reflect varying levels of internal drive among teachers in mastering professional skills and facing learning challenges. In general, most teachers exhibit moderate to high levels of mastery motivation, indicating a strong desire and commitment to continuous development despite facing various structural and psychological barriers.

Teachers with high levels of mastery motivation display characteristics such as a strong learning



orientation, high professional curiosity, and persistence in the face of classroom challenges. They actively seek out new learning resources, whether through social media, teacher forums, or online training. This mastery orientation is evident in teachers' proactive reflection, innovation, and experimentation with learning strategies that focus on the process rather than the outcome. Teachers in this category demonstrate initiative in adapting learning activities to children's needs and are willing to explore new approaches, such as project-based and inquiry-based learning, as well as the use of digital media in early childhood activities. As expressed by several informants.

"I enjoy trying new things in class. If I see an interesting idea on social media or in a training session, I usually immediately want to adapt it for the children's activities." (T1, Kindergarten Teacher in Sleman, interview, 2025)

"After every lesson, I like to write a short note about what worked and what needs improvement. From there, I learn again so I can do better tomorrow." (T2, Kindergarten Teacher in Yogyakarta, interview, 2025)

"Online training has been very helpful for me. Sometimes I join in at night after the children are in bed because I want to learn more creative and modern teaching methods." (T3, Kindergarten Teacher in Gunungkidul, interview, 2025)

These findings demonstrate that teachers with high mastery motivation possess reflective awareness and a long-term orientation toward professional improvement. They enjoy the learning process, are resilient in the face of failure, and view challenges as opportunities for growth. In the context of early childhood education, this is crucial because teachers' creativity and sensitivity greatly influence the success of early childhood learning by designing meaningful learning experiences.

Meanwhile, teachers with moderate levels of motivation demonstrate a passion for development but tend to be inconsistent in maintaining this drive. They are aware of the need to improve learning quality but are often hampered by external factors such as administrative burdens, time constraints, institutional pressure, and high reporting demands. This condition illustrates a phenomenon known as fluctuating mastery motivation, a state in which the drive for development is present but fluctuates due to work stress and a less supportive professional environment. Several interview excerpts support these findings.

"Sometimes I'm really excited to try new activities after participating in training, but then I fall back into my old ways because there are so many reports and administrative tasks to complete." (S1, Kindergarten Teacher in Sleman, interview, 2025)

"I actually want to create small project activities with the children, but I don't have enough time. Every week there are administrative tasks from the institution that have to be submitted." (S2, Kindergarten Teacher in Bantul, interview, 2025)

"When I'm feeling calm, I can focus on preparing creative activities for the children. But when I'm under a lot of pressure, I choose simple activities to save time." (S3, Kindergarten Teacher in Kulon Progo, interview, 2025)

This quote demonstrates that despite their desire to innovate, teachers often have to balance professional idealism with the realities of administrative work. This fluctuating motivation is also influenced by psychological Well-being and the availability of social support from colleagues and institutional leaders. In some cases, teachers working in schools with supportive Leadership tend to have more stable motivation than those working in environments with high administrative pressure and low appreciation.

Teachers with low motivation (low mastery motivation) tend to avoid challenges, are quickly satisfied with learning routines, and demonstrate minimal reflection on professional practice. They tend to wait for direction from superiors, lack initiative in participating in training, and view learning innovation as



an additional burden. Although the number of teachers with this pattern is relatively small, their presence demonstrates the importance of attention to work Well-being, strengthening academic supervision, and providing ongoing professional support.

Overall, this study's findings indicate that kindergarten teachers' mastery motivation in the Special Region of Yogyakarta is multidimensional and context-dependent. Motivation levels are not only determined by individual personality and values but are also strongly influenced by social support, school organizational culture, principal Leadership, and educational policies. Teachers who have the opportunity to participate in training, have space for reflection, and receive appreciation for their performance tend to have stronger, more stable mastery motivation. Conversely, bureaucratic systems and excessive administrative pressure can dampen teachers' enthusiasm for learning.

Therefore, developing mastery motivation cannot be focused solely on individual aspects but must be addressed systematically by creating a school ecosystem that supports teacher professional autonomy, strengthens learning communities, and reduces administrative burdens that are not relevant to improving the quality of learning. These efforts will help early childhood education teachers continue to grow professionally, innovate in their teaching practices, and make a real contribution to improving the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia.

Highly motivated teachers typically possess a strong learning orientation and demonstrate persistence in facing various learning challenges. This indicates a strong commitment to their primary role, despite the pressures of additional tasks and time constraints (Afriana & Rolina, 2025; Fiatunnabilah et al., 2025). High motivation encourages teachers to continuously strive to improve their professional skills through lifelong learning (Kula, 2025; Li et al., 2024; Sen & Durak, 2022). Teachers exhibit proactive behaviors such as seeking new resources, participating in training, joining teacher learning communities, and daring to try innovative learning approaches such as project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, or the use of digital media in early childhood activities (Klaeijssen et al., 2018; Pawlak & Mercer, 2024). This is also supported by Muhid (2021) and Herman et al. (2025), who stated that these actions reflect an intrinsic drive to continuously develop and adapt to changes in the world of education, particularly in the context of 21st-century learning transformations that demand creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy.

This pattern aligns with the characteristics of highly motivated individuals in professional contexts. Individuals with a mastery orientation not only demonstrate enthusiasm in facing professional tasks but also enjoy the challenging learning process. They persevere in completing complex tasks and demonstrate reflective abilities to learn from past experiences and correct shortcomings (Namin et al., 2025; Septikasari et al., 2025; Umamy et al., 2022). In the context of early childhood education, these characteristics are crucial because the success of early childhood learning depends heavily on teachers' sensitivity, creativity, and ability to design meaningful learning experiences. The passion for mastering new skills and improving learning practices demonstrates a concrete form of mastery motivation: an intrinsic drive to continuously develop competence and self, beyond simply achieving external outcomes such as certifications or awards.

Meanwhile, teachers with moderate motivation desire development but are inconsistent in maintaining that enthusiasm. This condition reflects fluctuations in the internal drive to achieve competence, known as fluctuating mastery motivation (Armstrong & Baron, 2005; Nerstad et al., 2020). This phenomenon occurs when the desire to advance and achieve is present but unstable due to psychological pressures and external factors in the work environment (Putra & Wahda, 2023; Riyadi, 2022). In this context, teachers strive to demonstrate initiative to improve their professional skills, but this motivation often wanes when faced with task demands and limited available resources.

For kindergarten teachers, administrative pressures, time constraints, and the demands of preparing various reports often shift attention from creative and reflective learning activities to administrative routines. As a result, teachers' energy and focus are more absorbed in technical work than in efforts to improve the quality of learning. This is also supported by research by Aldahdouh et al. (2019), Guruh et al. (2025), and Helia et al. (2025), which shows that work environment factors significantly influence the stability of teacher motivation. Therefore, support from educational institutions and appropriate managerial policies is essential to balance administrative burdens and the space for teachers to innovate, reflect, and continuously develop their professional competencies.

From the perspective of work motivation theory, the phenomenon of mastery motivation in early



childhood education teachers can be explained through the framework of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2013; Wang, Liu, Kee, & Chian, 2019), which emphasizes the importance of fulfilling three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and social connectedness. When teachers feel in control of their work, receive support to develop their competencies, and feel valued within their professional community, intrinsic motivation increases significantly (Mayangsari et al., 2025; Rarasati & Pramana, 2023). However, when one of these aspects is compromised, for example, due to excessive administrative control or a lack of appreciation for teacher creativity, the drive for development can diminish (Ansel, M, & Nono, BS, 2023). In this context, establishing a school culture that supports teachers' professional autonomy is key to maintaining the stability of their mastery motivation.

Furthermore, in the context of early childhood education, mastery motivation is also closely associated with teacher engagement and psychological Well-being (Hariyanti et al., 2025; Mayangsari et al., 2025; Yulisinta et al., 2025). Teachers with high mastery motivation tend to show stronger emotional involvement in their work, higher levels of satisfaction, and greater resilience to job stress. They view challenges not as burdens, but as learning opportunities that enrich themselves and improve the quality of their teaching. Conversely, teachers with fluctuating motivation are more susceptible to emotional exhaustion due to an imbalance between job demands and available psychological resources (Karo-Karo et al., 2020; Rachmawati & Kaluge, 2020; Wijaya, 2021). Therefore, attention to teacher Well-being is a crucial strategy for maintaining their professional enthusiasm and commitment.

Thus, mastery motivation among early childhood education teachers is a crucial factor in determining the quality of the learning process and its outcomes. Teachers with a mastery orientation are more open to innovation, more flexible in responding to curriculum changes, and better able to create a learning environment that supports holistic child development. This finding aligns with the views of Volta & Nahdiyah (2024), Utami et al. (2025), and Farid et al. (2025) that intrinsic motivation is fundamental to teacher professionalism, as it influences how teachers learn, teach, and adapt to challenges in early childhood education practices. Therefore, efforts to strengthen teachers' motivation for mastery should focus on developing a supportive work environment, a fair reward system, and continuous learning opportunities. These findings are expected to contribute to a broader understanding of early childhood education teachers' professional motivation, provide an empirical basis for developing educational policies and sustainable teacher competency improvement programs, and be studied further by future researchers.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the mastery motivation of kindergarten teachers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta falls into three main categories: high, medium, and low. The majority fall into the medium to high categories. Teachers with high motivation demonstrate a strong learning orientation, perseverance, and innovative behavior in teaching practices. In contrast, those with medium motivation tend to fluctuate due to administrative pressures and time constraints. Individual and work environment factors, including social support, organizational culture, and institutional policies, influence this level of motivation. Based on the Self-Determination Theory perspective, strengthening teacher mastery motivation requires fulfilling basic psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and social connectedness. Therefore, a supportive educational environment and policies that encourage professional autonomy are needed so that teachers can continue to innovate, develop, and sustain their professionalism.

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