

Recruitment and motivation of teachers from different generations

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considers an important issue.

When academic management books mention appraisals, timetables and organising classes, they appear to be working under the assumption that:

- teachers are available and interested in work;
- they are self-motivated, and any lack of quality or work is due to lack of ability not to lack of interest; and
- schools are able to keep the teachers they want.

However, the day-to-day reality that many academic managers in language teaching operations (LTOs) experience can be quite different. One of the greatest challenges we have faced in recent years is recruiting and retaining teachers.

Recruitment and retention of teachers is an ongoing challenge for LTOs with many language teachers having left the industry during the pandemic or shifting to freelance online work. This has been exacerbated for many by Brexit and

subsequent difficulties in obtaining work permits for teachers.

Around 30–50% of novice teachers leave the profession in their first five years; and language teachers have been identified as the most susceptible group to attrition (Sulis *et al.*, 2022; NeaToday, 2022).

This makes it more important than ever that we are able to attract and retain quality teachers. Which leads to the questions: What is important to teachers in a job? and What can we do to help them want to stay?

We know that different individuals have different motivators, and it seems that these may be related broadly to that individual's generation. Teachers working at present fall into one of the following generations:

- Baby boomers born 1946–1964
- Generation X born 1965–1980
- Generation Y (aka Millennials) born 1981–1994
- Generation Z born 1995–2009.

Each generation is broadly identified with the following traits:

- **Baby boomers:** committed, self-sufficient, competitive

- **Generation X:** resourceful, logical, problem solvers
- **Millennials:** confident, curious, question authority
- **Generation Z:** digital natives, confident, ambitious

I conducted some research with 110 EFL teachers in late 2024. The teachers were asked to identify their generation and to select which group of traits they most identified with. All of the age groups identified themselves mostly with the traits that are supposed to be for Generation X, i.e. resourceful, logical, problem solvers. (50% of Baby boomers, 64% of Generation X, 54% of Generation Y and 37% of Generation Z).

The respondents were also asked to define the number one factor for motivating them to do their best work.

Each of the Baby boomers chose a different motivational factor (the smallest sample group). The most popular factor for Generation X was 'making a difference for students'. The most popular choice for Generation Z was 'good pay' (which was not a factor at all for boomers). Generation Y predominantly voted for either 'respect for me as a person' or 'good pay'. The top, cross-generational motivator was 'Respect for personal contributions'.

When selecting more than one motivator, the top eight motivating factors overall were:

1. Good pay
2. Respect for me as a person
3. Opportunities for professional development
4. Making a difference for my students
5. Getting along with others on the job
6. Feeling my job is important
7. Steady employment
8. Long term financial stability

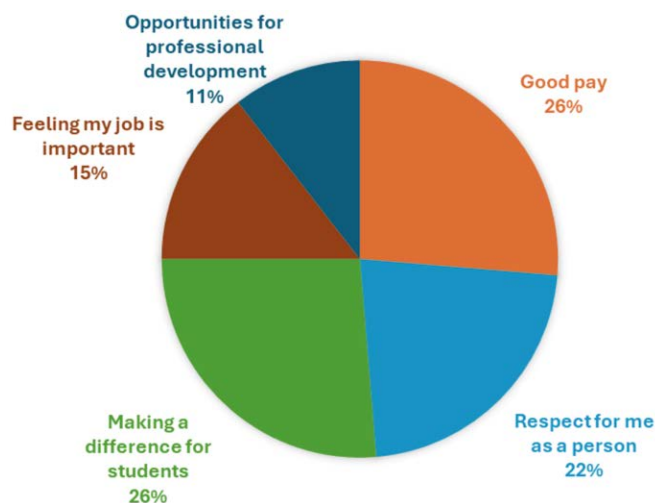


Figure 1: Number one motivation for doing their best work, by generation

Directors of studies or academic managers may not be able to influence the pay for their teachers (although hopefully, they will represent their teams and making the case for fair and better conditions where appropriate). However, the good news is that there are a number of things on this list within our sphere of influence that we can do to ensure that teachers feel respected, valued and valuable.

Retention and engagement strategies

1 Help teachers to improve their work-life balance

- Respect and encourage boundaries, avoid out-of-hours communication.
- Streamline lesson planning, reduce administrative work, facilitate swapping classes etc.
- Consider ways that teachers can have a say in their timetable planning, can you play to their strengths?

2 Professional development

- Provide pathways for advancement (senior teaching roles, management opportunities) so that teachers see long-term opportunities.
- Give recognition for development this may be a financial reward (e.g. a supplement for additional qualifications) or simply explicit congratulations and recognition.
- Offer mentorship programmes for new teachers.
- Customise professional development: offer diverse training formats tailored to generational preferences, for example:
 - **For Generation Z:** microlearning modules – short, interactive e-learning sessions accessible via mobile devices (10-minute video tutorials or quizzes) or peer-led workshops: sessions run by fellow young teachers sharing modern tools, apps or teaching techniques.
 - **For Millennials:** interactive webinars – live, virtual sessions with opportunities for discussion and Q & A or collaborative projects.
 - **For Generation X:** self-paced online courses – access to

professional development platforms like Coursera or webinars they can complete in their own time, or practical workshops: hands-on sessions focusing on concrete teaching challenges (e.g. classroom management).

3 Collaboration and autonomy

- Encourage teacher-driven initiatives giving teachers ownership and influence, this could be generated by group brainstorming sessions.
- Routinely ask for teacher feedback – ensure that everyone has input.
- Create opportunities, time and means to collaborate and share ideas. Now that many teachers prepare lessons at home or individually in their classrooms, we lose an informal exchange of ideas that used to happen in the staffroom. Create opportunities for face-to-face or online idea-swaps, formally and informally.
- Schedule regular team-building activities to foster relationships. This does not have to be a big thing like paintballing. Meeting for coffee and a chat can be just as effective.

4 Recognition and rewards

Celebrate milestones and achievements by sharing good news and letting people know when somebody has completed a course or a year at the school.

5 Celebrate teacher impact on student progress

- According to research, teachers really value being able to make a difference in their student's lives, as one teacher said, what motivates them most is 'seeing students smile when they achieve their goals'.
- Individualised feedback: share specific examples of how students are improving because of a teacher's efforts, this can be a great start to a staff meeting and encourages you to also think about how you are demonstrating progress to students and parents.
 - Student testimonials: collect and share student or parent feedback, highlighting how the teacher has positively influenced their learning

You could share quotes in meetings or put them up in public areas like the staffroom, social media (with permission!) or school hallways.

6 Respect and voice

One of the teachers involved in the research said: 'recognising good work, showing trust and goodwill, respecting their time and work, listening to their experience / input, etc. that would reap tangible benefits not just for the students but for the business.'

- Respect professional expertise and contributions (piloting new methodologies). It is important for teachers 'to be respected for their professional expertise and knowledge, particularly their knowledge of what works for students' (Grantmakers for Education, 2024).
- Give employees a voice and show your trust in their abilities. Teachers said they are motivated by 'feeling seen, heard and valued'.
- If possible, allocate resources for teachers to represent the school, for example, at a conference.

Small changes can make a big difference to how teachers feel in the day-to-day of their work and academic managers have the potential to make a positive impact on motivation at work to the benefit of all the stakeholders.

References

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- NeaToday. (2022). 'Survey: alarming number of educators may soon leave the profession'. *NeaNews*. Available at: <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession> (Last accessed 22 July 2025).



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