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Exploring Professional Commitment and Passion Among Norwegian High School Teachers

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Abstract

High school teachers' professional commitment and passion are about being dedicated and unwavering in their pursuit of teaching excellence. This study aims to explore the antecedents of Norwegian high school teachers' professional passion. We investigated three factors—relational trust, teachers' affective commitment to the school organisation, and teachers' instructional self-efficacy—by conducting a survey of 246 Norwegian high school teachers and using structural equation modelling. Our findings reveal a positive relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and teachers' professional passion, as well as a positive relationship between trust among teachers and their passion. Further, affective commitment to the school organisation is indirectly related to teacher passion via relational trust between teachers. We thus conclude that both teacher efficacy and trust between teachers are directly related to teachers' passion, while teachers' affective commitment to the school is indirectly related via relational trust. Implications for practice and further research are discussed.

Keywords

High school teachers; professional commitment; passion; relational trust; affective commitment in school; teacher efficacy; Norway.

Understanding the professionalism of teaching

One factor noted in Hattie's 2008 book *Visible Learning* "[…] was passion—the joy, the thrill, and the infectious nature of the teacher to cause students to experience learning. […] *There are still too few studies on the power of passion* [emphasis added], but it remains a visible feature of many classrooms" (Hattie, 2023, p. 7–8).

We begin with this quote from Hattie to situate and legitimise our study, which focuses on teachers' professional commitment and passion for teaching in Norwegian urban high schools. Although Hattie's league tables of the impact of different teaching methods have been controversial in many ways (Wescott, 2022), they highlight important characteristics such as teachers' deep sense of responsibility for and dedication to their students' learning outcomes. We call this phenomenon teacher passion. Teacher passion typically refers to the intense enthusiasm, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation that teachers feel towards their profession (Day, 2004). It is often associated with a love for teaching, a strong interest in the subject matter, or an interest in the teaching process itself. Passionate teachers are energized by their work and inspire their students through their excitement and deep engagement with the content or the act of teaching (Day, 2009).

Teacher professional commitment to the school, on the other hand, entails a broader range of professional behaviours and attitudes (Somech & Bogler, 2002). Commitment to the school can encompass a teacher's dedication to their profession, their sense of responsibility toward student learning outcomes, their willingness to pursue ongoing professional development, and their determination to persevere in teaching despite challenges (Su et al., 2018; Türk & Korkmaz, 2022). Committed teachers are likely to invest time and effort into improving their practice and generally plan to remain in the profession for the long term (Firestone & Pennell, 1993).

Students and teachers share a mutual *interest* in students' education. Yet their *desires* may not always align: a student might seek ease and comfort in the classroom even while acknowledging that true comprehension of the material demands rigorous effort (Elstad, 2002). This is a paradox. A student may have a long-term goal, such as scoring well on a major exam, whose benefits are significant and long-lasting but also distant. This differs from immediate benefits such as relaxation, enjoyment, or stress avoidance that a student might gain by neglecting their studies in the present. In these cases, a teacher's capacity and commitment to encourage and challenge students can greatly enhance the quality of the learning experience.

The overarching analytical research question of this study is: How do relational trust, teachers' affective commitment to the school organisation, and their instructional self-efficacy interrelate to impact professional passion? This question aims to encapsulate the investigation into central factors and their complex relationships that contribute to the professional commitment of high school teachers in the Norwegian educational context.

High school teachers generally enjoy greater professional autonomy and have more decision-making responsibilities than elementary school teachers (Parker, 2015). They often engage in more autonomous planning and lesson delivery. High schools tend to have more intricate organisational structures, featuring larger faculties, multiple departments, and varied administrative roles (Bidwell, 2013). The dynamics of relationships and collaborative efforts among high school teachers can be complex. Understanding these aspects is crucial for enhancing the overall functioning of the educational institution (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Questions about teacher professional passion can be culturally sensitive, and the present study is rooted in a Norwegian social context. Learners in Norwegian high schools are 16–19 years old and thus in the process of becoming adults (Directorate of Education and Training, 2023). The typical emotional closeness that elementary school teachers can have with individual learners weakens in this age range (Gross & John, 1997; Kouhsari et al., 2023; Kunter et al., 2011; Santoro et al., 2012). However, even for teachers with learners who are approaching or have reached adulthood (age 18), their passion for student learning and success can easily interfere with their cognitions. They are often emotionally invested in helping students succeed (Perry et al., 1979; Phelps & Benson, 2012). It is not unreasonable to state that passion drives many, or even most, teachers' professionalism (Frenzel et al., 2013). Learners who are approaching adulthood can still appreciate teachers' pursuit of excellence in their instructional practices, but teachers' emotional role execution often becomes more distant (Brookfield, 2013).

Teachers with a high level of professional commitment often employ effective teaching strategies to capture students' interest (Killen & O'Toole, 2023). These teachers go the extra mile to make lessons relevant, relatable, and interactive, ensuring that students find the material engaging and meaningful. This approach may help combat boredom and encourage students to stay focused on and invested in their learning. Therefore, we believe that the attributes of commitment are critical components in the educational process that can have a profound impact on student learning. Generally, teachers with a high level of professional commitment are more motivated, effective, and resilient (Gu & Day, 2007); they have a stoic calm when trying to have a positive impact on student learning.

The power of teachers' impact on students' learning processes depends on how those learners relate to the teaching (Keller et al., 2013; Lazarides et al., 2021; Mart, 2013). When teachers present content in an exciting and dynamic way, learners are more likely to remember the information because it is associated with an emotional experience (Patrick et al., 2000). Teachers who teach with a sense of infectiousness and even thrill often employ active strategies that involve students in the learning process (Hattie, 2023). This allows learners to engage more deeply with the material through discussion, thought-provoking tasks, and hands-on activities. Teachers who show genuine passion and enthusiasm are often more approachable and relatable to learners, which can help build the strong teacher-learner relationships that are important for creating a supportive and effective learning environment. Research has

shown that teacher enthusiasm is positively related to learner achievement (Keller et al., 2013; 2016). When teachers are excited about teaching, they are more likely to go the extra mile, use innovative teaching strategies, and be effective in helping learners understand complex concepts (Waldbuesser et al., 2021). Moreover, enthusiastic teachers often experience greater personal happiness and well-being (Burić & Moè, 2020; Kouhsari et al., 2023). Additionally, teachers often perceive that their effectiveness is enhanced when they demonstrate enthusiasm in their teaching practices (Kunter, 2013). We believe that a deeply embedded emotional component in teachers' motivation to perform their job is important and thus seek to identify factors that, on a theoretical basis, may be related to what we call teachers' professional commitment and passion, which is the endogenous variable in this study.

Theoretical framework

In this section, we outline our theoretical framework, which combines teacher self-efficacy, teachers' commitment to the school organisation, trust among teachers, and teacher passion. These concepts have not yet been examined in concert, and the main contribution of our study is to deepen the understanding of aspects known to influence teachers' commitment and passion. Teachers' mind frames play a critical role in their teaching effectiveness and in shaping their learners' learning experiences (Hattie, 2023). The term "mind frames" refers to the underlying beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives that shape teachers' thoughts, actions, and decision-making processes in the classroom. A teacher's mind frame influences how they respond to learner performance (Hattie, 2023, p. 46). We believe that teachers' professional commitment to teaching originates in their mind frames and propose that teachers' professional commitment guides how they perceive and interpret information and approach teaching and learning (Gu & Day, 2007). By understanding and reflecting on their mind frames, teachers can continually grow and adapt their practices to better meet the needs of their learners and promote effective learning environments (Schaufeli et al., 2002). We believe that teachers' mind frames might influence their instructional decisions and their passion, enthusiasm, and perseverance in their teaching duties. One related aspect of teachers' mind frames is teacher self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy, as defined by psychologist Albert Bandura (1977), refers to individuals' belief in their own capability to organise and execute the actions necessary to achieve a specific goal or outcome. Teacher efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their ability to provide high-quality education (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teacher passion plays a vital role in fostering and enhancing teacher efficacy because efficacy encompasses the confidence teachers have in their capacity to teach effectively: teachers' persistence, enthusiasm, commitment, and instructional behaviour (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Thus, teachers' instructional self-efficacy is assumed to have an impact on the effort a teacher puts into classroom work (Phelps & Benson, 2012). However, the relation between teacher efficacy and teachers' professional passion for teaching might be reciprocal (Keller et al., 2016): that is, the passion not only enhances learners' interest and motivation but also strengthens teachers' belief in their own

effectiveness, leading to higher levels of teacher efficacy. Experiencing the joy of teaching can further reinforce teachers' beliefs in their abilities, forming a positive cycle of self-efficacy and enthusiasm. Further, teachers' self-efficacy is related to instructional quality (Holzberger et al., 2013). When teachers are motivated, passionate, and enthusiastic, they are more likely to persevere through challenges (Fabelico & Afalla, 2020; Shao, 2023). Our first hypothesis (H1) is that teacher efficacy is positively related to teacher passion.

Moreover, teachers' work is carried out within a larger school organisation (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) in which relationships with colleagues are presumed to be important for a professional commitment to teaching. Affective commitment to the organisation often means that teachers align with their school's culture and values. A strong emotional involvement in the school community provides teachers with a sense of purpose and belonging, and affective commitment to the organisation is believed to be at the core of organisational commitment, which has important implications for both practitioners and researchers (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Huseyin, 2018; Mercurio, 2015). A school culture that values teamwork and provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate with their peers can increase job satisfaction and shared enthusiasm for teaching (Kouhsari et al., 2023). Our second hypothesis (H2) is that teachers' affective commitment to their organisation is positively related to teacher passion.

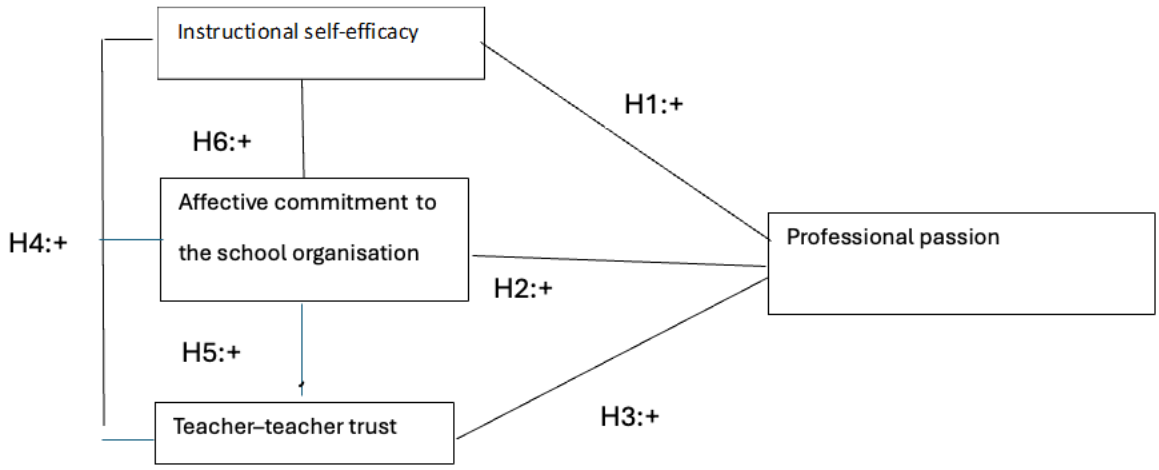
Further, we believe that recognising and appreciating teachers for their efforts and achievements can significantly impact their professional passion. Bryk and Schneider (2002) argue that schools characterised by strong relational trust are significantly more inclined to implement the types of changes that lead to improved learner achievement than those with weaker relationships: the functioning of schools relies heavily on the quality of social relationships within them. A trusting relationship between school leadership and teachers contributes to a positive school climate. When teachers feel trusted, they are more likely to exhibit high levels of job satisfaction, commitment, and motivation, which translates into better teaching. Bryk and Schneider (2002) document the importance of trust within school organisations and illustrate how a foundation of trust among school staff members serves as a crucial asset. However, it remains unclear in the existing literature whether relational trust between teaching colleagues influences their passion and the levels of energy and enthusiasm teachers display in their educational duties. Despite this uncertainty, we believe that trust between teachers is an essential element in building a collaborative, supportive, and effective school environment which promotes teachers' passion. Relational trust among teachers is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity for quality teaching. It lays the foundation for a professional community that values excellence in education. Further, schools with high levels of trust between teachers are more likely to retain effective educators (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). This leads us to ask whether the levels of relational trust affect teachers' professional passion for teaching. This is our third hypothesis (H3). We also explore the empirical relationships between the exogenous variables in the model and find it convincing to propose that there is a positive relationship between relational trust and teacher efficacy (H4; see Tschannen-

Moran, 2014), between relational trust and affective commitment (H5; see Meredith et al., 2023), and between teacher self-efficacy and affective commitment (H6; see Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Our hypothesised model is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Hypothesised model



Materials and methods

Teachers in Norway work at various levels within the education system: elementary school, middle school, and high school (Directorate of Education and Training, 2023). There may be differences in motivational orientation and preferences among teachers at the various levels of a school (Han & Yin, 2016). We focus on high schools, which typically deal with more complex subject matter and specialised disciplines compared to elementary schools (Marston, 2010). High school teachers are expected to possess deeper subject-specific knowledge and often face greater challenges in aligning their teaching practices with curriculum guidelines. In Norway, becoming a high school teacher typically requires completing a five-year master's degree program. This extensive education process ensures that teachers are well-prepared and highly qualified. Investigating the factors that influence their professional commitment can yield valuable insights into navigating these complexities effectively.

To gather the most relevant data for our study, we carefully selected public high schools in Oslo, in late autumn 2023. We invited five high schools from various regions of the city to participate in the survey. These schools were chosen to reflect the wide diversity in socio-economic levels and ethnic backgrounds among students in Oslo. This diversity is evident in the admission scores and average grades of the students upon graduation. All the selected

schools offer academic programs, ensuring that our sample accurately represents the range of high schools in Oslo that prepare students for further academic studies.

The survey was conducted during a mandatory school meeting for school staff, where teachers were given paper-based questionnaires to complete. The survey was anonymous, and thus no participant had an incentive to provide false information. Although participation in the survey was voluntary, all teachers chose to participate. Participants were provided with information about the project and assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. Observation determined that none of the 246 teachers failed to participate. However, some non-completed questionnaires were excluded from the sample for the present study.[1] Consequently, the response rate among teachers from the five schools was approximately 87% (*N* = 223). It should be noted that teachers who were absent are not represented in the data. We are unaware of any systematic absence in the participating schools, which could represent potential bias, and we are confident that the sample used for the survey effectively represents the diversity of teachers in high schools in Oslo that offer academic programs.

By employing structural equation modelling (SEM) in a research study regarding the factors related to professional commitment and passion, we can gain insights into the connections among variables (Kline, 2023). In this context, factors refer to the variables that may impact high school teachers' professional commitment. The variables are used to comprehend and elucidate differences in the endogenous variable; however, we cannot ignore the fact that the causal directions can go more than one way.

As a statistical approach, SEM enables researchers to analyse intricate relationships between observable and latent variables. It considers the presence of measurement errors, providing more precise estimations of the associations between variables. This is particularly crucial when working with survey data, which may be susceptible to such inaccuracies.

The survey items were derived in part from indicators found in previous scholarly research conducted by Bryk and Schneider (2002), Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014), and Allen and Meyer (1990), while others were newly developed indicators. We followed the recommendations in Haladyna and Rodriguez (2013). Our items and descriptive statistics are presented below in Table 1.

[1] In one educational institution, a subject section comprised of five individuals conducted a distinct gathering to collect data. Unfortunately, four questionnaires were disregarded since the participating teachers selected the "neither agree nor disagree" option for all questions. Additionally, four questionnaires were excluded due to respondents omitting answers to multiple questions. Furthermore, two individuals completed their questionnaires quickly enough to suggest limited contemplation of the prompts, leading to their exclusion from the sample. In our data set, we found some boxes that the teachers did not tick and disregarded these teachers as informants. These factors combine to explain the 87% response rate.

The concepts were assessed using two to three individual items. In the survey, teachers rated items on a five-point Likert-type scale, with three indicating a neutral midpoint. Generally, the Likert-type scale used was 1 = completely agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat disagree; 5 = completely disagree. However, for items 86 and 87, the scale was adjusted to 1 = completely certain; 2 = fairly certain; 3 = neither certain nor uncertain; 4 = fairly uncertain; 5 = very uncertain. The descriptive statistics (Table 1) and measurement were analysed using IBM SPSS 29, and structural model (Figure 2) was analysed using IBM SPSS Amos 29.

Results

We calculated the mean *(M)* and the standard deviation *(SD)* for each item, as shown in Table 1. When we used three indicators, we have reported measures of internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) and Pearson's *r* from when we have used two indicators. Cronbach's alpha of .68 and .65 for three indicators suggest moderate internal consistency, it might be acceptable in the specific context. A Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.48 ($p < 0.01$) between two indicators indicates a moderate positive relationship that is statistically significant. This suggests that the two indicators are related and measure somewhat similar constructs. A correlation coefficient *r* of .65 ($p < 0.01$) indicates a moderate to strong positive relationship between the two indicators. This suggests that there is a considerable degree of consistency between the indicators. A correlation of $r = .36$ ($p < 0.01$) between two indicators suggests a statistically significant but moderate relationship, indicating moderate internal consistency as a measure of reliability. Held together there is a considerable degree of consistency between the indicators, with higher scores on one indicator associated with higher scores on the other.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics

Latent variable	Name of variable	Wording of the item	Mean	SD	Range	Cronbach's alpha/ Pearson's r	References
Teachers' professional passion	JA70	I give absolutely everything when I teach, even if learners are not always mentally present.	1.9	0.8	1–5	α= 0.68	Developed for this study
	JA71	I work really hard to do as good a job as possible, even if I don't get good feedback from learners.	1.9	0.7	1–5		
	JA72	Even when learners think the subject is boring, I am full of energy when I teach.	2.2	0.9	1–5		

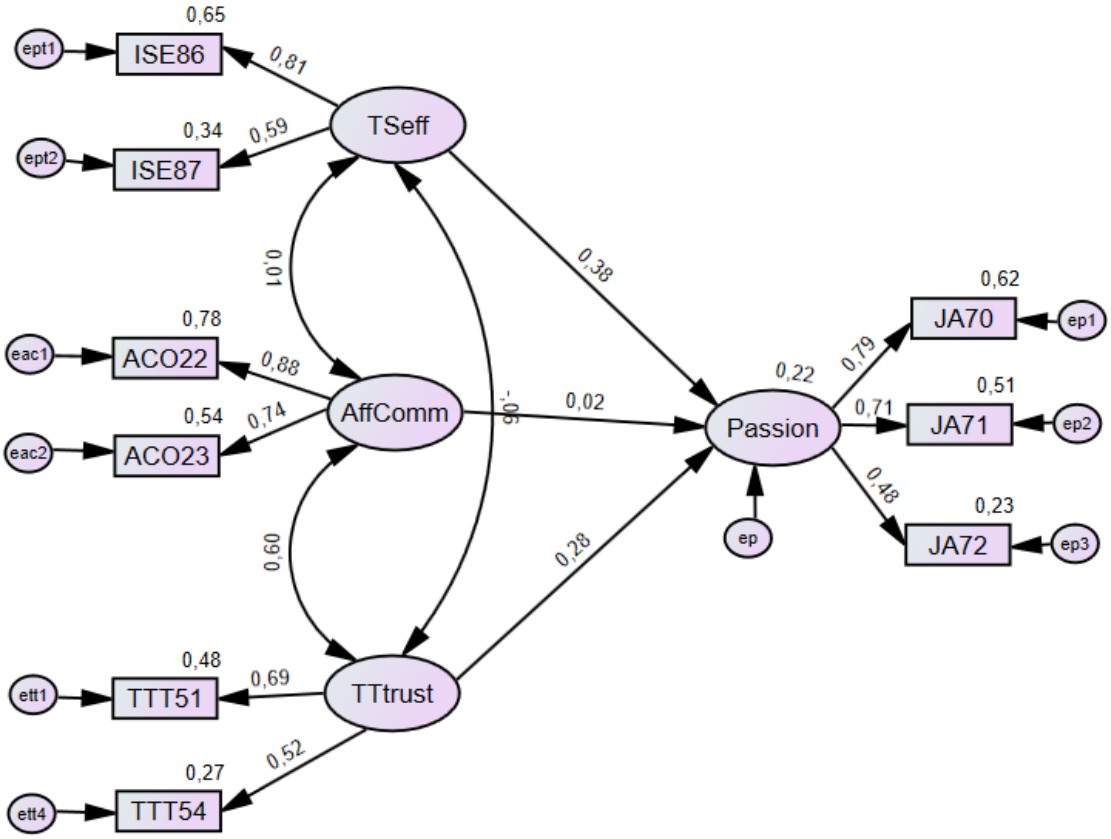
Table 1 (Continued)

Latent variable	Name of variable	Wording of the item	Mean	SD	Range	Cronbach's alpha/ Pearson's r	References
Teacher instructional self-efficacy	ISE86	How sure are you that you will be able to motivate learners who show little interest in schoolwork?	2.6	0.8	1–5	*r* = 0.48 *p*<0.01	Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014
	ISE87	How sure are you that you will be able to make learners believe that they can actually do well in school?	2.6	0.7	1–5		
Affective commitment	ACO22	I have a strong sense of belonging with the others who work at this school.	2.1	1.0	1–5	*r* = 0.65 *p*<0.01	Allen & Meyer, 1990
	ACO23	I am emotionally attached to this school.	2.0	1.0	1–5		
Teacher–teacher trust	TTT51	The teachers at the school trust one another.	1.7	0.8	1–5	*r* = 0.36 *p*<0.01	Bryk & Schneider, 2002
	TTT54	The teachers at this school really respect their colleagues who are skilled in their work.	1.7	1.0	1–5		

The results of the descriptive statistics shown in Table 1 indicate that the teachers report a high level of professional passion (*M* = 2.0, *SD* 0.8), a moderate to high level of instructional self-efficacy (*M* = 2.6, *SD* = 0.8), a high level of affective commitment (*M* = 2.0, *SD* = 1.0) and a high degree of teacher-teacher trust (*M* = 1.7, *SD* = 0.9).

In Figure 2, the ovals represent the latent variables, the rectangles represent the observed variables, and the circles represent the measurement errors. The pathways signify the strength and directions of the connections between the variables. These coefficients are standardized estimates, similar to beta weights in regression analyses, with values typically ranging from +1 to -1. A value above zero indicates a positive relationship; as one variable increases, so does the other. Meanwhile, a value below zero indicates a negative relationship: as one variable increases, the other decreases. In this context, we also assess the practical or substantive significance of the pathways, which involves evaluating whether the observed relationships have meaningful implications in real-world scenarios. Abbreviations are explained right under Figure 2, together with the interpretation of the results.

Figure 2 *SEM-model depicting teacher passion, self-efficacy, affective commitment, and teacher-teacher trust*



Standardized estimates
CHI = 25,942; DF = 21; P-CHI = ,209; RMSEA = ,033; CFI = ,987; TLI = ,978

Our SEM analysis indicated that the proposed model displayed a satisfactory fit with the data, as evidenced by the chi-square test, indicating a rejection of the null hypothesis. The comparative fit index (CFI) was acceptable, with a value of 0.987, suggesting that the model provides an accurate representation of the actual data structure. Additionally, the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) indicated a good fit for the model, with a value of 0.978, and the root mean square error of approximation value (RMSEA) of 0.033 indicates a good fit (Kline, 2023), further affirming the model's adequacy. Taken together, these indices support the conclusion that our model fits the data well.

Table 2

Overview of the results

Hypothesis	Wording	Result
1	Teacher efficacy is positively related to teacher passion.	Supported
2	Teachers' affective commitment in their own organization is positively related to teacher passion.	Not supported
3	The level of trust among teachers affect their professional passion to teaching.	Supported
4	There is a positive relationship between relational trust and teacher efficacy.	Not supported
5	There is a positive relationship between relational trust and affective commitment.	Supported
6	There is a positive relationship between teacher self-efficacy and affective commitment.	Not supported

There is a clear pathway between teacher efficacy and professional passion: the coefficient is 0.38. With a cross-sectional approach in SEM, a path coefficient of 0.38 can be characterized as a moderately positive relationship between the two variables (Cohen et al., 2018). This means that for one standard deviation increase in the predictor variable, there is an expected 0.38 unit increase in the outcome variable. Further, the results demonstrate a modest pathway between trust among teachers and their professional passion: the path coefficient is 0.28. This is commonly characterized as a moderately positive relationship between the two variables (Cohen et al., 2018). The other pathways were lower in strength, but we can identify indirect pathways, which can be interpreted as one variable acting via another variable. Affective commitment is an effective pathway to teacher passion via relational trust. The strength of the connection between the trust that exists among teachers and their affective commitment involvement with the school organization is strong (b = 0.60). This strength is notable because we can distinguish on a theoretical basis between two clearly distinct concepts.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the relationship between high school teacher's professional passion for delivering high-quality education and various factors associated with their work, including trust among colleagues, affective commitment to the school organization, and teachers' instructional self-efficacy. We found evidence to indicate that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy are more likely to possess professional passion, and the converse is true for teachers with low self-efficacy. This mechanism might lead to increased enthusiasm for the profession (and to decreased enthusiasm for teachers with low self-efficacy), an insight that can help explain the strength of the path coefficient between these latent variables. In other words, we find evidence of a relationship between teacher efficacy and teachers' professional passion.

Further, we believe that instructional self-efficacy and teachers' passion form a dynamic, reciprocal relationship. Each attribute feeds and amplifies the other, making both essential elements in promoting effective teaching and fruitful learning outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Teachers who believe in their abilities and approach their work with engagement and drive are more likely to thrive in their roles and inspire their learners to do the same (Burić & Moè, 2020).

Relational trust among teachers is a practical necessity for quality teaching (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). It lays the foundation for a professional community that values excellence in education, and schools with high levels of trust between teachers are more likely to retain effective educators. The pathway between trust among teachers and their professional passion is 0.28. This is a moderately positive relationship between the two variables (Cohen et al., 2018). We find the strength of this pathway meaningful because teachers are alone when they are in the classroom and thus have little contact with colleagues when performing their core duties (Lortie, 2020). However, the quality of the contact with colleagues seems to be related to how teachers develop a professional commitment to deliver good teaching. In other words, the question of how one is perceived by one's colleagues and the relationships one has with them could affect the energy teachers put into teaching. What we find here is not solid evidence for this possible connection, and we note that this finding should be followed up in further research to gain insight into a possible causal relationship.

The direct pathway between teachers' affective commitment to the school organization and their professional passion is notably weak. Similarly, the link between teachers' instructional efficacy and their affective commitment to the school organization is minimal, while the relationship between teacher efficacy and relational trust among teachers is surprisingly low. However, it is crucial to consider that this is an indirect effect influenced by another variable, which diminishes the expected impact between the two factors. In future research, it would be valuable to investigate these relationships, which we have found to be strikingly weak. Qualitative research, based on observations and interviews, could offer explanations of what

is happening in the relevant pathways (Cohen et al., 2018). It is also possible to include more variables in quantitative analyses to obtain a more nuanced picture of how meaningful variables are related (Kline, 2023).

There is an indirect relation between affective commitment to the school organisation via relational trust among teachers and teachers' professional passion for teaching. We interpret this as if the subjective experience of how colleagues perceive a teacher and the extent to which this perception fuels trust among colleagues will strongly fuel a highly valuable characteristic in employees: that they have an affective commitment to their organization. The research on affective commitment shows that this quality is important for the energy employees put into their work and, hence, their willingness to go the extra mile (e.g., Mercurio, 2015). This is important because teachers' actual work tasks are only specified to a modest extent in documents that explain their duties (Somech & Bogler, 2002). One possible interpretation is that the realization of a good school depends on teachers who are willing to do more than what can be considered the minimum effort required to retain their position.

Limitations

While a cross-sectional questionnaire study using SEM can yield valuable insights, it is important to consider its limitations. One significant issue is the inability to establish causality from cross-sectional data. Although SEM models often depict causal processes, it is challenging to draw definitive conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships without temporal precedence (Kline, 2023). Randomised controlled trials are the gold standard in studies of causal processes but are difficult to conduct in school settings (Berliner, 2002).

Another clear limitation is that this study is only valid for the context from which the sample was drawn. Although our sample captures the diversity among schools in Norway's capital well, we cannot claim that it is strictly representative; nor can we claim that it is representative of high schools across Norway, let alone other countries. Further, both school culture and age level can have an impact on how the factors that we have emphasised play out (Cohen et al., 2018). How they manifest themselves in different school contexts is a pressing matter for further research because we believe that teacher passion is a crucial attribute that has received relatively little attention in educational research.

It is also important to note that the quality of SEM results relies on the accuracy of the underlying theoretical model (Kline, 2023). If a model is incorrectly specified, the findings may reflect that error rather than depicting an accurate relationship between variables. Additionally, unmeasured variables can impact both exogenous and endogenous variables. Low-strength pathways may indicate the need to reassess the theoretical model. Therefore, it is crucial to interpret such pathways within the context of the overall model fit indices (RMSEA, CFI, and TLI) and the theoretical framework guiding the research. Despite these considerations, our structural model demonstrates good fit, allowing even weak paths to provide insights into the relationships examined, although they may not have as much influence as stronger paths. At

the same time, we acknowledge that our model may benefit from the inclusion of additional variables in future steps.

Self-reporting has obvious weaknesses (Cohen et al., 2018). Observations of teachers' visible behaviour could, in principle, be an interesting corrective to assess the veracity of the information teachers provide, but this would be very difficult to implement.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data is an avenue for further research (Cohen et al., 2018). Therefore, a qualitative follow-up study would be an interesting opportunity to go behind the numbers to hear how the respondents perceive their own reality. This can provide valuable information to better understand the complex phenomena studied here. We believe that future studies, including the work of other researchers, will contribute to a more accurate understanding of the factors influencing teachers' professional commitment to teaching. Thus, our research serves as a starting point for further investigation.

Implications for practice and research

The implications for practice from this study include actionable insights for educational administrators, policymakers, and teachers themselves. Enhancing teacher self-efficacy involves investing in professional development programs that focus on boosting teachers' instructional self-efficacy. This can include workshops on effective teaching strategies, mentorship programs, and opportunities for teachers to reflect on and discuss their practices, as well as providing constructive feedback and recognizing teachers' efforts to help boost their confidence in their teaching abilities (Meredith et al., 2023). Building relational trust is also crucial, and schools should foster a culture of collaboration that cultivates trust among teachers. This can include regular team-building activities, collaborative teaching projects, and platforms for sharing successful practices (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Encouraging open and honest communication among staff can help build mutual trust and respect (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Promoting affective commitment entails creating a positive and supportive school climate that values teachers' contributions and involves recognizing and celebrating achievements and providing a supportive environment for professional growth (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Allowing teachers more autonomy and involvement in decision-making processes can increase their sense of belonging and commitment to the school (Parker, 2015). Integration of these efforts should adopt a holistic approach, since affective commitment is indirectly related to teacher passion through relational trust; and efforts to build a strong, trustful community among teachers indirectly enhance their commitment to teaching. Implementing interconnected programs that simultaneously address self-efficacy, relational trust, and affective commitment can be more effective (Holzberger et al., 2013). Leveraging teacher passion could involve supporting initiatives that allow teachers to pursue projects they are passionate about, which may enhance their overall commitment to teaching (Mart, 2013). Focusing on teachers' well-being by reducing burnout and supporting their emotional needs can sustain their passion and enthusiasm for teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Policy implications suggest that policymakers need to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for professional development and community-building activities within schools and that policies supporting teacher autonomy and professional growth can contribute to higher levels of professional passion among teachers (Hargreaves et al., 2013). Future research and practice integration could explore additional variables that may impact professional commitment and integrate qualitative studies to understand the detailed experiences and perceptions of teachers. Though the study is situated in the Norwegian context, these insights can be adapted and tested in different cultural settings to assess their universal applicability. By addressing these practical implications, educational institutions can better support teachers in developing strong professional commitment and passion, which ultimately enhances the quality of education and student outcomes.

One avenue for further research is to investigate how teacher self-efficacy, on the one hand, and teachers' professional passion, on the other, can lead to higher levels of learner engagement, improving student outcomes. This kind of research design will require a more comprehensive set of surveys that also include student data (Keller et al., 2016). This is not impossible to implement but will require extensive funding and adequate permissions. A more comprehensive sample could also help clarify how teachers' professional passion manifests itself in different teacher age groups and in different school subjects.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be seen as a potential conflict of interest.

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