

# Preferences Related to Becoming, Being, and Remaining a Teacher—A Case Study on Teachers' Job Satisfaction in the Danish Public School System

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## Abstract

This article examines teachers' job satisfaction and explores a well-known phenomenon: the gap between people's stated attitudes or intentions regarding a particular matter and their actual behaviors (for example, remaining or leaving). Specifically, it investigates the attitude-action divergence among teachers in the Danish public school system, who contemplate leaving their school or profession but ultimately stay, at least temporarily. This phenomenon is analyzed through factors such as the school's approach to inclusion, digital practices, collegial collaboration, opportunities for professional development, and the alignment between job responsibilities and the resources available. The findings are based on statistical and survey data spanning the last 25 years. By applying a triangulating mixed-methods design, the article confirms the existence of a substantial attitude-action gap and proposes directions for further research.

## Keywords

Teaching in Public Schools, Job Satisfaction, Attitude toward Being a Teacher, Decision to Continue at or Leave the School, Attitude-Action Divergence

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## 1. Introduction

In both public and private organizations, it is common—and sometimes even necessary—to employ staff for a limited duration. This allows individuals to pursue career aspirations, navigate professional dilemmas, and accommodate considera-

tions related to health and age. In other cases, job changes are involuntary, resulting from organizational restructuring, mergers, or closures. This also applies to the Danish public school system, which is the focus of this article. Within the K-9 education system, only a small proportion of teachers maintain long-term employment at the same school.

Various narratives exist about being a teacher—and, more broadly, about job satisfaction among teachers in public schools. One such narrative centers on binary decisions where teachers must determine whether to leave their current school (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). In the Danish public school system, the majority of teachers prefer to stay. The retention rate among teachers in public schools is higher than the average across other sectors of the Danish labor market. Between 2021 and 2022, the proportion of employed individuals who remained in their primary job over the past year was below 80% (DS, 2024). In comparison, the proportion of teachers who remained at the same school during the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years exceeded 87% (Cepos, 2025a).

Another narrative concerns teachers' attitudes toward their work, which range from highly positive to deeply negative. Analyzing this spectrum provides insight into job satisfaction—or the lack thereof—particularly at the classroom level. Here, “classroom” is understood broadly to include both physical and digital environments. Denmark was the first country in the world to implement a digital 1:1 solution in all public schools, ensuring that every student has access to a digital device—such as a computer, tablet, or smartphone—for use in classrooms (Soby, 2013). Teaching is fundamentally a communicative act, and teachers' attitudes are shaped by expectations to engage with students both face-to-face and through screens.

These attitudes influence teachers' decisions about whether to remain at a school. Positive attitudes may reinforce teachers' commitment to remain in their current roles, whereas negative attitudes can heighten the likelihood of contemplating resignation—although this association remains non-deterministic. As will be shown, a considerable number of public school teachers are considering changing jobs; however, only a relatively small proportion make the transition within a year.

This article examines teachers' reflections and attitudes and how these relate to actions concerning school changes or shifts in professional trajectory. The article opens by presenting the research objectives and theoretical framework, followed by a description of the methodology employed. A subsequent section presents key findings from the analysis, including a range of contemporary challenges that may prompt teachers to consider leaving. Chronologically, these challenges include work pressure and limited opportunities for professional development, the inclusion of students with special needs, distractions related to social media, and the implications of generative AI. Additionally, the article addresses collegial collaboration and emerging trends in teacher shortages within the public school system. The article concludes with a discussion and final reflections.

## 2. Research Objectives and Theoretical Framework

The research objectives are threefold:

- To identify and characterize teachers' attitudes toward their professional work.
- To examine the relationship between these attitudes and the decision to remain employed at a specific public school.
- To explore how these dynamics can be analyzed using a mixed-methods design informed by divergence theory.

Divergence theory is introduced to examine the relationship between attitude and action. This theory focuses on typical discrepancies between teachers' attitudes toward their work and their actions aimed at achieving a meaningful professional life. It is inspired by—but not identical to—psychological dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Rather than emphasizing temporary discomfort when attitudes and actions are misaligned, divergence theory frames this misalignment as a relatively enduring and functional—yet often frustrating—phenomenon.

Divergence theory also draws upon—but is not synonymous with—the sociological rational choice theory of action (Sonne Ragans, 2019), which posits that actions stem from individual choices based on a systematic evaluation of costs and benefits. Theoretically, the actor selects the course of action that maximizes expected utility in a given situation. Divergence theory adds a critical nuance to this perspective by emphasizing that inherent uncertainty often prevents such evaluations from being translated into action. Uncertainty may lead to postponement or outright hesitation—even when attitudes and preferences clearly point in a particular direction.

The concept of divergence fundamentally refers to the deviation between two entities. In this context, it denotes the gap between a teacher's attitude toward continuing to work in their current classroom environment and their actual behavior in relation to that attitude. Divergence occurs to varying degrees and is minimal when a teacher takes concrete action, such as deciding to change schools, leave the profession, or retire.

The divergence between attitudes and actions is a well-documented phenomenon, commonly referred to as the attitude-action gap. In this context, divergence is operationalized as attitudes regarding staying at one's current school versus actual job change within a year. Since such attitudes represent a preceding phase in the decision-making process that may ultimately lead to action, they do not reflect a determined course of action. Even when attitudes evolve into clear intentions to change one's professional situation, these intentions do not necessarily result in tangible action.

A range of circumstances and barriers may hinder the transition from intention to execution. In making such decisions, teachers must consider not only personal ideals and past experiences, but also the practical realities associated with changing their jobs. Consequently, the translation of attitude into action—such as changing schools or leaving the profession—may constitute a substantial step.

Many teachers in Danish public schools have also had limited access to profes-

sional development, which may contribute to uncertainty about the requirements for meeting new professional expectations. In addition, ingrained habits and routines can make it difficult to adapt to new working conditions. A lack of support from leadership or colleagues may further contribute to feelings of isolation during periods of change. These barriers can lead to hesitation and delayed action, even among teachers who possess a clear commitment to professional transformation.

In the following sections, divergence theory is used as an analytical framework to interpret key findings from empirical studies conducted over the past 25 years on teachers' reflections on their professional lives and the implications for remaining in the public school system and the teaching profession.

This calls for reflection on the data sources most suitable for shedding light on these dynamics—a focus of the subsequent section.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a triangulated mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2007) aimed at analyzing distinct yet complementary data types that collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of the complex mechanisms underlying teachers' professional orientations and decision-making processes. The analysis incorporates both data on teachers' explicit attitudes and their observed behaviors related to job transitions. This encompasses registry data capturing actual behaviors and survey data reflecting teachers' self-reported attitudes. These respective datasets are analyzed independently and subsequently integrated into a synthesizing interpretation.

Although these data types are sometimes referred to as “hard” and “soft” data, they are accorded equal value. In contemporary mixed methods research, both sources are considered essential for achieving a comprehensive understanding.

Registry data can be characterized as objective, comparative, and relatively straightforward. In this case, teacher turnover is calculated using employee data obtained from Statistics Denmark's Research Service at the workplace level (Cepos, 2025a). The turnover rate is determined as the average of departure and entry frequencies for individuals holding the role of “Teacher,” excluding substitute teachers. Since such sources lack teachers' personal accounts of working conditions and job satisfaction, they offer only limited insight into these dimensions.

Therefore, incorporating data that illuminate teachers' perspectives is essential. However, analyses of self-reported data may be limited by the researcher's subjective interpretations and the biases these may introduce, as well as by challenges to generalizability—particularly when sample sizes are small. Registry data do not share these limitations (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Yet, in this context, their binary classifications (e.g., employed/resigned) may mask important variations in attitudes. The phenomenon should therefore be examined by combining data on newly qualified teachers' reflections on the transition to practice with experienced teachers' reflections on their work in a specific school context.

To uncover teachers' mental processes, it is necessary to ask them directly. Descriptive statistics drawn from multiple survey waves conducted over the past 25 years are therefore included. However, due to relatively small sample sizes and response rates, overall representativeness is limited. In general, this approach also risks reduced reliability due to social desirability bias, whereby responses are shaped by perceptions of what is socially acceptable and politically correct.

More specifically, statements are constrained by prevailing discourse, as respondents may feel restricted in both what they can express and how they can express it (Foucault, 2006). Consequently, surveys tend to yield insights into politically correct attitudes that only partially reflect actual behavior (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2017).

A challenge in using mixed-methods designs is the risk of empiricism without theory, whereby studies present data without sufficient theoretical grounding. Theory serves as an analytical lens that enables precise definition and application of concepts, thereby reducing the risk of misinterpretation. In this analysis, divergence theory is employed to illuminate how many teachers, on the one hand, hold critical views of their practical experiences and, on the other hand, choose to continue teaching in the classroom at their current school.

## 4. Results

Teachers' attitudes toward their classroom-level practice—and, more broadly, toward remaining employed at their current school—are shaped by both personal circumstances and daily experiences within the school context. Specifically, individual factors significantly influence job satisfaction. For example, a teacher's health and well-being play a key role in decisions about continuing to teach in the classroom at their current school (Casely-Hayford et al., 2022). Moreover, teachers' job satisfaction depends on personal perspectives regarding their professional role, such as perceived competence in managing stressful situations in the workplace (Montuori et al., 2022).

As teachers reflect on their everyday experiences, they develop insights and, when these insights are articulated, they form explicit attitudes toward their own and others' practices within the school environment. These experiences and the resulting attitudes can, as previously noted, drive various forms of action. Specific elements of these attitudes influence how teachers interact with other actors in the school and affect their overall job satisfaction.

A range of organizational characteristics—such as student behavior, administrative support, teacher collaboration, and opportunities for professional development—strongly affect teachers' attitudes toward their professional lives (Nguyen et al., 2019). These attitudes essentially reflect whether and to what extent teachers' fundamental work-related needs are being met, including meaningful work, acceptable compensation, professional growth, and overall satisfactory working conditions. More positive attitudes may reflect satisfaction with collegial collaboration and support from school leadership, reducing the sense of isolation when

facing classroom-level challenges. Such attitudes may also indicate that teachers find meaning in their work, experience professional autonomy, and are able to manage a large and complex workload with the resources available (Plauborg et al., 2022).

Over the past 25 years, studies of teacher attitudes have been conducted on several occasions, primarily based on self-reported data. One such study examined the working environment in public schools, conceptualized as a multivariate phenomenon encompassing a wide range of factors (Kreiner & Mehlbye, 2000). At the time of the study, approximately nine out of ten teachers chose to remain at their school. However, a key finding was that many of them considered alternatives, even though they were generally satisfied with being teachers in public schools.

- One in three teachers considered changing or planned to change professions.
- One in four teachers considered transferring or desired to transfer to another school.

Given the relatively high number of teachers contemplating alternatives, the researchers emphasized that “the vast majority of teachers who indicate that they either wish or consider changing schools or professions are only considering it” (Kreiner & Mehlbye, 2000: p. 119). The high proportion of teachers in public schools who consider alternatives nevertheless demonstrates that there may be substantial discrepancies between teachers’ attitudes and their actual behaviors regarding continued employment at their current school.

The substantial number of teachers expressing a negative attitude towards remaining employed at their current public school is further substantiated by a 2019 study, which revealed that, on average, one in four teachers had considered leaving their position (Böwadt et al., 2019). Even larger proportions have been reported in several subsequent surveys, which will be examined in the following subsections.

#### 4.1. Professional Development

When the previously mentioned study of the working environment in Danish public schools was conducted 25 years ago, the greatest challenge identified was that “some teachers do not perceive the public school as a workplace that fosters professional development” (Kreiner & Mehlbye, 2000: p. 119). This perception has largely persisted since then. However, a structural incentive for professional development was introduced in the spring of 2025: the Municipal Competence Fund, which provides financial support for continuing education courses—such as subject-specific and pedagogical courses lasting up to six days.

While the impact of this initiative remains to be evaluated over time, experiences from the UK suggest that courses aimed at strengthening teachers’ core classroom competencies—rather than those targeting alternative career paths—can enhance teachers’ local commitment to the profession (Gu et al., 2023).

In many neighboring countries, teacher education is offered at the graduate

level. In Denmark, however, proposals to convert teacher education into a five-year master's degree program (DLF, 2014) have never received political approval. Consequently, a substantial share of continuing education consists of teachers enrolling in diploma programs at the bachelor level.

Additionally, approximately one in eight teachers engages in graduate-level continuing education programs (Danske Professionshøjskoler, 2024). Until now, both types of professional development have facilitated career advancement within and beyond the classroom.

A recent development is the increasing availability of master's programs specifically designed to enhance teachers' qualifications for sustained classroom practice. Future analyses may examine whether—and to what extent—this initiative positively influences teacher retention in the classroom. Notably, such programs may also strengthen teachers' competencies in addressing inclusion-related challenges, which will be explored in the following section.

## 4.2. Inclusion Challenges

Two national goals for the Danish public school system are to challenge all students and reduce the impact of social background on academic outcomes. However, neither of these goals has been successfully achieved over the past decade (STIL, 2025). Students' gender, ethnicity, and parental education level continue to significantly influence academic performance.

More broadly, realizing the ideal of every student's fundamental right to education remains a challenge (Andresen, 2025). While teachers and school leaders generally express positive attitudes toward the task of inclusion (Engsig et al., 2024), in practice, inclusion represents the most pressing challenge in public schools (Petersen et al., 2023).

From the school year 2024/2025, systematic assessments are conducted at school entry to identify students' needs for language support. Initial results indicate that 19% of students require targeted or specialized interventions (Ministry of Children and Education, 2025d). However, there are significant municipal disparities: In Frederiksberg Municipality—the lowest rate—an average of 10% of students require support, compared to 43% in Høje-Taastrup Municipality.

The need for language support is considerably lower among students whose parents hold higher education degrees (13%) than among those whose parents' highest level of education is primary school (44%) (Ministry of Children and Education, 2025d). This trend aligns with findings that teachers who transfer between schools tend to prefer institutions with students from well-educated families (DEA, 2025b).

There are substantial differences in the scope and effectiveness of municipal initiatives aimed at strengthening inclusion (Tegtmejer & Larsen, 2025). In the municipality with the lowest inclusion rate, 86% of students participate in mainstream education, compared to 97% in the municipality with the highest rate (Ministry of Children and Education, 2025c). While an analysis of the financial

aspects of inclusion falls outside the scope of this article, it is worth noting that educating a student in the public school system for ten years costs approximately 1 million DKK (Ministry of Children and Education, 2025a). One explanation for inadequate inclusion may be a lack of resources to implement effective measures (Lund, 2025). Another explanation could be that current efforts are insufficient, resulting in wasted resources on ineffective interventions. In either case, this can negatively impact teachers' job satisfaction.

Teacher burnout may result when a considerable proportion of students are dissatisfied with their school experience and feel a lack of belonging. This group constitutes an average of 16% of students in public and independent schools (Ministry of Children and Education, 2025b). Moreover, repeated attempts to engage disruptive or violent students in schoolwork may contribute to teacher burnout. "Public schools must accommodate all children, but not all behavior"; yet, when it comes to enforcing this principle, teachers' options have so far remained unclear (Tesfaye, 2025).

Behavior deemed incompatible with the school environment can be viewed from both a student-centered and contextual perspective. In the student-centered view, problematic behavior is seen as an issue within the individual student. In 2025, the "Executive Order on Promoting Good Conduct in Public Schools" was revised to allow for the exclusion of students from full school days in cases of violence or property damage (Parliamentary Committee on Children and Education, 2024). In the contextual perspective, disruptive behavior and bullying are interpreted as symptoms of a mismatch between institutional structures and the needs of the student population, and thus call for systemic improvements (Bjørnholt, 2025).

Both newly qualified and experienced teachers' attitudes toward remaining in the public school system are influenced by these challenges. Their general perception is that resources are insufficient to adequately support students—a view supported by a DLF survey showing that nearly nine out of ten classrooms include students who do not receive the necessary support, and four out of five teachers believe their ability to provide support has deteriorated over the past five years. This contributes to the fact that two out of three teachers have considered leaving the profession within the last year (Knudsen, 2025).

This, in turn, may contribute to a growing trend in which qualified teachers are reluctant to pursue positions within the public school system—a phenomenon analyzed in the following section.

### 4.3. Teacher Shortages in Public Schools

Unsuccessful recruitment efforts are widespread across the Danish labor market, with employers reporting that positions were "either not filled or filled by candidates with different profiles from those desired" (Jakobsen & Mølby, 2025). This trend extends to teaching positions in public schools. Although the absolute number of teacher jobs has declined due to reduced student enrollment, shortages

within the profession have become increasingly pronounced (Pihl & Lykketoft, 2021).

When teachers in public schools are asked about their motivations to enter, remain in, and commit to the profession, many articulate a strong sense of dedication—often described as a “calling” (Böwadt et al., 2020). Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of teaching positions are not filled by qualified teachers. In 2022, 19% of teachers in public schools lacked formal teaching qualifications, which is a notable increase from approximately 10% in 2012 (AE Council & DLF, 2023).

Between September 2023 and February 2024, 15% of vacancies were staffed by individuals without formal teacher training (Danske Professionshøjskoler, 2024). Younger teachers (ages 20 - 30) are less likely to remain at their schools compared to older colleagues (Cepos, 2025a), reflecting a broader trend: “The younger the employee, the greater the job mobility” (DS, 2024). Fewer than seven out of ten graduates from 2020 were still working in primary education 23 months later, and 50% of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Danske Professionshøjskoler, 2024).

As a result, two out of three municipalities have introduced initiatives such as adjusted teaching hours and mentorship programs to support early-career teachers (Epinion, 2025). Additionally, the Danish bachelor’s program for primary and lower secondary school teachers places increased emphasis on practical experience. Since 2023, 17% of the curriculum has consisted of school-based internships (Danske Professionshøjskoler, 2024). Future evaluations will determine whether such efforts enhance newly qualified teachers’ preference for remaining in public schools. However, evidence from England suggests that research-based support for novice teachers has promoted sustained engagement in the teaching profession (Department for Education, 2019; Gu et al., 2023). Furthermore, it highlights the positive effects of structured career pathways and collegial learning without prompting teachers to exit the classroom.

While the impact of teacher shortages on student learning, well-being, and collegial collaboration remains contested (Cepos, 2025b), evidence suggests that a higher proportion of qualified teachers—coupled with initiatives to strengthen professional and social communities among staff—positively affects students’ literacy development in early education (DEA, 2025a) and boys’ academic performance throughout their schooling (DEA, 2025b). Moreover, schools that emphasize both aspects tend to maintain a proportion of qualified teachers above the national average.

## 5. Discussion

Over the past 25 years, a significant divergence has persisted between teachers’ attitudes and actions regarding remaining in their current positions within the public school system. To analyze and understand this phenomenon, it is insufficient to examine only whether—and to what extent—teachers are satisfied with

their work. It is also necessary to consider the specific context in which the work is performed. While job characteristics are vital, the social and organizational conditions within the workplace are equally influential (Kristensen et al., 2013).

In short, understanding what it means to work as a teacher requires knowing where the work takes place. There is no definitive answer as to whether teachers perceive their jobs in positive or negative terms; rather, such attitudes depend on the specific school context, which is itself shaped by prevailing education policy.

The school context includes social relationships and collaborative structures that can be described using the concept of social capital. A school's social capital encompasses shared norms and mutual trust, both of which are essential for successful collegial collaboration and for coordinating teachers' efforts to fulfill the school's core mission (Olesen et al., 2008). It especially includes the resources teachers possess through their engagement in professional collaboration, mutual inspiration, and team learning.

When a school is established, the professional staff and school leadership must agree on how pedagogical practice should be organized and implemented. During staff transitions, newly hired teachers may encounter the phrase "This is how we do things at this school," reflecting the objectification of a socially constructed school reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Although values, visions, and frameworks may appear objectively given, they are, in fact, created by the school's actors—and can be continuously developed. This requires that newly hired teachers be thoroughly introduced to—and gain a clear understanding of—the school's core mission, foundational values, instructional organization, and collegial collaboration.

In schools, teachers commonly form teams or professional learning communities that are both stable and enduring. Close and coordinated collaboration equips teachers to better fulfill the school's core mission (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Teachers typically benefit substantially from analyzing challenges within the learning environment and developing targeted initiatives to address them (Andresen, 2015). Strong collaboration improves both instructional practice and classroom well-being (House of Commons Education Select Committee Inquiry, 2023). Furthermore, such collaboration enhances teachers' collective self-efficacy, which is one of the most influential factors in student learning outcomes (Hattie, 2012).

Participation in these communities also benefits teachers' professional development by enhancing their sense of belonging, social cohesion, and motivational autonomy (Fullan, 2005). When collaboration is experienced as meaningful and enriching, it also increases overall job satisfaction (House of Commons Education Select Committee Inquiry, 2023).

However, there is room for improvement in this area within the Danish public school system. Many teachers in public schools face daily challenges, which they attribute to a psychologically demanding work environment and to collaboration difficulties. Recently, these challenges have led 57% of Danish Union of Teachers

members in public schools to consider leaving the profession within the past year (Trier, 2024).

Additionally, many schools face challenges in managing digital classroom environments. The following sections explore two contemporary issues that may shape teachers' decisions to enter, remain in, or leave the profession.

### 5.1. Distracting Social Media

The first challenge is distraction, as social media posts are only a click away when students work independently on digital devices in the classroom. In recent years, there has been growing concern about digital distraction. Without proactive measures from schools to counteract this issue, many teachers report that students' attention to academic tasks becomes fragmented.

In Denmark, digital life begins early, with children receiving their first mobile phone at an average age of just over eight. Consequently, most students have access to smartphones throughout their years in public school. To mitigate potential distractions, many schools have implemented mobile phone policies requiring students to switch off or hand in their devices during lessons and breaks.

Although most social media platforms have a minimum age requirement of thirteen, many students do not enter their age accurately. In response, the EU (2025) has decided to strengthen efforts around age verification, and a pilot study involving countries such as Denmark will begin in summer 2025. Consequently, it is too early to determine whether—and to what extent—this initiative will impact students' use of potentially addictive social media platforms.

Parents are responsible for determining acceptable screen habits at home to safeguard their children's mental health. Most parents trust that their children will inform them of any issues encountered on social media (Digitalt Ansvar, 2025), yet there is growing global concern about the extensive use of social media among children and adolescents (Haidt, 2024). This trend highlights the need for collaboration between schools and families to promote students' mental well-being and academic engagement.

Students use social media to build relationships, foster community, and entertain themselves (Fynbo et al., 2022). Unintended consequences include “attention theft” (Mehlsen, 2024) and “concentration challenges” (Haidt, 2024). The prevalence of such effects has increased significantly since the rise of social media platforms (Trivselskommissionen, 2025). Some students report excessive use of social media and struggle to establish boundaries around their exposure to these “super-stimuli” (Brendborg, 2024). Signs of dependency are particularly evident among those who consume content passively rather than engaging interactively (KFST, 2025).

Students in the eighth and ninth grades of public schools spend an average of 4 to 5 hours daily on social media and digital games (Madsen et al., 2023). Four out of ten students use these platforms “during some lessons” or more frequently, and more than one-third report feeling distracted by them (Ministry of Children and

Education, 2024). The number of eighth-grade teachers who believe social media distracts students from learning has increased fivefold between 2013 and 2023 (Bundsgaard et al., 2024). While seven out of ten teachers agree that digital technologies enhance academic performance and increase student interest in learning, the same proportion now also believes that such technologies divert students' attention away from learning.

## 5.2. Challenges Related to Generative AI

In November 2022, ChatGPT 3.0 was launched, and since then, growing uncertainty has emerged regarding authorship in students' written assignments. The challenge lies in the rapid societal adoption of ChatGPT and other forms of generative AI, while existing teaching and assessment practices have yet to adapt to the new conditions surrounding student writing. These conditions are characterized by unprecedented opportunities for bluffing and academic disengagement. An unintended consequence is that some students opt for shortcuts, submitting seemingly acceptable content that they did not produce themselves (Elstad, 2023).

When students act in this way, they not only deceive their teachers but also deprive themselves of valuable learning experiences. This behavior can make it difficult for them to appreciate the value of producing academic content independently. "Google and ChatGPT know everything—so why not just ask them?" This mindset challenges teachers who strive to motivate all students, including those with special needs and those who feel disconnected from school, to engage in independent learning efforts.

Although academic dishonesty has been the subject of research for nearly a century (Zachek, 2020), there is no internationally accepted definition of cheating (Gallant & Rettinger, 2025). In this context, cheating is understood as bluffing or trickery, where students attempt to mislead others into believing that their written work is original, even when it is not. The extent of such behavior is relative and depends on the expectations for independent student work (Davis et al., 2009). When students experience high workload pressure, they may be motivated to reduce their academic burden. Cheating becomes particularly relevant when students struggle to meet assignment requirements and when failure to do so carries personal consequences (Finn & Frone, 2004).

Teachers often suspect cheating based on the following characteristics in students' written work (Epinion, 2019):

- Unusually high academic quality
- Shifts in academic level within a single text
- Previously submitted content or material sourced online
- Identical responses across multiple student assignments.
- Terminology or phrasing.
- Sentence structure
- Formatting inconsistencies
- Questionable citations

In Denmark, it has largely been left to individual teachers and school leaders to navigate these new conditions. Some educators are keenly aware that generative AI—if used appropriately—can enhance students’ academic understanding (Christensen, 2024), which is central to learning (Gardner, 2000). This requires students to adopt subject-specific perspectives and interpret knowledge, thereby demonstrating understanding rather than merely reproducing information (Illeris, 2017).

Effective use of GenAI can strengthen students’ “understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich, and rapidly changing world” (UNESCO, 2024: p. 1). Such use can inspire students by providing accessible support for processing facts, theories, concepts, principles, and ideas (Koper & Bennett, 2008). It positively influences their agency (Jeon & Lee, 2023) and holds the potential to revolutionize differentiated instruction and foster individual reflection (Elstad, 2023). AI-generated texts can be customized to meet students’ individual needs and provide, for instance, simplified content for learners with dyslexia (Kirkhorn, 2023).

Since all teaching is intentional (Andresen et al., 2024), it is essential to align teachers’ instructional goals with the work submitted by students. Constructive feedback on student products is crucial for learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Teacher feedback can be effectively supplemented with AI-generated, adaptive feedback tailored to students’ abilities and interests. In the context of story writing, this enhances students’ motivation, creativity, presentation skills, and knowledge acquisition (Fang et al., 2023).

As a result, teachers face two pressing challenges: helping students resist the temptation to cheat and guiding them to harness AI’s potential in meaningful, ethical ways. Consequently, they must develop competencies to initiate, support, and evaluate contemporary learning processes in a 1:1 digital environment. Currently, some teachers are actively seeking guidance on how public schools should adapt to this technological shift (Cohrt, 2025). Moreover, the Danish Ministry of Education recommends that schools establish clear guidelines and frameworks (Ministry of Children and Education, 2025e). Without these competencies and guidelines, students may lose motivation and struggle to find meaning in their learning—an issue that may also contribute to decreased job satisfaction among teachers.

## 6. Conclusion

This article has addressed a threefold research objective. First, it analyzed the defining characteristics of teachers’ attitudes toward their work in public schools. As teachers reflect on their professional lives, they develop attitudes toward workload, collegial collaboration, professional development, and support for students with special needs. In connection with these reflections, they also form attitudes about leaving their current school, changing professions, or retiring.

A positive attitude implies that teachers feel their professional preferences are

being met and therefore do not consider changing jobs. However, the analysis reveals that a considerable number of teachers have concerns about their working conditions, which are reflected in their considerations about leaving their current workplace.

More specifically, some teachers question whether their tasks are sufficiently meaningful, manageable, and worth continuing—or whether they are unsatisfactory and worth abandoning. Job satisfaction is particularly undermined when teachers face challenges related to inclusion efforts, digital practices, collegial collaboration, opportunities for sustained professional development, and a lack of alignment between tasks, available resources, and time.

Second, the article examined the relationship between teachers' attitudes and their decisions to remain employed at a specific public school. Insights into these decisions are based on registry data tracking teachers' actual retention over time. It is evident that a divergence exists between attitudes and actions: negative attitudes do not consistently lead to action in the form of leaving. Concerns and dissatisfaction are significantly more widespread than actual job departures.

Compared to the broader Danish labor market, a relatively higher proportion of teachers in public schools choose to remain in their positions. Nonetheless, a shortage of qualified teachers persists. Many positions are not filled as planned, and certain municipalities face considerable recruitment challenges, while others are less affected.

Third, the article explored how these dynamics can be mapped using a mixed-methods design informed by divergence theory. It proposes a triangulated design that combines municipal and national statistics on who is actively working as a teacher at a public school—as an objective measure of job mobility—with self-reporting methods to capture teachers' attitudes as a multivariate phenomenon.

These findings are subject to certain limitations, including low response rates and the potential for self-reporting bias in surveys, as well as constrained historical comparability and incomplete documentation of school mergers within the utilized employee data register. With these caveats, the combined design appears suitable for identifying the divergence between attitudes and actions.

Future research should expand triangulation with qualitative methods—such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and similar approaches—that can shed light on teachers' reasoning and the observed divergence between attitudes and behaviors. Qualitative approaches can help uncover nuanced perspectives on being employed at a specific school and generate insights into the school's social capital.

This analysis does not examine general attitudes among teachers in public schools toward their profession but instead investigates whether they contemplate changing jobs—and whether they follow through. The findings indicate a relatively weak relationship between attitude and action, as the desire to leave one's current school often lacks the necessary strength to prompt an actual job change. In conclusion, teachers' attitudes and their corresponding actions within this do-

main appear to be loosely connected. This type of attitude-action divergence also manifests across a wide range of other social contexts.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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