

**Understanding motivators and influences behind the choice  
of the teaching profession of Physical Education teachers in  
Malta.**

Jana Dabic

A Dissertation Presented in the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta  
for the Degree of Masters in Teaching and Learning in Physical Education

June 2025



L-Università  
ta' Malta

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# ABSTRACT

Jana Dabic

## **Understanding motivators and influences behind the choice of the teaching profession of Physical Education teachers in Malta.**

Teacher motivation forms a fundamental component of educational quality and student achievement (OECD, 2024; Watt & Richardson, 2008). This dissertation explores the concept of motivation behind the initial choice for the pursuit of teaching Physical Education (PE) in Malta, as well as the long-term sustained commitment to the profession. Given the current concerns of PE teacher recruitment and retention, the present study aims to provide insights into what influences individuals' early choice and how such factors evolve over time. The study employs the qualitative approach, thus the use of semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of PE teachers varying in gender, age, experience, and school context. Through open narratives, participants reflect on the initial choice to enter the profession of teaching PE, as well as their ongoing motivators that may have evolved throughout their careers.

The findings of the study demonstrate the predominance of intrinsic motivators in the initial drive to the profession, such as passion for sport and teaching, as well as positive personal experiences within a sporting environment at an early age. Furthermore, sustaining factors were mainly identified as enjoyment of seeing students' progress, creating meaningful relationships with school members, and external aspects of the job's benefits. Nevertheless, the extrinsic factors including a lack of recognition and limited professional development opportunities emerged as demotivators affecting the long-term commitment to the profession.

The study concludes that the complexity of motivation within the PE teaching context is predominantly influenced by personal, social and professional experiences. Further insights into motivational factors are critical for obtaining a deeper understanding of such dynamics and consequently help develop initiatives, programs, and policies targeting teaching retention and well-being.

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Keywords: **MOTIVATION, TEACHING, PHYSICAL EDUCATION, CAREER CHOICE, JOB SATISFACTION**

## Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation is my own original work and has not been submitted previously for any academic degree or qualification. All sources of information have been appropriately acknowledged and referenced.

*Jana D.*

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Jana Dabic

June 2025

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## **List of Abbreviations**

PE – Physical Education

PA – Physical Activity

SDT – Self-Determination Theory

EVT – Expectancy-Value Theory

AGT – Achievement-Goal Theory

IM – Intrinsic Motivation

EM – Extrinsic Motivation

AM - Amotivation

EU – European Union

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

This introductory chapter establishes the essential groundwork for the present dissertation. The central focus of this research is the concept of teacher motivation, which underscores the increasing importance of understanding teacher retention within the field of Physical Education. Additionally, the chapter presents the overall organisation and structure of the dissertation by outlining the main focus and providing an overview of each subsequent chapter.

### **1.1 Significance of the Study**

Understanding the motives behind the initial pursuit of the career, as well as the sustaining factors of long-term teacher engagement, has been one of the central foci in educational research. The motivation of teachers is recognised as one of the fundamental determinants of the educational success of students and overall school improvements. In the context of Physical Education (PE), teacher motivation involves additional complexity due to the interplay between unique challenges faced by educators, such as the subject's marginalisation, class management, and lack of support – factors which can lead to burnout and attrition (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

The increasing rate of teacher shortages across multiple Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries has become a critical priority within the education system, according to a recent Educational Policy Survey (2024). Data indicate a significant rise from 29% to 46.7% of school principals reporting teacher shortages between 2015 and 2022, primarily resulting from systemic factors such as insufficient teacher support, socio-economic shifts, and rapid changes in technology (OECD, 2024). Similarly, the situation in Malta echoes the issue of teacher attrition rates due to several reasons stemming from systemic support and working conditions (Galdes, 2022). When combined with demanding work expectations, the long-term sustainability of PE teachers and their effort is further challenged.

By exploring the motivational trajectories of education within the PE context, the present study aims to address the limited data regarding the initial and sustaining motivators of teachers, ultimately aiming to enhance support structures and quality of PE lessons as a means of holistic learner development and adequate teacher job satisfaction.

### **1.2 Teacher Motivation in the Literature**

The quality of education has long been acknowledged as closely linked to teacher motivation (OECD, 2024; Watt & Richardson, 2008). Educators expressing sufficient effort, inclusive pedagogical approaches, and resilience towards challenges help create a positive learning environment, and in turn, affect student success (OECD, 2021).

Past research on teacher motivation reflects on two major, distinct sets of factors – intrinsic and extrinsic – and highlights their interplay in long-term sustainability. While the intrinsic motivating factors incorporate passion, personal interest and value of the profession, extrinsically motivated individuals emphasise job conditions, such as security, salary and recognition (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sinclair, 2008). The prominence of such factors varies across different stages of career, hence, research suggests the domination of intrinsic motives mainly present in the initial entry to the profession, and external rewards becoming increasingly important over time (Han & Yin, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Richardson & Watt, 2010).

In the field of Physical Education, common initial motivators for teaching reflect passion for sport and physical activity, coupled with interest in teaching and work with children (Spittle et al., 2009). Nevertheless, retaining such motivation over the years within the profession is often impacted by various challenges related to systemic support, professional development opportunities, and class management (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Bevans et al., 2010). Additionally, the frequent undervaluation of the subject and recognition within school cultures further influences declined self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Pelletier et al., 2002).

A number of motivational theories apply their structures and understandings of the formation and sustainability of motivation, however, the common factor of occupational socialisation is particularly emphasised. Early immersion in a sporting environment and experiences often contribute towards shaping initial perceptions of the career of teaching PE (Lawson, 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2000; Richards & Templin, 2012). Further teacher education and work experiences reinforce or alter an individual's motives towards the career trajectory (Richards & Templin, 2012). Therefore, the importance of optimal alignment of professional and personal values and abilities is crucial for fostering sustained motivation leading to an effective teaching role.

According to contemporary universal findings, dissatisfaction with the teaching profession has become progressively linked to systemic concerns, particularly in relation to support, resources, autonomy, and workload (OECD, 2024). Lack of initiatives to improve external conditions directly correlates to increased rates of teacher attrition. Subsequently, although the context of PE reflects limited research in comparison to other academic subjects, literature suggests that recognition and administrative support are essential in maintaining teacher commitment and motivation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Consequently, whilst broad literature provides a meaningful understanding of the motivational factors and challenges across a general context, more specific and nuanced

studies are needed for deeper insights into the situation in Malta. Investigating complex dynamics of motivation in the localised context contributes to informing and shaping policies and practices aiming to enhance teacher well-being and professional satisfaction.

### **1.3 Rationale behind the Research within the Local Context**

National-level concerns additionally reflect the global findings (Galea, 2020). Data from Parliament ta' Malta (2019) demonstrate an increase of 119% in resigned teaching posts between 2008-2018, reflecting a local concern. Moreover, according to a 2017 report by the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT), shortages of educators across all levels evidently reflect unresolved challenges associated with working conditions and insufficient salaries. MUT has further stressed this critical issue and called for immediate attention with the aim of attracting and retaining teachers.

Despite the modern educational policies targeting the promotion of holistic student well-being and development (Ministry for Education and Employment [MEDE], 2012), growing challenges of maintaining the retention of teachers derive from various systemic challenges that correspond to concerns regarding teachers' risk of burnout and thus attrition rates. Recent years show governmental and institutional efforts aiming to improve conditions and support teachers' well-being, hence reducing the crisis of retention. For such a reason, gaining a deeper understanding of motivators for entry and commitment to the profession represents a significant topic requiring further research. Whilst the majority of local studies revolved around the motivation of teaching from a general, non-subject-specific standpoint, the present study holds particular importance in Maltese education, where paucity of empirical research in the field of PE has been carried out. Capturing the lived experiences of in-service PE teachers in Malta, therefore, conveys relevance and importance in developing interventions and professional initiatives aiming to promote teacher well-being and satisfaction, as well as the quality of education for learners.

### **1.4 Research Objectives and Questions**

The main aims of the present study are to examine the factors that influence initial choice to enter the profession of teaching PE, together with the motives that sustain or diminish teachers' motivation throughout their career. The adoption of a qualitative approach in this research, hence the use of interviews, facilitates an in-depth exploration of the underlying perceptions and experiences of PE teachers in Malta across their careers.

To adequately direct and guide this investigation, the following research questions have been proposed:

1. What factors influence individuals to pursue a career in teaching?
2. What role do motivations play in sustaining a long-term commitment to the profession of teaching?
3. Do motivators change over the years?

The developed research questions are structured to support descriptive and interpretative analysis of the interview narratives. Addressing these questions allows for gaining a deeper insight into teacher motivation in the Maltese educational landscape, hence targeting enhanced motivation and professional fulfilment.

This study's contribution reflects its practical relevance and contextual specificity. Whilst the previous research literature in Malta explores general teaching populations, specific motivation of PE teachers requires additional attention. The findings of the study contribute to future policy discussions at the national level and further help generate theoretical and practical applications for the advancement of professional development initiatives and school-level support systems. The present research adds to the international literature by demonstrating comparative perceptions and insights which potentially mirror educational systems encountering challenges in similar contexts.

### **1.5 Organisation and Structure of the Dissertation**

The organisation of this dissertation demonstrates six interconnected chapters which together contribute to a comprehensive exploration and understanding of the complexities of PE teacher motivation in Malta. This structure aids in providing a logical progression of the concept explored, hence focusing from a wider context and gradually narrowing down to specific insights and implications that emerged from the study.

The initial Chapter One introduces the overall research study by presenting the research topic and its significance in local and broader educational contexts. It briefly outlines the literature on teacher motivation whilst justifying the rationale and central objectives of the research. Subsequent Chapter Two extensively explores the critical review of the existing literature by discussing distinct theoretical frameworks of motivation. Concentrating on intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, as well as the impact of early occupational socialisation on teachers' motivation, the chapter provides the foundation for addressing the contemporary educational gaps that the present research aims to explore.

Chapter Three delves into the methodological orientation of the present study. Emphasising the underlying philosophical stance, the chapter details the significance of the qualitative approach to gathering and evaluating data, thus reflecting upon the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Ethical considerations are carefully outlined,

ensuring that informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and participant protection are aligned with guidelines and ethical research standards.

Furthermore, the presentation of the comprehensive integration of research findings and relevant discussion is presented in Chapter Four, which therefore, offers the analysis of the collected data through semi-structured interviews. The thematic patterns of participants' narratives are discussed in relation to relevant literature, which helps interpret the central influencing motivators of PE teachers.

Finally, the concluding Chapter Five provides concluding remarks of the study by encapsulating key insights, identifying research limitations, as well as offering practical implications and recommendations for future research.

The organisation and structure of this dissertation enhance the coherent and systematic narrative by ensuring a comprehensive understanding of PE teacher motivation in the context of the Maltese education system.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

## 2.1 Introduction

The current shortage of teachers on the global and local levels constitutes an increasing concern in the education system (UNESCO, 2024; Han & Yin, 2016). The effectiveness of teaching instruction and, hence, student success is determined by the motivation of teachers whose enthusiasm and commitment to teaching ensure quality education (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Chapel et al., 2021). Consequently, understanding what inspires individuals to pursue a career in teaching, as well as their self-determined motivation, is essential for illustrating the reason behind declining rates of teachers within the field of Physical Education (Mäkelä et al., 2015).

The present research study aims to analyse the major factors that influence the choice of a profession as a Physical Education teacher, together with the motivation mediators that initiate and maintain the desire to teach. An effective analysis of the proposed research questions will incorporate an investigation of two dimensions of teacher motivation, which consist of early motivation development as well as ongoing socialisation processes. Several motivation theories will be mentioned and applied across the teaching context to examine the influences that initiate and sustain in the profession.

Through a thematic structure, the literature review chapter will initially outline the definition of the concept of motivation, after which several significant theoretical frameworks will be evaluated. Subsequently, the foundation of the development of motivation towards teaching in terms of early life and subject matter will be reviewed. Due to their significant impact on teaching practices, continuous motivation leading to long-term commitment to the profession will be discussed in relation to job satisfaction and well-being. Additionally, this chapter seeks to provide a review of teachers' perspectives in relation to the aspect of job commitment, as well as outline the barriers encountered both in the local and global contexts that potentially influence resignation from the career. The current local situation of motivation of Physical Education teachers in Malta is somewhat limited; thus, acquiring a deeper understanding of the reasons why a large number of individuals leave the profession and experience burnout would potentially lead to job improvements and diminish such occurrences. A thorough understanding of these concepts is crucial for the effective conduct of the study.

## **2.2 Motivation**

Motivation is often interpreted as a drive prompting individuals towards taking action or achieving a goal. A more precise comprehension reflects a behaviour associated with “the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it, and the effort expended on it” (Dornyei, 2001, p.8). Although a universal definition for motivation has still not been developed by the researchers, the agreement on the fundamental layout is well established. Diverse individual characteristics and the external environment simultaneously impact one’s motivation status; hence, the sole focus on one area of factors forms an inadequate setting for executing behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Whilst certain variables may create positive results in motivation, some aspects generate conflicts that could hinder potential outcomes. Ultimately, the complexity of understanding motivation has led researchers to adopt distinct theories for the effective comprehension of such a concept, which will be further discussed by providing unique views and their essence.

### **2.2.1 Teacher Motivation**

The concept of motivation constitutes one of the most important factors impacting students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards participation and learning. The significance of research on motivation within the context of a teaching profession indicates the need to understand the multidimensional aspect of reasons that influence the choice of a career. Motivation in teaching is reflected through educators’ enthusiasm and dedication, which is mirrored by the effectiveness of a learning environment as identified in a systematic review by Han and Yin (2016). One’s drive and passion for teaching are formed and moulded through personal life experiences and education, as well as opportunities within teacher education that widen their skills and interests.

Sinclair (2008) characterises teacher motivation with factors that regulate “what attracts individuals to teaching, how long they remain in their initial teacher education courses and subsequently the teaching profession, and the extent to which they engage with their courses and the teaching profession” (p.37). This definition is further supported by Dornyei and Ushioda's (2011) research, which displays motivation through the dimensions of direction and magnitude. Direction refers to reasons and initial motivations that attract an individual's interest in a teaching profession, whilst magnitude relates to the in-service

factors that portray a teacher's effort and determination to fulfil the role of an educator. These interpretations indicate the importance of examining different dimensions of teacher motivation, both prior to and during their career, in order to determine how and why such influences commence and evolve.

The transformation of teacher motivation throughout a teaching career is a widely researched topic, on which the researchers indicate several components that must be taken into account. Primarily, the motives leading to the pursuit and commencement of a teaching profession are well associated with intrinsic factors. The literature suggests that the origin of teaching motivation is linked to the innate passion stemming from satisfaction with students' success as well as personal and professional progress (Sinclair, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Han & Yin, 2016). Such inherent factors may be further impacted by external conditions from a social context, indicating an effect of past experiences, socialisation, and working environment. These may therefore result in positive or negative impacts leading to alterations in one's drive for teaching and potentially shifting the motivation towards extrinsic values related to income, social status, and job security (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Fokkens-Brunnsma & Canrinus, 2012). Nonetheless, the emphasis on demotivating elements was put forward by Dornyei and Ushioda (2011) who suggest that such elements derive from negative experiences and situations, which would prohibit the sustainability of motivation. Although the beginning of a teacher's career is usually driven by intrinsic factors, novice teachers' assumptions and expectations brought to the workplace may not align with the realities of the work environment. This discrepancy may lead to a decline in motivation, particularly in the early years of teaching.

Changes in motivation within the teaching profession over the years raise questions about how evolving motives impact the quality of teaching and student learning effectiveness. Beyond the personal implications of motivation educators experience, the drive for teaching profoundly influences a range of other educational variables. Several significant outcomes have been identified, including student engagement, student achievements, teaching practice and methods, as well as the subsequent creation of a positive learning environment (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Therefore, the research on teachers' motivation does not solely focus on teacher-centred elements but reveals comprehensive impacts on the overall school environment. The present research will examine the factors

across different areas within the teaching career and their relation to the concept of motivation. The study will link individuals' initial and continuing drive to intrinsic and extrinsic types, determining which dimension of motivation plays the key role in the profession. Nevertheless, the conduct of longitudinal research would provide a more comprehensive approach, through the exploration of the impact of initial stimuli and tracking their fluctuation over the course of the career. This would provide in-depth insights, thus a better comprehension of motivational factors would be achieved.

### **2.2.2 Intrinsic Motivation in Teaching PE**

Due to the distinct characteristics of the profession of teaching Physical Education in comparison to other academic subjects, the analysis of PE teacher motivation is associated with specific intrinsic and extrinsic motives and influences. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), the concept of intrinsic motivation is associated with engagement in an activity out of passion and enjoyment, whilst gaining an inherent satisfaction. Such a type of motivation relies on the absence of rewards and is largely derived from one's need for autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 1985). Ryan and Deci (2000) suggest that one's participation in activities due to intrinsic motives fosters learning and creativity and allows for exploring new opportunities. These further challenge oneself and set self-determined behaviour toward personal growth.

Several approaches have been utilised for the enhanced understanding of intrinsic motivation, however, Vallerand and colleagues (1992) constructed a clear concept of the matter, which incorporates 3 areas. Primarily, the intrinsic motivation "to know" indicates a desire for learning, curiosity, and exploration. IM "to accomplish" relates to one's participation in activities for the sake of satisfaction achieved through creating accomplishments and is further tied to the theory of mastery motivation (Harter, 1981). Lastly, IM "to experience stimulation" represents activity engagement due to the sensory stimulation satisfaction, which often results in pleasure and excitement (Vallerand et al., 1992). The three dimensions are listed in order of decreasing self-determination and provide an outline of specific and differentiated motives that intrinsically motivated individuals possess. Spittle and colleagues (2009) describe the development of intrinsic motivation through a heightened sense of competence and success encompassing decision-making participation, goal setting, feedback provision, and others.

The benefits intrinsic motivation carries are supported by Vallerand and Bissonnette (1992), who discovered that high initial IM of college students is correlated with their likelihood of completing the course when compared to others of predominant extrinsic motivation or amotivation. The study suggested that self-determined individuals possess intrinsic motivation, which further propels other desirable factors that interchangeably impact their motivation levels and hence their professional career.

The process of becoming an intrinsically motivated educator is related to the need for autonomy (Hinton et al., 2016). Experiencing free will and the ability to control one's own practices leads to self-determined behaviour, which is portrayed through autonomy-supportive teaching, hence incorporating student-centred teaching styles. Intrinsically motivated teachers are associated with exhibiting innovative and creative teaching, which in turn is positively linked to a supportive learning environment, which sets the stage for learning (Taylor et al., 2009). Implementing autonomous behaviour as a basic psychological need within a pedagogical style encompasses the principles of Self-Determination Theory and focuses on promoting learner initiative and independence. Reeve and Cheon (2021) define the style of autonomy-supportive teaching as an approach to "the adoption of a student-focused attitude and understanding interpersonal tone", which in turn targets internalisation and intrinsic motivation. The concept of this teaching style incorporates promoting learners' decision-making opportunities, particularly in class settings, as well as allowing them to regulate their own learning pace, which together contribute to empowerment, meaningful learning, and boost IM (Reeve, 2006; Hein et al., 2012). Teachers utilising such a teaching approach aim to develop and stimulate learners' interests through multiple strategies, including encouraging self-directed learning, problem-solving, collaboration, as well as meaningful tasks (Reeve, 2009; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010). Through self-determined behaviour developed by intrinsic motives, educators are enabled to exploit autonomy-supportive teaching, which results in improved educational practices that lead to student and teacher benefits (Reeve & Cheon, 2021; Haerens et al., 2015).

In the overall context of teaching Physical Education, a systematic review by Han and Yin (2016) identifies educators' intrinsic motivation as predominantly deriving from the personal enjoyment and passion for physical activity and sport, which they aspire to pass on

to students. By grouping findings of various studies on teacher motivation, the review emphasises the internal pleasure of teaching and seeing interest in students to participate, which ultimately fosters a long-term appreciation of physical activity within students. Consequently, the sense of fulfilment of the teacher role plays a significant part in their intrinsic levels of motivation, which is demonstrated through creating a positive learning environment (Han & Yin, 2016). Distinct intrinsic motives prior to and during a teaching career will be further explored in the later discussions.

### **2.2.3 Extrinsic Motivation in Teaching PE**

Whilst intrinsic motivation can be considered as the ideal type of motivational source (Ratelle et al., 2007; Vansteenkiste et al., 2009), extrinsic controlling factors of motivation must not be undervalued. Extrinsic motivation is defined as participation in an activity for the sake of achieving a separable outcome in terms of reward or avoidance of punishment, and hence, it overlooks the sole fundamental interest in the activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Therefore, it mainly differs from IM in terms of autonomy over the choice versus demand of participation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

External motivation can be portrayed along the spectrum of distinct mechanisms of control. Primarily, the highest type of external motivation is associated with integrated regulation and is placed closest to IM, as it greatly resembles autonomous, self-concept traits, and reflects goals integrated into one's identity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The subsequent component, called identified regulation, encompasses the alignment of behaviour with one's inherent values and objectives, which establishes a sufficient level of self-determined behaviour (Petrie & Govern, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Motivation associated with low internalisation, which is controlled by feelings of guilt or pleasure, is identified as introjected regulation and reflects a focus on an individual's ego and self-esteem (Wang et al., 2024). Lastly, the lowest type of external motivation is related to predominant motivation driven by external rewards or punishment, known as external regulation. This regulatory style is defined as acting based upon "an external demand or obtaining an externally imposed reward contingency" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.61); hence, it resembles low autonomy and thus amotivation. The progression through the continuum is based on the alignment of one's intrinsic values and external motivations, hence the positive outcomes as a result of the harmony between the two components (Ryan and Connell, 1989). For instance, within an

educational context, a student's motivation towards studying would translate from the avoidance of punishment to the realisation of the importance of good grades and learning.

Multiple findings on teacher motivation suggest that extrinsic influences form an important component of both early and sustaining teacher motivation (Han & Yin, 2016). Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that with the absence or lack of extrinsic motivators in the form of rewards or tangibles, intrinsic motivation would diminish over time. Extrinsic motivation in the teaching profession encompasses different dimensions, such as a range of job-related factors, including salary and pension, together with job security, which is one of the external motivators in novice teachers, ensuring economic security (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Although present in the early induction period, the in-service phase of a teaching career is predominantly associated with the financial component of motivation (Praver & Oga-Baldwin, 2008; Sinclair, 2008). Additional extrinsic factors in Physical Education teachers are linked to performance evaluations, which indicate the drive for accomplishing educational goals that further lead to student achievement. This may reflect opportunities for professional development, whilst incorporating institutional support and resources that impact teaching quality and strategies used, thus job satisfaction (Hein et al., 2012; Fierro-Suero et al, 2023). The aspect of social recognition of their role as PE teachers also creates a significant impact on teachers' motivation. The process of acquiring social recognition is viewed as a form of external validation, which directly increases one's EM (Pelletier et al., 2002).

Ultimately, it is crucial to note the evidence supporting the link between external motivation and job dissatisfaction. Although the initial stages of being extrinsically motivated may bring a positive job experience, there seems to be difficulty in maintaining a strong drive in comparison to the inner passion for teaching (Bezzina & Portelli, 2006). Externally motivated teachers may experience a lack of personal fulfilment due to their dependence on external factors, which therefore, as mentioned, has a direct impact on their teaching quality and educational outcomes (Hein et al., 2012). Nonetheless, the sole dependency on intrinsic motivation may result in theoretical pitfalls due to a disregard for the complexity of motivation. Whilst intrinsic influences form constitute, extrinsic motivation complements the overall human needs that sustain satisfaction and encourage growth within a teaching profession (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Dinham & Scott, 2000; Richardson & Watt, 2010).

#### **2.2.4 Perspectives on PE Teacher Motivation from Different Theoretical Constructs**

A wide range of social-cognitive theories can be utilised and applied to examine motivation within the educational context. For a more comprehensive understanding, it is of high importance to examine the concept of motivation through a variety of theories. This would contribute towards effectively recognising the source of reduced motivation levels leading to increased burnout in today's educators (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). Richardson and colleagues (2014) highlight the three major theoretical frameworks used to analyse the dimensions and dynamics of motivation. As suggested in their book, self-determination theory (SDT), expectancy-value theory (EVT), and achievement goal theory (AGT) constitute prominent perspectives by which teacher motivation can be broadly analysed, not solely focusing on career satisfaction but on teaching effectiveness and its impact on students themselves. Ultimately, research through various theoretical lenses emphasises the significance of teacher motivation from short to long-term commitment by exploring the multiple dimensions and factors that determine one's motivation sustainability and Fokkens-B Bruinsma and Canrinus (2012).

#### **2.2.5 Self-Determination Theory**

Self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985) is one of the major outstanding socio-cognitive theories used to analyse the concept of motivation, particularly in the education and teaching context (Deci et al., 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Their development of self-determination theory portrays the satisfaction of the primary psychological needs of human beings, which relate to competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The achievement of the three inherent components is argued to positively result in self-determined motivation, which thus affects one's job satisfaction. Deci and Ryan (1985) relate autonomy to an individual's ability to regulate their own behaviour and motivation whilst orienting towards a specific goal. Competence is associated with belief in one's abilities and learning, leading to achievements and success, whilst relatedness is perceived as a sense of belonging and connection within the environment (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Whilst the concept of competence and relatedness should not be overlooked, Deci and Ryan (2016) emphasise the importance of autonomy in the process of IM development.

Additionally, Deci and Ryan’s (1985) theoretical model builds upon motivation from the perspective of intrinsic motivation (IM) and extrinsic motivation (EM), which also includes the concept of amotivation (AM). These are represented in Figure 2.1, which portrays the motivation levels in ascending order, intrinsic mostly relating to a self-determined behaviour. Extrinsic motivation takes a more complex approach, as apart from the contingencies it is often associated with, the three inherent human needs for achieving motivation are also integrated. Self-determination theory claims that motivation in humans is ultimately determined by the interaction between externally imposed restrictions and individual mental dispositions, suggesting a simultaneous effect of external and internal forces. In other words, this idea highlights individuals seeking conditions that optimise and fulfil their basic psychological needs. The self-determination theory model emphasises that through individual growth and achievements established in a motivating environment, extrinsic motivation is stimulated, resulting in a successful regulation process (Bakker et al., 2007). Ultimately, understanding what inspires individuals to pursue a career in teaching from a perspective of self-determined behaviour is essential in illustrating the reasons behind declining rates of educators within the field of Physical Education (Mäkelä et al., 2015).

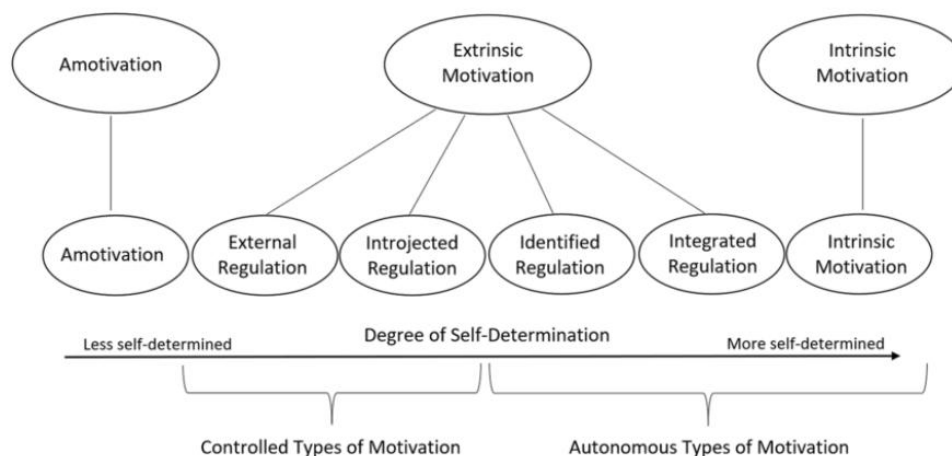


Figure 2.1: Representation of motivation in self-determination theory

*Note.* Adapted from “Testing a continuum structure of self-determined motivation: A meta-analysis.”, by J. L. Howard, M. Gagné, & J. S. Bureau, 2017, *Psychological Bulletin*, 143(12), 1346–1377. Copyright 2017 by American Psychological Association.

### **2.2.6 Expectancy-Value Theory**

Atkinson's (1964) expectancy-value theory (EVT) expanded by Eccles (1983, 2009), is another framework used to analyse the motivation levels of individuals. This theory determines one's engagement in activities based on the likelihood of success, which relates to the component of expectancy, and whether the outcome is perceived as valuable to an individual, hence the element of value (Watt & Richardson, 2014; Andersson & Palm, 2018).

Research shows a positive correlation between increased expectancy beliefs and heightened motivation towards engagement, whilst the performance effort is influenced by the level of perceived value (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Expectancy-value theory suggests that the selection of a career path reflects alignment with personal values and beliefs, and the willingness to achieve (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In the educational context, EVT links teacher motivation and commitment to the perceived value of teaching practices, which helps the engagement of new strategies and professional development (Watt & Richardson, 2014; Bostrom & Palm, 2020). For instance, educators' belief in fostering a creative learning environment would lead them to seek professional development opportunities that further enhance such skills (Andersson & Palm, 2018). This is supported by Taylor and Ntoumanis' (2007) research, which indicates a correlation between teachers' perception of students' autonomous behaviour, having a simultaneous and positive effect on their own motivational strategies.

Additionally, the significance of this motivational theory embraces a social context in examining the effect of cultural factors on one's expectancies and values, which provides a deeper conception of the dynamics of motivation across various contexts (Eccles & Wigfield, 2023). This indicates a multidimensional approach to the concept of motivation, hence including cognitive and emotional factors that influence individuals' behaviour for achievement. The application of expectancy-value theory within this research would benefit a more comprehensive approach to understanding the motivation of Physical Education teachers by not solely exploring the motives towards teaching but also the foundational values that maintain their commitment within the profession.

### **2.2.7 Achievement-Goal Theory**

Achievement-Goal Theory (AGT) focuses on the ways in which individual performance and motivation are influenced by their goals. The importance of this theory derives from the idea that engagement in different tasks stems from having distinct goals, which in turn determine one's effort and behaviour. The two primary categories of types of goals include mastery goals and performance. Also known as task-oriented, mastery goals resemble motivation towards personal and professional improvement, which is shown through effort and persistence (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). On the other hand, the focus of performance goals is associated with enhancing one's own competencies relative to others with the aim of achieving external recognition and validation (Elliot & McGregor, 2001).

The extensive literature on this theoretical concept in the education setting has mainly been explored by targeting teacher and student motivation. A number of studies highlight the impact of teachers' motivation levels on their teaching approaches and practices, which therefore influence the learning environment and student achievement (Butler, 2007; Butler & Shibaz, 2008; Darnon et al., 2010). Butler and Shibaz (2008) suggest that educators prioritising mastery goals usually exploit a student-centred approach, which fosters a supportive learning environment, aiding the development of students' intrinsic motivation. Mastery goals help emphasise personal growth and learning over extrinsic factors such as comparisons. Its close relation to intrinsic factors associates task-oriented goals with the fulfilment of one's teaching profession, which thus enhances job satisfaction whilst lowering the risk of burnout (Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Retelsdorf et al., 2010).

On the contrary, a longitudinal study on elementary children by Hughes et al. (2010) found negative classroom effects when competition is prioritised by teachers with high performance-oriented goals. The research suggests an inverse correlation between student engagement and teacher performance goals, thus showing an increased engagement when teachers' performance-goal practices are low (Hughes et al., 2010). Additionally, teachers' own motivation can also be undermined by an increased focus on performance rather than mastery goals (Aytaç, 2024). Nevertheless, effective goal setting, from which inner motivation arises, occurs when performance goals complement mastery goals. This conveys a delicate understanding of achievement-goal theory, which acknowledges the significance of environmental factors on goal orientations and consequently on motivation status.

## **2.3 Impacts on Teacher Motivation**

Building on the exploration of the relevant theories of motivation, a broad range of factors deriving from distinct contexts can be identified. According to Dornyei and Ushioda (2001), the idea of motivation can be viewed from the dimensions of direction and magnitude of human behaviour. This perspective pinpoints the rationale and decision behind engaging in an activity, along with the duration and level of commitment to it. In the education context, the researchers additionally suggest the importance of motivation to teach, as well as motivation to remain in the teaching profession (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011). This notion is further supported by Williams and Burden's (1997) research, highlighting two distinct approaches to motivation: the initial interest and choice in deciding to perform something, and sustaining motivation, which shows persistence of effort. The two dimensions portray the layout for future research and understanding of the ways of attracting individuals' interest in a teaching profession, together with developing strategies for maintenance within the career.

### **2.3.1 Subjective Warrant**

In the process of exploring how teacher motivation is developed, it is essential to examine the effect of socialisation and early life experiences that led to a decision to become a teacher. An important concept proposed by Lortie (1975) reflects the development of subjective warrant, which relates to the social reasons for pursuing the profession of teaching. Lortie (1975) defines the notion of subjective warrant as "a person's perceptions of the requirements for teaching education" (p.6), which is a significant element of analysing motivation for teaching. Therefore, subjective warrant is a foundational source of drawing one's interest towards a career choice.

Within the field of Physical Education, individuals' years of whole academic learning experience have shaped their subjective warrant, which is consequently the result of the socialisation process. Occupational socialisation is a concept applied to understanding one's development within a career as well as prior to it (Lawson, 1986). The primary stage of this process promotes students' interactions with their PE teachers and other individuals, such as family members, that subsequently influence their interest in teaching PE. Lawson (1986) states that socialisation in the sports context "can nurture the choice of a sport-related

career, including the decision to complete a physical education major in higher education” (p.107). When teaching PE is perceived as meaningful and enjoyable, one’s personal belief in the capability of being in such a profession increases.

From an expectancy-value theory, researchers additionally indicate that individuals choose their careers on the basis of personal values and expectations (Eccles & Wigfield, 2000). However, Lawson (1983a) emphasises that during student years, individuals’ perception of the teaching profession is based almost solely on what they observe and are unaware of the work put into lesson planning. Therefore, the evolution of subjective warrant brings additional errors through which the reality of a profession might be misinterpreted (Lawson, 1983a).

Nevertheless, the period of the PE teacher education program allows candidates to develop the assumptions and expectations of the chosen career pathway. Formal tertiary education provides broader insight into the requirements of teaching, which shapes earlier perceptions and thus either challenges or strengthens their motivation towards teaching. Research suggests that a strong occupational socialisation process, and thus subjective warrant, establishes a long-lasting commitment and retention in the career that goes beyond societal expectations and enhances initial intrinsic motives (recognition).

### **2.3.2 Early Motivators**

Initial influences targeting one’s interest in pursuing the teaching profession relate to their perception and expectations of the job itself. Aside from the previously discussed effects of subject warrant and occupational socialisation, a number of factors that increase one’s motivation towards the career are associated with personal and professional expectations once they commence a teaching job. Such elements reflect intrinsic and extrinsic motives encompassing meaningful careers and opportunities for growth, as well as job stability and balance (Sinclair, 2008; Han et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

The review by Richardson and Watt (2010) on their empirically validated theoretical framework represented in Figure 2.2, also known as the FIT-Choice (Factor Influencing Teaching Choice) programme, examines the motivating factors of entry-level teachers. The expectancy-value theory-based research relates the choice of the teaching profession with the strongest factors being intrinsic and social values, which are linked to passion for

teaching and the subject itself, together with the perceived ability to teach (Richardson and Watt, 2010; Richardson, 2012). Richardson and Watt (2010) further highlight early teachers' motivation toward influencing students' love for physical activity, hence engaging in societal contribution. These are followed by a positive personal teaching and learning experience, including influential teachers, thus indicating a positive relationship with long-term factors such as career development aspirations, as well as teaching engagement.

Their subsequent 2014 work validated the FIT-choice framework with additional emphasis on cultural context and acknowledgement of social status as extrinsic motives in pre-service teaching motivation. An emphasis was placed on the higher significance of possessing intrinsic rather than extrinsic motives, which is reflected by the predominant factors of pre-service teachers, such as the commitment to altruistic values (Richardson & Watt, 2014). Watt and Richardson (2014) ultimately suggest the importance of the initial years of teaching during which the motivation to remain in the profession develops. It is proposed that the initial years of teaching constitute a critical period where motivation is significantly reduced when the expectations are not met (Richardson & Watt, 2014; Watt and Richardson, 2007). This study, therefore, recommends the exploration of teachers' experiences throughout their lifespan due to the essential influence on motivation to pursue a career in teaching.

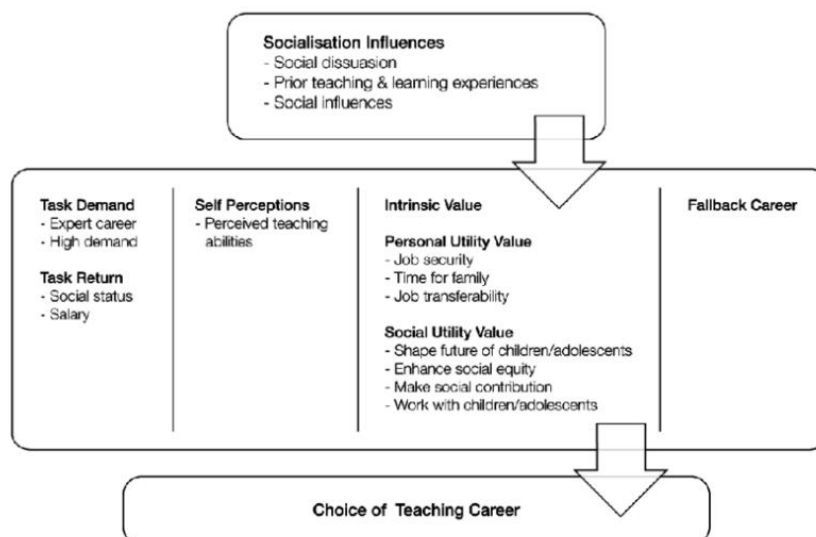


Figure 2.2: The FIT-choice theoretical model (Richardson & Watt, 2010, p. 151)

In the context of teaching Physical Education, Spittle, Jackson, and Casey (2009) explored the motivational forces and identified a number of prominent intrinsic motivators that are linked to prospective PE educators. They included interpersonal reasons, as well as the passion for physical activity and sport, which were seen as intrinsic motives. These findings are supported by later research on Physical Education teachers, which indicates that the commitment to physical activity and the love for sport represent the major influencing factors for becoming a teacher (Spittle & Spittle, 2014; Curtner-Smith et al., 2008). Nonetheless, Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus (2012) highlight the importance of believing in one's own teaching abilities at the start of a career, which forms one of the strongest drives propelling and sustaining one's passion for teaching. Whilst the study by Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus (2012) aims to examine the process of change in motivation during the teaching profession, longitudinal research observations are necessary to fully understand how such factors vary throughout a career and their effect on the outcomes of long-term motivation.

### ***2.3.3 Long-Term Commitment to the Profession***

In the process of examining teacher motivation, it is of high importance to incorporate the ways in which motivation is sustained in the long term. Sustainability within a teaching career contributes to an effective education system, which is directly correlated with educators' satisfaction as well as the quality of the fostered learning environment. Therefore, the evolution of motivational factors from the commencement of a teaching career until later years in the profession forms the basis for analysing and enhancing career retention.

Long-term commitment in the teaching profession is linked to several factors, which mainly stem from the intrinsic dimension. According to Watt and Richardson (2007), their longitudinal study found that teachers who remain in their careers predominantly portray intrinsic motives towards teaching. These incorporate a passion for teaching that is linked to personal fulfilment, hence associating with a meaningful career. Through the FIT-Choice framework, Watt and Richardson (2007) further suggest that extrinsic motives form an insufficient motivation when one prioritises salary and job security. The significance of this study lies in revisiting the research on participants whose initial motivation was previously analysed and comparing the results to the later findings regarding the motivational factors

arising after a period of teaching, with the aim of determining influences on retention and satisfaction. Their results show that the evolution of teaching motives tends to shift towards external factors, thus, the negligence of intrinsic factors may result in negative effects such as impacted well-being, dissatisfaction, and finally attrition (Watt & Richardson, 2007; See et al., 2020). Ultimately, the retention factors of teachers can be explored through the concept of job satisfaction, which not only focuses on teachers' personal motives but also places emphasis on the social and work environment.

This is additionally supported by literature, such as research done on one of the significant PE teachers in the United States and their motivation for maintaining the role of a teacher (Woods & Rhoades, 2010). It has been found that the major external factors that affect the sustainability of a teaching career are in the form of financial compensation (Woods & Rhoades, 2010). Nevertheless, their study further indicated high intrinsic motives, which have increased enhancement effects on retention within the profession.

#### **2.3.4 Job Satisfaction**

Multiple positive outcomes arise in educators who display sufficient levels of job satisfaction. Such effects range from increased performance and teaching practice to reduced employee turnover and thus increased job sustainability (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2020). This concept encompasses one's expectations and needs, whilst allowing for personal fulfilment, which leads to higher productivity. In order to manage PE teacher shortages, researchers propose numerous elements that target job satisfaction, which forms a fundamental factor that must be evaluated with the aim of promoting better quality of teaching. Aside from the external factors such as institutional support and professional development opportunities, which will be discussed in the later sections, inner motives towards teaching constitute the major contributions.

Broad literature shows a correlation between teacher dissatisfaction and heavy reliance on extrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1991; Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Bezzina & Portelli, 2005), however, the maintenance of sufficient intrinsic motives may combat the negative effects and thus improve the satisfaction rate (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Therefore, educators exhibiting the predominant factors of passion for teaching and a feeling of job purpose report heightened job satisfaction regardless of the insufficient salaries and heavy workloads

they experience (Mertler, 2002). This additionally supports local research on teacher job satisfaction, which found that working with children and student success formed the highest motivation among long-serving teachers in Malta (Vassallo, 2014). Although the examined teachers in Malta reported the importance of salary, they highlighted the predominant significance of personal growth, relationship with students, and social contribution as the fundamental aspects of their teaching profession (Vassallo, 2014; Cockburn, 2000). Additionally, a 2018 research by Attard Tonna and Calleja highlights the insufficient remuneration experienced by 94% of examined teachers, which is associated with dissatisfaction and attrition rates. Nonetheless, whilst job (dis)satisfaction also implies teachers' well-being, and motivation relates to their drive for teaching, Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2006) state that:

Perennial factors, such as student achievement, helping students, positive relationships with colleagues, and self growth have been associated with teacher job satisfaction, while other factors such as perceived low status, low pay, lack of professional autonomy, and deprofessionalisation have been linked to teacher dissatisfaction (p. 229).

Consequently, this correlates with the importance of intrinsic values in job satisfaction, which links to teachers' ability to make a change in student development and contribute towards social equity. Richardson and Watt (2014) suggest that if the factor of the social contribution lacks fulfilment, educators are more likely to experience a sense of dissatisfaction, resulting in an alteration of initial motives, regardless of their ability and love for teaching. This also highlights the fulfilment experienced by Physical Education teachers whose internal motivations outweigh external influences (Karagün & Ekiz, 2020; Collie et al., 2012). Collie and colleagues' (2012) systematic review study among 664 secondary school teachers in Ontario, Canada, further delves into teacher well-being as it links it to personal experiences at the workplace, suggesting an interrelation of the two variables.

### ***2.3.5 Teacher Well-being***

Teacher well-being and motivation are two essential factors impacting not only personal quality of life but also job satisfaction and teaching effectiveness. Well-being is

comprised of physical, psychological, and social health, which has an interrelated effect on motivation and influences professional performance (Hascher & Waber, 2021). However, it is critical to note the unique effects present in the nature of teaching Physical Education in comparison to other academic subjects. Research highlights that the physical demands of lesson delivery paired with the management of a large number of active pupils and their safety, increases the complexity of a teaching role, which may result in heightened stress levels and exhaustion (Richards et al., 2018; Markkanen et al., 2019).

Stress and burnout are two common outcomes of job dissatisfaction, which further relate to a decline in motivation and are often perceived as being synonymous. However, understanding their relationship is significant in identifying potential well-being factors leading to teacher attrition. Stress as an influencing factor encompassing physical and emotional challenges is often present in interpersonally oriented professions like teaching, which increases the risk of burnout (Alsalhe et al., 2021). Through Maslach's (1996) definition, burnout is viewed as a state of exhaustion in which one is cynical about the value of one's occupation and doubtful of one's capacity to perform (p. 20).

This interpretation highlights the aspect of deep psychological disengagement, which consists of emotional detachment and a decline in a sense of purpose and motivation (Maslach, 1996). In teaching Physical Education, burnout is often a result of unattained factors that facilitate personal and professional growth stemming from a lack of professional support and autonomy, as well as heightened expectations and teaching workload (Wang et al., 2024; Creagh et al., 2023). A systematic review and meta-analysis by Alsalhe and colleagues (2021) examining burnout in PE teachers found 29.5% associated with low personal accomplishment, while 28.6% was associated with high emotional exhaustion. This reflects the lack of opportunities for overall development and a sense of a meaningful career, which leads to reduced job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and intention towards leaving the profession (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) found a positive correlation between the lack of teachers' well-being associated with burnout and exhaustion, and diminished motivation levels. They suggest the importance of a careful job dissatisfaction intervention as it may incorporate physical and cognitive illness, which decreases performance output (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Additionally, their 2015 study further supports the new findings as the

researchers have identified a number of stressors teachers experience, leading to their choice to leave the profession. The common causes of burnout, regardless of age, were associated with school-based factors including time pressure, disruptive student behaviour, and insufficient resources for inclusive practice, which, together with low salaries, also increase the chance of career change (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Nonetheless, it has been found that improvements in certain factors, such as a supportive school climate, increased professional development opportunities, as well as enhanced teacher-student relationships, could reduce the impact of stressors on teachers, hence aiding them in sustaining their intrinsic motivation towards teaching (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

In the local context, a study by Bezzina and Portelli (2005) found a high rate of job satisfaction among teachers, which correlates with their low-stress symptoms and well-being. With respect to factors negatively impacting teachers' health, their findings align with previous local research by Chetcuti (2000), indicating that 48.2% of teachers are negatively influenced by stress. Therefore, teachers' stressful experiences throughout their careers build up over the years and finally result in a loss of motivation to teach and symptoms of exhaustion leading to burnout (Bezzina & Portelli, 2005; Bezzina & Portelli, 2006). Nevertheless, this interpretation should be carefully examined due to differing findings by Redin and Erro-Garces (2020) regarding the stress of teachers in Europe. Their empirical analysis suggests that the teaching career constitutes a high-stress profession (Redin & Erro-Garces, 2020; Otto, 1986), which despite displaying a higher level of job satisfaction in comparison to other occupations, thus provides inconsistent results with other research.

Ultimately, the combination of increased motivation, job satisfaction and teacher well-being together creates a direct impact on the teaching approach. It is therefore essential to understand the dynamics of the relationship between well-being and motivation with the aim of enhancing effective teaching strategies that support retention in professional and student development (Collie et al, 2012).

### ***2.3.6 Impact on Teaching Practices***

Understanding the sustainability of motivation among educators is essential as it establishes the foundation for effective teaching styles and approaches to student

engagement and learning (Watt & Richardson, 2013). The instructional practices are highly influenced by teachers' motivation, which requires a comprehensive understanding for the successful teaching interventions resulting in improved student outcomes (Abós et al., 2019).

A study conducted by Hein and colleagues (2012) examines the relationship between the motivation levels of PE teachers and their teaching styles they used. The researchers confirmed that autonomous motivation as a predominant type is directly linked to productive student-centred teaching styles, which aid student success. Hein et al. (2012) show the levels of different types of motivation in various European countries, suggesting that the cultural aspect itself plays an important role when assessing the concept of motivation. This cross-cultural comparison research found that intrinsically motivated Physical Education teachers are associated with a higher use of student-centred teaching style, whilst external motivation is linked to a reproductive or teacher-centred approach (Hein et al., 2012). On the contrary, teacher-centred teaching styles were associated with extrinsic motives towards teaching, indicating the reliance on. Furthermore, students' perceptions of PE teachers' motivational styles correlate with their engagement, motivation, and achievement (Doren et al., 2021). These findings are further supported by Deci and Ryan (2000), who suggest that the maintenance of intrinsic motivation correlates with the high autonomy of an individual. In other words, having increased autonomy would benefit teachers in sustaining their intrinsic motivation reflected through high-quality education, hence helping long-term sustainability within the profession (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011; Abós et al., 2019).

Additionally, longitudinal research focusing on a teacher-centred approach conducted by Cheon et al. (2014) analysed the personal teaching methods of 27 PE teachers in South Korea and their relation to the autonomy supportive approach. Cheon and colleagues (2014) proposed a list of recorded benefits of autonomy support that includes enhanced teaching motivation, autonomous motivation, intrinsic motivation, psychological needs satisfaction, teaching efficacy, as well as teachers' well-being (vitality, job satisfaction, decreased exhaustion). This research was built upon SDT findings, which associate reciprocated benefits of autonomy-support, indicating interrelated attainment of psychological needs satisfaction and well-being between providers and receivers of such

teaching strategies (Deci et al., 2006; Cheon et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the findings align with the global context as compared and represented in the systematic review by Zee et al. (2016) exploring teacher self-efficacy and its impact on their well-being by synthesising four decades of research. As the concept of self-efficacy is linked to motivation, it is suggested that teachers' belief in their own practices contributes to quality teaching, which is hence related to improved teacher well-being, job satisfaction, and commitment to the profession, and ultimately results in enhanced student academic adjustments (Zee et al., 2016). Ultimately, providing supportive leadership and professional development contributes to enhanced teaching strategies, which in turn increase the motivation levels and mitigate obstacles educators encounter in their professional practice, resulting in increased teacher shortages on both the global and local levels.

## **2.4 Teacher Shortage**

The present research questions of the study aim to examine teacher motivation behind the choice of their profession as well as the evolution of such factors over the course of a teaching career. It is therefore significant to analyse the aspect of increasing teacher shortages in order to provide a more comprehensive approach to mitigating hindrances that negatively influence motivation towards teaching.

The shortage of teachers is the result of multiple systemic issues and barriers impacting individuals' satisfaction and well-being, which hence contributes to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining teachers within the profession. According to UNESCO (2024), the global data reflects a nearly doubled increase in teacher attrition rates, ranging from 4.62% in 2015 to 9.06% in 2022. Moreover, a recent report by the European Commission indicates that only 8% of teachers under the age of 30 are within the teaching profession in the European Union (EU) in 2021, showing either a low rate of attraction to the career and/or increased occurrence of early dropout (European Parliament Research Service, 2024). A systematic review by Madigan & Kim (2021) highlights the 50% dropout rate of early teachers in the EU within the initial five years of working, which results in significant effects on teaching quality and student success as well. Nonetheless, a similar situation is also present in the local context as outlined by Parliament ta' Malta (2019a), suggesting a 119% increase in teacher attrition rate from 2008 to 2018. This is further supported by a 2020 study by Galea highlighting the rise of teachers resigning from the profession due to

heightened demotivation by various barriers and challenges throughout their careers. Provided the common undervaluation of Physical Education as an academic subject from the societal perspective, identifying the potential challenges undermining motivation and job satisfaction, allows for the development of policies and strategies for increasing teacher retention and motivation towards their career (Bailey, 2006).

#### **2.4.1 Barriers to PE Teacher Retention**

Physical education teachers often encounter resistance to maintaining their interest in remaining within their career path. This is a result of a number of institutional barriers that promote weak motivation in respective educators (Patton and Griffin, 2008). European Parliamentary Research Services (2024) outlines several factors associated with a decrease in motivation towards the profession. Amongst a wide range of factors encompassing teacher overall well-being, job satisfaction, and motivation level, the major factors incorporate working conditions, school environment, societal perceptions, as well as opportunities for further development and career advancement (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Garcia et al., 2022).

#### **2.4.2 Working Conditions**

The primary barriers relate to the working conditions of today's educators, associated with heightened workloads and extended working hours as reported by educators in the European Commission's 2023 annual report. Such factors potentially lead to overwhelming feelings that onset should be set in due to increased teaching responsibilities, which are particularly widespread in Physical Education due to the multifaceted nature of the subject (Stočkus & Adaškevičienė, 2018). When this is accompanied by low salaries, which are 10.5% lower than average salaries of other tertiary-educated professions in the EU, teacher attrition rates seem to rise (European Parliamentary Research Services, 2024). Additionally, the local situation regarding teaching workforce sustainability displays the causes of increased teacher attrition, which relate to insufficient working conditions accompanied by unsatisfactory salaries (Galea, 2020).

The lack of adequate resources for teaching, particularly Physical Education in terms of equipment and facilities, additionally restricts educators in delivering quality instruction and practice (Garcia et al., 2022). This inadequacy contributes to a lack of inclusive practices,

limited motor development, and reduced innovative strategies, related to the absence of proper equipment during PE lessons (Hastie et al., 2011; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). This represents a critical factor of teacher attrition as a well-resourced teaching environment correlates with a high satisfaction level, contributing to feelings of competency and motivation (Mäkelä et al., 2014).

### **2.4.3 Institutional Support**

The negative impact of working conditions further reflects the lack of administrative support. This can be viewed in the form of securing the mentioned resources, addressing behavioural issues, as well as increasing decision-making opportunities for the development of curriculum and policies (Norris et al., 2017; Lynn & Woods, 2010). Teachers who achieve a sense of belonging and support from their work institution report increased feelings of empowerment, which leads to improved performance. Skaalvik and Skaalvik's extensive research on this topic suggests the importance of maintaining an appropriate school culture that promotes support for teachers, and in turn increases their satisfaction and commitment (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). The insufficient support further translates into limited professional development opportunities as found by the Teaching and Learning International Survey (2018), which thus contributes to targeting educators' specific needs and allowing them to advance in their careers. This potentially stems from the difficulty of advocating for the subject of PE and its marginalisation, which mainly arises from the societal and cultural perceptions.

### **2.4.4 Societal Perceptions**

The need for sufficient recognition of Physical Education as equally important as other academic subjects still remains a challenge that greatly impacts educators' motivation towards their profession. Societal and cultural perceptions reflect marginalised views on PE stemming from a low understanding of pedagogical and academic value within the holistic education system. PE is often seen as a recreational time for students rather than a component of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development, which leads to increased demotivation in teachers (Kul et al., 2018). This is shown through the usual association of PE as a secondary priority, which is reflected by decreased time and lessons allocated (Burden et al., 2012; UNESCO, 2014). The increased perspective of the

insignificance of PE also occurs due to the lack of examination-based assessment in comparison to other subjects, which identifies PE as irrelevant from a societal point of view (Sargent & Casey, 2019; Köksal & Görücü, 2015). Extensive research has shown that the lack of subject value contributes to detrimental effects on teachers' self-determination, which leads to feelings of insignificance and ultimately results in career attrition (Vaidya, 2023; García et al., 2022).

Physical Education teachers are also often undervalued in comparison to other educators, which additionally fosters feelings of professional alienation (Temel et al., 2023). This barrier mainly derives from education administrators, other educators, parents and guardians, as well as the students themselves, who show disinterest in engagement. This further emphasises the need for heightening the importance of the role of PE teachers not solely as mediators of physical activity, but as facilitators of student well-being and holistic development (Abós et al., 2019).

A wider cultural context influences the overall perspective of Physical Education, which differs amongst various countries. Global data shows that the majority of cultures and countries have degrading and insignificant perspectives on PE (UNESCO, 2014). Less importance, therefore, results in a lack of resources, policies, and professional development opportunities, which together have detrimental effects on the subject and instructional quality (Bevans et al., 2010). Ultimately, external motivation in the form of recognition is shown to play a critical role in shaping teachers' motivation for their profession. Addressing such factors by increasing the support and recognition would enhance the status and reputation of PE teachers and therefore highlight their vital part within the education system.

#### ***2.4.5 Strategies to mitigate Barriers***

The result of such challenges faced by new teachers, as well as those with years of experience, has a significant impact on their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which hence influences their autonomy, competence, and relatedness towards teaching. A number of such barriers create insufficient interest among teachers to remain in the profession, which, however, must be tackled by individual, institutional, and government interventions (Shoaib, 2004).

At a personal level, teachers may implement self-motivating strategies that incorporate reflection on their own performance and improvement, consulting with colleagues, and addressing their stress and anxiety levels (Dörnyei, 2001; Butler, 2007). The importance of self-direction further benefits motivation levels as teachers are enabled to modify and adapt personal approaches, which hence encourages a proactive attitude towards improvement (Lamb, 2000; Vermunt, 2011). Additionally, engaging in professional development opportunities and seminars stimulates motivational growth through continued academic progress, which fosters innovative teaching strategies and reduces tedious and repetitive practice.

External interventions by educational institutions could additionally enhance the teaching experience and mitigate the challenges. This predominantly entails fostering a positive working environment that reflects support, teamwork, and respect, constituting a learning community (Bezzina, 2004). Collaboration amongst colleagues, therefore, represents another strategy schools could implement with the aim of raising teacher motivation and commitment (Bezzina, 2004). The provision of professional development opportunities, as discussed, is identified as a significant role of schools by enabling teachers to expand their knowledge, enhance teaching quality, and sustain their motivation within the profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Nevertheless, the fundamental source of quality and satisfaction of the teaching profession stems from government institutions. Such systemic interventions consist of adequate investment in education in the form of resources, facilities, and training, as well as the provision of sufficient teacher salaries and benefits (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Together with acknowledging the adoption of appropriate policies and recognising the value of a teaching profession, the government could significantly influence the challenges faced by educators, and thus enhance individuals' motivation to pursue and remain within their chosen career.

Such interventions would contribute to policy reforms aiming to effectively address the challenges and improve the teaching profession's satisfaction. The present research, therefore, serves as the basis for creating policies and practices for later studies with the aim of attracting, sustaining, and preparing future generations of educators, together with reducing potential teacher shortages.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The literature review has provided an extensive understanding of the critical role that motivation has in the PE teaching career, affecting both the initial choice to enter the profession as well as the committed drive to maintain engagement over the years. Intrinsic motives such as a passion for teaching represent significant motivators, whilst external factors in the form of recognition and professional development opportunities influence long-term sustainability. It was concluded that teacher well-being and job satisfaction strongly determine teachers' initial and continuous motivation, which can, however, be undermined by a number of barriers. Although different challenges influencing motivation status have been identified, the literature on the impacts on Physical Education teachers still lacks insights. The present research aims to bridge this gap and show a more comprehensive understanding of how the motives evolve throughout the career, and the ways of maintaining effective and quality performance that mitigates career attrition.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological framework and epistemology utilised to examine the major motivators of Physical Education (PE) teachers towards pursuing and remaining in the profession. Due to the context-dependent nature of motivation, the research design of the study reflects a detailed analysis of participants' personal experiences, beliefs, and narratives. This chapter provides relevant justification for the choice of research design, philosophical stance, and practical considerations.

Primarily, the epistemological and ontological assumptions constituting the nature of the study will be discussed. Subsequently, the methodological framework highlighting the significance of a qualitative approach for in-depth insights into motivational factors will be provided. The collection and analysis of data are thoroughly outlined, emphasising the use of thematic analysis to explore patterns and meanings of narratives. The alignment between the research objectives and the development of interview questions is included, indicating how thoughtful and relevant responses are elicited.

This chapter further demonstrates ethical considerations and key limitations, ensuring the reliability and credibility of the research process. Supporting documents, including the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) approval, are provided in Appendix 1. All references and citations in this dissertation follow the guidelines of the APA 7th edition referencing style.

### **3.2 Epistemological Foundations of the Study**

Understanding the reality and nature of knowledge forms an essential foundation for structuring the research design of the study. Anchored within an interpretivist paradigm, this research study adopts a constructivist epistemological stance, demonstrating a co-constructed knowledge through personal and social interactions. Such a perception is crucial for a deep and authentic exploration of narratives and understanding of the motivations shaping teachers' professional journeys.

The concept of epistemology relates to the study of knowledge, its origins and nature (Crotty, 1998). According to Crotty (1998), epistemology is defined as "a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (p.3), hence indicating its

significance in guiding the research processes and interpretations. As a result, epistemological assumptions in qualitative research shape how researchers perceive reality and how they engage with participants' experiences. These reflect a central component in understanding the subjective motivators that shape the decision to enter and remain within the career.

On the other hand, ontology refers to the nature of reality, excluding concerns regarding how knowledge about reality is obtained (Scotland, 2012). For the present study, a relativist ontological perspective is applied, suggesting that a socially constructed reality is reliant on individual perceptions. Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that reality is composed of individual experiences, thus indicating that this research assumes no objective influences, but rather a unique set of motivators shaped by participants' lives. Nevertheless, both epistemology and ontology contribute to obtaining insight into the researcher's beliefs about the nature of truth and existence, which directly define their overall perspective on the world.

Such philosophical standpoints of the present research align with the interpretivist epistemology, emphasising the subjective knowledge interpreted by distinct individual experiences (Bryman, 2016). Consequently, the present research excludes the viewpoint of positivism and empiricism, thus rejecting the perspective of traditional knowledge, which posits that the global community can be understood through measurable metrics (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The adoption of this approach ultimately recognises the multidimensional aspect of motivation as a personal phenomenon. From the researcher's standpoint, intrinsic motivation in the form of enjoyment, passion for teaching and desire to make a difference, subjectively satisfies teachers' emotional needs, hence cannot be recorded through sole quantifiable measures. Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory relates intrinsic motivation to autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which further highlights individually experienced and interpreted knowledge.

The adequacy of applying the interpretivist approach to this study reflects the emphasis to "understand, explain, and demystify the reality through the eyes of different participants" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 19), suggesting no objective truth. Seeking clarification on how and why the motivation of teachers changes or does not over time requires personal perspectives and comprehension within the specific social and cultural contexts of

participants. This, in turn, supports the chosen epistemology and ontology, which offer authentic interaction with distinct realities faced by PE teachers within their careers.

The philosophical orientation of the present study directed the choice of a qualitative semi-structured interview approach, which allows participants' expression of motivation through narratives. The interpretivist framework further targets the ways of constructing motivators within wider personal and professional contexts, rather than as sole factors. Nonetheless, as identifying the universal solution to complex behaviours is unattainable (Palinkas, 2013), the research's findings provide partial coherence in specific contexts without generalisation. Whilst the data obtained through interpretivism typically reflects the reliability and trustworthiness of participants' narratives, certain limitations to the methodology may arise due to the inherent subjective nature of understanding.

### **3.3 Methodological Framework**

An essential element of any research process relates to the methodology applied. According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), "the ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions; these, in turn, give rise to methodological considerations; and these, in turn, give rise to issues of instrumentation and data collection" (p. 3). Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) suggest the importance of selecting the right data collection methods, which ultimately reflect the study's methodological approach (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In contrast to quantitative methods, which encompass generalised numerical quantification, qualitative methods focus on generating deep and meaningful experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative approach is particularly significant in research studies targeting the examination of complex internal processes, such as human motivation. Its high subjectivity provides personal meanings and emotions which are typically absent in quantitative research.

In the present study exploring the motivational journeys of Physical Education teachers, selecting appropriate tools of qualitative methodology allows for meaningful interpretation of individual, social, and professional factors. The understanding of such influences is limited in a quantitative framework; therefore, qualitative means are required for effective investigation of human experiences and their ways of interpreting the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Implementing qualitative methods aligns with the interpretivist epistemology of this research. The non-universal nature of motivation emphasises context-dependent personal narratives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), through which initial and ongoing motivators that sustain or diminish teachers' drive are identified. Although data gathered through this paradigm may not support statistical evaluation, it provides rich, contextualised knowledge addressing the posed research questions concerning motivation within the profession of teaching Physical Education.

### **3.4 Alignment with Research Questions**

The pivotal research questions of the present study centre around generating insights into underlying factors that determine the choice of a teaching career, as well as the continuous commitment amongst Physical Education teachers. Specifically, the study aims to examine:

1. What factors influence individuals to pursue a career in teaching?
2. What role do motivators play in sustaining a long-term commitment to the profession of teaching?
3. Do motivators change over the years?

The posed questions are intentionally aligned with the qualitative methodology as well as the interpretivist philosophical stance of the study, thus focusing on the assessment of subjective experiences of PE teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) suggest that the questions addressing the “how” and “why” are often acquired through qualitative methods, which express the meanings and processes, together with evolving experiences, in contrast to sole outcomes. Such questions reflect an open-ended nature, which allows for the collection of detailed narratives aligned with the choice of semi-structured interview method.

Ultimately, the research questions are constructed to identify changes in participants' motivation throughout their professional careers, reflecting a structure focused on contextualised understanding and supported by the qualitative, interpretive framework. Additional questions are included within the interview to obtain a broader range of factors and a detailed analysis, thus offering a clearer perspective.

### 3.5 Research Method

Addressing the proposed research questions related to the motivation of Physical Education teachers was done through interviews as the primary data collection method. Dornyei (2007) suggests that the qualitative approach to data collection typically involves the use of interviews, which serve as a means of inspecting a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Interviews offer deep insights into the subjective experiences of motivation, reflecting evolving factors influencing career choice and commitment to the profession. As suggested by Creswell and Poth (2018), interviews play a significant role in qualitative research because they capture the complex phenomena involving narratives and detailed experiences that require meaningful interpretation.

For the present research study, the format of semi-structured interviews was employed. Semi-structured interviews uncover nuanced data through the structured yet flexible design, providing an opportunity to study personal narratives and the complexities of individual experiences (Longhurst, 2003). Their use further aligns with the interpretivist paradigm of the present research as interpretivism centres around uncovering the meanings of individuals' experiences within particular social contexts (Balushi, 2016). Subsequently, the present study seeks to understand the motivation of PE teachers in both personal and professional contexts.

In contrast to structured interviews, which are rigid and limit participants' ability to share their motivation journeys openly, semi-structured interviews reflect a dialogue-based approach (Balushi, 2016; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), the follow-up questions probe intriguing responses that offer further elaboration of the predetermined topic as well as the emerging themes. This reflects a significant aspect of flexibility, which supports the changing nature of motivation throughout teaching careers.

Multiple research studies on motivation by Ryan and Deci suggest semi-structured interviews as the most valuable form of studying deep personal processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ultimately, the choice of semi-structured interview questions encourages meaningful dialogue between the researcher and participant, fostering greater nuance and authenticity. By selecting open-ended questions and active listening, semi-structured interviews help the researcher control the flow of conversation, thereby maintaining the focus on the major

research objectives (Ruslin et al., 2022). This adaptability demonstrates significant importance, particularly in the exploration of longitudinal shifts of motivation factors, allowing for the interplay of past and present aspirations, as well as future expectations (Ruslin et al., 2022). Consequently, the rationale behind adopting this method to the present research is essential in investigating the complexity of motivation among PE teachers across diverse stages of their professional careers.

### **3.6 Research Procedure**

Following careful planning and design of the research, a structured approach was implemented to answer the research objectives of this study. Each stage of the data collection procedure was constructed to ensure quality and in-depth data, which reveals the dynamic nature of PE teacher motivation. The procedure incorporates the selection of the participants, data collection and subsequent analysis, which were conducted with attentiveness, aligning with the qualitative methodology and ethical guidelines.

#### ***3.6.1 Participant Selection and Sampling***

The selection of participants was carried out using a convenience sampling method as typically used in qualitative research due to practical reasons (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Due to the absence of large-scale sampling, the participants were selected from a pool of available individuals willing to take part in the study. Therefore, the permission from the ministry was not required, allowing for a more streamlined recruitment process and timely data collection through direct communication with prospective participants. This reflects a significant characteristic of convenience sampling, which is often a preferable choice when time constraints hinder widespread sampling (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The sampling incorporated four male and four female Physical Education teachers from primary and secondary schools, six of whom were selected from the government institutions and two from church schools. This intentional selection encouraged a greater gender representation, which ensured diverse perceptions and experiences within distinct educational institutions. Ultimately, this led to a better comprehension of different contexts impacting teaching motivation whilst reducing the gender-related bias.

The use of purpose selection constitutes an additional major element of the chosen sampling method. It offers an opportunity for researcher to determine particular knowledge

and experiences associated with research questions and select the appropriate individuals accordingly (Creswell, 2014). The teachers included in the present research study varied in their years within the profession, however, there was no requirement for a minimum threshold of years of experience. Such a strategy was applied with the aim of obtaining a wider range of motivators that evolve over time, thus capturing diverse perspectives of early and committed years within the career. Furthermore, the study considered different working environments in state and church schools, which may influence teachers' commitment and attitudes, hence overall motivation towards teaching PE.

### **3.6.2 Recruitment Process**

Participant recruitment for the present research study was guided by their accessibility, alignment with the research focus, as well as their voluntary interest in participating. After obtaining permission from FREC, the researcher directly contacted the potential participants via email and in-person interactions, inviting them to participate in the study. Such an informal approach was appropriate due to the researcher's existing association with the educational community, as well as the given scale of the study.

The information sheet defining research objectives, purpose and procedure, together with the consent form, was provided upon expression of interest to take part. The ethical considerations in terms of voluntary participation, anonymity, as well as the right of withdrawal without repercussion, were clearly outlined and explained in the provided documents, ensuring privacy and confidentiality throughout the study. Sufficient time was allowed for the review and signing of documents, whilst the individuals were encouraged to answer any inquiries. Therefore, a written informed consent form was acquired as a preliminary step towards the data collection process, ensuring ethical standards (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2017). This allowed the researcher to proceed with a committed group of participants of diverse demographic information, as represented in Table 3.1, contributing towards rich qualitative data, uncovering various motivational factors of teaching PE.

Participant code	Gender	Age	Years of experience	School type	Sector (State/Church)
P1	Male	35	12	Primary	Church
P2	Female	32	10	Secondary	State
P3	Male	33	10	Middle	State
P4	Male	31	8	Middle	State
P5	Male	35	11	Secondary	Church
P6	Female	25	2	Primary	State
P7	Female	29	6	Secondary	State
P8	Female	48	26	Middle	State

Table 3.1: Participants' descriptive demographic information

### **3.6.3 Data Collection**

The process of data collection was conducted through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The location was mutually agreed upon between the researcher and each participant, ensuring a quiet and distraction-free environment where the comfort and confidentiality of participants were prioritised. Each interview lasted approximately 40 to 50 minutes, depending on the depth of participants' responses and their interest in further elaborating on their personal experiences. Voluntary participation was once again acknowledged prior to the start, after which the participants were asked 15 predetermined open-ended questions, which provided an opportunity for further discussion and engagement in meaningful narratives beyond the researcher's expectations. The questions encompassed different dimensions of motivation, including the initial influencing factors, long-term sustainability, and the evolution of motivators over time. Additional follow-up questions were also incorporated into the discussion with the aim of examining both structured objectives as well as other emergent themes that participants identified as significant. Throughout the interviews, the researcher maintained a neutral stance by clarifying questions and noting non-verbal cues relevant to the responses of the participants.

Every interview was audio recorded and consequently transcribed to enhance the reliability and accuracy of the information gathered. Audio recording also offered a more comprehensive basis for analysis for the responses by reducing the risk of omitted data. Ultimately, such collection tools and this approach proved efficient for qualitative research, demonstrating the effectiveness of transcribed interviews in preserving the richness of individuals' narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical integrity is one of the foundational elements of any research study, especially when investigating personal experiences, which require a high degree of privacy and confidentiality. As suggested by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013), providing transparency and protecting the rights of the participants are a fundamental responsibility and ethical obligation of the researcher. In the present study, significant ethical measures were implemented to safeguard participants' identity and well-being.

As the primary approach to ensuring adherence to a code of ethics prior to data collection, ethical approval was acquired from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC), which approved of the study's purpose, procedure, and safety according to institutional guidelines (Appendix 1). This demonstrated adherence to ethical practices as well as promoted the aspect of accountability (BERA, 2018). Subsequently, before the interviews, the participants were given a printed information sheet and informed consent form outlining the nature of their participation as well as their rights, as shown in Appendix 3. Prior to signing, participants' voluntary involvement was highlighted, together with an emphasis on their right of withdrawal from the study at any point in time, without the need for explanation or risk of repercussions. This reflected transparency and helped build appropriate trust between the participants and the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Confidentiality was cautiously maintained throughout the study, and the data remained anonymous. To preserve privacy, any identifiable information of the participants was excluded from the transcripts through the use of pseudonyms to protect their names. Additionally, participants' overall well-being was ensured by abstaining from any potential psychological or emotional distress that could cause harm. This involved a non-judgmental stance of the researcher, indicating a level of respect and acceptance.

After the data collection, the audio recordings, transcripts and any other relevant information were securely stored on an encrypted, password-protected device. The researcher and academic supervisor were the only individuals who had access to the data gathered. Securing sensitive qualitative data was therefore ensured, demonstrating compliance with the necessary data protection regulations. The study's adherence to the mentioned standards maintained a high ethical standard throughout the process, upholding accountability, transparency, and protection of all participants.

### **3.7.1 Research Reflexivity**

Reflexivity forms an essential process of any qualitative research in which the researcher critically reflects on their potential influence on research processes and outcomes through personal background, assumptions and interactions (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023; Berger, 2015). Maintaining reflexivity in the interpretive nature of the present research study investigating the motivation of PE teachers fostered increased reliability and credibility of the findings.

With a background in Physical Education, the researcher's shared experiences and knowledge had a possible impact on the collection of data, as well as its subsequent evaluation. Although such awareness enhances an open dialogue, it further introduces unintentional bias and subjectivity (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). To mitigate such influences, the researcher maintained a neutral perspective, which provided participants with an opportunity to share their experiences without the interference of the researcher's perceptions on the topic. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews further promoted this idea, allowing for the natural flow of discussion and additional questions based on individual responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Regular consultations with the supervisor further ensured objective interpretation during data analysis, thus reducing the risk of shaping the themes through unintentional bias. Ultimately, as suggested by Finlay (2002), a higher authenticity of the research is established, provided that transparency in the reflexive practice of the researcher is present.

### 3.8 Data Analysis

Following the phase of data collection, thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data. Given the alignment with the interpretivist paradigm and adequate flexibility within qualitative research, the thematic analysis was chosen to systematically interpret meaningful data of participants' subjective experiences by deriving themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was specifically guided by the research questions aiming to identify the key motivators of PE teachers throughout their careers. The phase of analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, which incorporates gradual immersion in data starting with familiarisation, initial coding, identifying themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and ultimately generating a final report.

The initial step involved the manual transcription of the audio recordings, capturing every word, phrase, and pause of the narrative. Detailed transcription facilitated close engagement with the raw content and deep familiarisation with emerging ideas. Bird (2005) associates transcription analysis with a significant interpretive act rather than a simple technical task, hence highlighting the researcher's active role in the evaluation process. The following step incorporated multiple readings of the transcripts through which the researcher reflectively reviewed and noted any interpretive thoughts. During the readings, primary interpretations and recurring patterns were noted. This process helped categorise different concepts of motivation and associate potential connections, which were therefore manually grouped into initial codes. Examples of identified codes in the analysis included passion for sport, personal fulfilment, job security, and so on. As part of this process, colour coding and labelling the responses with descriptive tags were applied. This consisted of linking a colour for specific thematic relevance without pre-determined categories, thus creating visually distinct and organised clusters.

Afterwards, the researcher examined the similarities among the selected codes and grouped them into broader themes. The codes were then renamed, as well as merged or discarded accordingly, mitigating any redundant categories and allowing for a more focused interpretation of data. This process was influenced by the proposed research questions as well as the concepts derived from the theoretical lenses, thus themes such as "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" motivators were identified. This was followed by extracting significant quotations from the narratives in relation to a specific category, as shown in Figure 3.1, thus making

sure the findings incorporated representation of participants' authentic experiences (Eldh et al., 2020). Moreover, any contradictory responses were acknowledged by reviewing their significance in relation to the themes.

Subsequently, the themes were re-evaluated according to their internal consistency and relevance to the theoretical framework, thus providing a meaningful distinction between each (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Ultimately, the final report indicated a clear reflection of participants' perspectives, offering a rich interpretation of the complex data gathered. Establishing regular communication between the researcher and supervisor ensured minimal personal bias in analysis, thus supporting the credibility of this qualitative research study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

It was a government school and primary. Unfortunately, the system is conflicting. **(system-level issues)** I can understand the point of view of the class teacher because she's all the time with the kids. **(empathy towards class teachers)** The only break she has is when we are replacing, so I can understand the burden they have. **(role of PE teachers as relief staff)** But it can be done in a positive way, rather than ha, take them, you know? **(lack of respect)**

I mean, after all you feel like literally a babysitter, they don't believe in your subject, you know what I mean? **(devaluation of PE; lack of recognition)** The SMT, the assistant head and the heads play a big part as well in motivating you. **(influence of school leaders on motivation)** When I entered here it was the perfect spot and that it remained like that for the first seven, eight years, **(positive early experience)** and then the things changed unfortunately, the school didn't remain as it was. There were a lot of changes, people were becoming demotivated and unfortunately, transferred to the school. **(decline in school climate; impact of school change)**

Figure 3.1: Initial coding in brackets

### 3.9 Interview Questions

As discussed in Chapter 2: Literature Review, there is a distinction between the factors initially influencing one's choice of entering the profession of PE teaching and the subsequent motivators that follow later on in the career. Additionally, such motivators can further be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic, with each having a unique effect on shaping individuals' professional journeys. Assessing PE teacher motivation through semi-structured interviews was structured by thematically grouping the questions. Aside from the introductory questions establishing the demographic background of the participants, the

main body of the interview reflects on initial factors, long-term sustainability, as well as the change of motivators over time, as shown in Appendix 2. This structure facilitated rich personal narratives that ensured alignment with the research objectives.

### ***3.9.1 Initial Factors and Motivators***

The first section of the interview, questions 3 to 7, examined participants' early motivators influencing their choice to pursue a profession of teaching PE. The questions encompass both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by focusing on personal interests and inspirations, which further incorporate external impacts in the form of job opportunities and societal expectations. The initial question, "What were the main factors that influenced your decision to become a teacher?", encouraged participants to gradually reflect on the fundamental rationale behind their choice, thus predominantly revolving around passion for sports and job stability. The exploration of early influences of motivation, as suggested by Watt and Richardson (2007), aids in gaining a deeper insight into components shaping long-lasting teachers' commitment to the profession.

### ***3.9.2 Long-term Sustainability***

The subsequent sections included questions 8 to 10, which allowed participants to address factors associated with their commitment to teaching PE. The maintenance of teachers' long-term sustainability was identified through narrative-eliciting questions such as "What motivators help sustain your commitment to teaching nowadays?", thus evaluating responses influenced by personal contextual factors. Teachers' continuous engagement is also linked to their job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2011); hence, understanding these motivators can aid the development of strategies for retaining and supporting teachers. Moreover, additional inquiry into how participants navigated any career challenges revealed their personal perseverance and emphasised the ways in which external influences impact their commitment to the profession (Klassen & Chiu, 2011).

### ***3.9.3 Change of Motivators Over Time***

The evolution of motivators throughout the teaching careers was captured through questions 11 to 13. The questions "Do you believe your motivators for staying in the teaching profession have changed over time?" and "Do you foresee your motivators evolving

in the future?” elicited responses reflecting personal growth, shifting priorities, as well as the change of perspectives influenced by personal and professional experiences. Ultimately, this interview section demonstrated the dynamic nature of teacher motivation, highlighting longitudinal shifts in purpose and professional identity.

#### **3.9.4 Final reflections**

The last set of conclusive interview questions allowed participants to openly share their advice and additional insights into their professional careers. The closing questions provided a reflective space for remaining thoughts that might not have been identified earlier, hence demonstrating the participant-centred approach, which enriched the final data of the present research study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

#### **3.10 Limitations of the Methodology**

Throughout the methodological process of data collection and analysis of the present research study, certain limitations were identified. These encompass constraints associated with participant selection, such as sample size and reliance on convenience sampling. Additionally, the potential for researcher biases, as well as the researcher’s approach to interacting with participants, might have contributed towards the variability and limited generalisability of the research findings. Nevertheless, further elaboration on the key limitations and their implications will be addressed in the Discussion chapter.

#### **3.11 Conclusion**

The methodology chapter reviewed the research approaches utilised in the investigation of the factors affecting the choice to pursue and sustain in the profession of teaching Physical Education. The qualitative research design, incorporating semi-structured interviews, contributed towards an in-depth understanding of the concept of motivation. The chapter provided an overview of the research philosophy, grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which enabled the subjective interpretation of participants’ experiences. Detailed sampling methods and thorough ethical considerations were addressed, ensuring appropriate participant selection and safeguarding their rights throughout the study.

Additionally, the careful design of interview questions as the data collection tool, and their further evaluation through thematic analysis, constitute an effective method for

exploration of rich and meaningful data. A brief acknowledgement of the study's limitations enhances the transparency in the research process, ensuring contextualised findings which support the credibility and trustworthiness of the research.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results and Discussion**

## **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the findings analysed from the semi-structured interviews of PE teachers, whilst engaging in discussion about how such results answered the research questions of the study. The aim of the present research is to gain a deeper understanding of individuals' motivational influences towards the profession of teaching PE, hence answering:

1. What factors influence individuals to pursue a career in teaching?
2. What role do motivations play in sustaining a long-term commitment to the profession of teaching?
3. And how do motivators change over the years?

Examining the multidimensional concept of motivation in the local context contributes towards a broader awareness of teacher retention, especially in the subject of Physical Education, which incorporates emotional, physical, as well as institutional influences (Zhang, 2021).

Through Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach of thematic analysis as the chosen data evaluation tool, several themes and subthemes have been derived. A diverse pool of participants allowed for a comprehensive exploration of varying factors, enabling deeper insight into their effect on motivation in the teaching profession. The chapter delves into the key themes by identifying recurring patterns and grouping according to thematic areas, which are additionally supported by illustrative quotations from the participants' narratives. Discussed findings are linked to the existing literature, thus aligning teachers' experiences with the scholarly standpoints, which finally provide a holistic understanding of initial and sustaining factors within the profession of teaching PE.

## **4.2 Overview of Findings**

Through the comprehensive data analysis, several core themes emerged, forming a foundation for the discussion of findings in alignment with the proposed research questions. The three major overarching themes reflect progressive stages of motivational factors in PE teachers' professional journeys, starting with Initial Motivators, Sustaining Motivators, and Changing Motivators. Derived from participants' narratives, these themes provide an understanding of the elements that influence a decision for the pursuit of a teaching career

and the retention within the profession, whilst also exploring potential evolving factors over time. Therefore, each theme distinctly contributes towards answering the research questions:

1. What factors influence individuals to pursue a career in teaching?
2. What role do motivations play in sustaining a long-term commitment to the profession of teaching?
3. Do motivators change over the years?

Primarily, Theme 1 – Initial Motivators, addresses factors which initially inspired individuals to become PE teachers. This theme further encompasses a group of subthemes such as the passion for sport and physical activity, passion for teaching, work with children, personal identity, role models, and job attractiveness. The emerging subthemes represent a strong alignment with the intrinsic motivation, highlighting the inner drive over the external components. Such findings are confirmed and supported by the existing literature, demonstrating the significance of the personal experiences and interests, together with the sense of purpose of the role (Mertler, 2002; Watt & Richardson, 2007). Consequently, Theme 1 tackles the first research question by underscoring the personal and contextual determinants contributing towards the pursuit of the profession.

The following Theme 2 – Sustaining Motivators, encompasses a wide range of factors impacting teachers' commitment and sustained motivation across their careers. The most prominent subthemes emerging from this theme include "Positive Relationships with Students", "Student Success and Feedback", "Professional Growth", "Administrative Support", and "Work-life Balance" associated with the teaching job. These, therefore, reflect the interpersonal and institutional factors that reinforce the overall motivation of the teachers to remain in the profession. One of the strongest impacts was associated with the relational aspect of teacher-student rapport and thus the work with children, which directly aligns with the local research linking such an emotional engagement with job satisfaction (Vassallo, 2014). Demonstrating the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcements concerning their impact on sustained professional commitment directly answers the second research question of the present study.

Finally, the third research question explored the changing factors affecting the dynamic nature of motivation across PE teachers' careers, constituting Theme 3 – Changing Motivators. The findings from participants' narratives further diverged into several subthemes, including “Demotivation and Burnout”, “Evolving Sense of Purpose”, and “Shifts in personal priorities”. These personal and environmental changes over the teaching lifespan indicate a re-evaluation of teachers' professional goals and shifts, which therefore reflect the evolution of their drive to remain in the profession (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2012).

This chapter will provide a detailed analysis of the narratives through which the major themes and subthemes will be comprehensively discussed. As previously discussed in Chapter 3: Methodology, it is critical to reiterate that the researchers' own background and professional involvement may have influenced the interpretation of the findings and the rapport established during data collection. Given the subjective nature of the qualitative thematic analysis of data, it was essential to maintain a reflective awareness of the researcher's positionality and biases. The use of quotations from participants' narratives together with cross-examining themes against raw data provided an effective approach to minimising subjectivity, hence promoting the credibility of the study. Ultimately, the reflexive method contributed to the depth and transparency of the results, whilst highlighting that the construction of core themes and subthemes was made between the researcher and participants.

#### **4.3 Theme 1 – Initial Motivators to Purpose Teaching Career**

The exploration of the initial motivating factors impacting individuals' choice of pursuing a career in teaching Physical Education is crucial due to the effects early factors have on the sustained involvement within the profession. Existing literature suggests the integration of intrinsic and extrinsic factors across personal and professional contexts of teaching PE, which are often primarily associated with sport and education (Spittle, Jackson, & Casey, 2009; Sinclair, 2008; Han & Yin, 2016). The findings from the present study suggest a predominant range of intrinsic motivators associated with initial interest in the teaching profession. Participants' narratives encompass six core subthemes under Theme 1: Passion for sport and physical activity, Passion for teaching, Working with children, Personal identity, Role models, and Job attractiveness. The following subsections provide extensive insight into

various initial influences derived from the participants, thus examining the ways early professional choices are constructed in the context of education.

#### **4.3.1 Passion for Sport and Physical Activity**

The predominant factor influencing individuals to pursue a career in teaching, as identified across participants' narratives, was their passion for sport and physical activity. Often developed at an early age through immersion in sports, this passion laid the foundation for personal identity formation and later translated to specialisation in PE. One of the primary school PE teachers, with 12 years of experience, simply indicated, *"I loved sports, and that's it practically."* This direct statement illustrates an intrinsic drive for physical activity rooted in enjoyment, developed prior to any pedagogical motives. It highlights the way emotional attachment to physical activity creates a primary foundation for the professional pathway.

All of the participants indicated active engagement in physical activity during their childhood and adolescent years. Whilst some of the participants described a competitive involvement in sports such as football, volleyball, and gymnastics, others showed equally consistent positive sport experiences. The findings of participant P8, who explained, *"Sports always gave me a lot of joy... I was always involved in different sports"*, suggest how emotional fulfilment shapes identity and later aligns with her career. This is supported by Spittle, Jackson and Casey (2009) as well as the later research by Spittle and Spittle (2014), whose studies identified passion for physical activity and sport as a prominent intrinsic predictor influencing individuals' career trajectories in sport-related professions.

In response to a generic open question about the initial motives to pursue a teaching career, the majority of the participants referred to their lifestyle itself and how teaching PE fit seamlessly into it. Participant P3 mentioned his already active daily life, thus describing PE as a *"natural fit"* on which he built his current career. Viewing PE teaching as an extension of a lifestyle rather than a fallback suggests a deep connection between personal values and professional identity, which in turn fosters long-term commitment to the profession (Han & Yin, 2016).

Evidently, the passion for sport and physical activity extends beyond the sole enjoyment and encompasses personal and social development and values cultivated. The

participant P2, a 34-year-old female PE teacher, outlined her perspective on PE as being “more than just about sports” and additionally suggested “*it’s about building confidence, discipline, and social skills*”. Her statement displays a broader understanding of PE’s educational role, reflecting the work of Dudley (2025), who suggests a number of personal and social values being fostered through PE participation.

These reflections, therefore, link strengthened intrinsic motivation to alignment with passion, social impact, and professional purpose. This foundational motivation interconnects with subsequent subthemes such as “Passion for Teaching” and “Personal Identity”, which further explore the ways of how inner passion shapes professional interest.

#### **4.3.2 Passion for Teaching**

Aside from a common attachment to sport, the majority of participants identified a genuine passion for teaching as another key motivator for entering the field of PE. Their narratives suggest that the choice to become a teacher extended beyond the sport enjoyment, hence encompassing a deeper desire to support and educate young individuals.

The participant P1 illustrated his internal inclination towards teaching through the statement, “As far as I know, looking back, it was something natural for me”, whilst further elaborating, “it has to be within you”. This reflects an absence of external motives, thus suggesting a deeper motivation stemming from his character. According to Mertler (2002), teachers’ sense of fulfilment derives from the internal satisfaction of teaching, which inherently influences their long-term motivation. This aligns with local research by Bezzina and Portelli (2006), whose findings suggest a strong correlation between a strong inner drive for teaching and its impact on sustained commitment to the profession, in contrast with predominantly rooted extrinsic motivators.

Additionally, the participant P3, having 10 years of teaching experience, expressed, “If you love teaching, and you love the subject, you’ll stay within the job”. His view highlights the importance of passion for the pedagogical aspect of the career in fostering long-term satisfaction. Despite the potential challenges faced throughout a teaching career, this initially deep-rooted enthusiasm for teaching itself helps sustain motivation and contributes towards greater resilience (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Beyond the inherent drive for teaching, the participants further indicated a desire towards fostering positive student development. The appeal of teaching was expressed by participant P5, who stated, “I wanted to be that positive influence in students’ lives”, whilst participant P7 emphasised she had “always been drawn to helping others”. Their statements demonstrate an emotional investment in a teaching role, indicating a meaningful connection that is viewed beyond the career. Subsequently, the findings by Klassen (2011) highlight the significance of altruistic factors in teacher motivation, underscoring how initial choice for the profession is often embedded in devotion to students’ growth and well-being.

This subtheme highlights the value of internal passion for teaching in the process of deciding to enter the respective career in the field of PE. The analysed findings indicate a strong presence of intrinsic motivators among participants, whose genuine interest in teaching and physical activity formed the foundation for their career choice, thus aligning the profession to personal values and fulfilment.

#### **4.3.3 Work with Children**

A local study conducted by Vassallo (2014) on the job satisfaction of Maltese teachers found that the love for work with children formed one of the key factors for high motivation. Although the study suggests the presence of such a motivator in long-service teachers, the interest in working with children and adolescents often occurs from the initial years as well as prior to entering the profession.

This intrinsic inclination is derived from personal experiences and an innate affinity for working with younger individuals. As the participant P4 explained, “I have a cousin who was roughly ten years younger than me... I used to teach him. So it's something inner in me.” This response from the participant’s narrative conveys intrinsic satisfaction in mentoring, which stems from the early experience of guiding and influencing a child’s development preceding any formal schooling. Several earlier studies confirm the presence of this factor, which occurs from early interactions and social experiences, thus shaping the professional inspirations in education (Lawson, 1986; Lawson 1983a).

The common emphasis on working with children was highlighted by several teachers, reinforcing the role of positive influence in the decision to enter a teaching profession. Participant P5, for instance, stated that, “I saw how rewarding it was to work with younger

kids—how they looked up to you...”, which reflects internal pleasure many educators sense in positively impacting children's development. Consequently, studies by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) as well as Kalsen (2011) suggest that teachers’ positive impact on students translates to the experienced emotional reward, which in turn is ingrained in their motivation. The rewarding nature of the work with children serves as a key motivator for individuals who have experienced such a role prior to entering the teaching profession.

Other participants’ narratives reflected similar perspectives, thus defining children as “curious, honest, and full of energy” (P6), together with expressing a rewarding feeling when academically low-achieving students experience success in their physical abilities in PE. Such viewpoints display the significance of inclusive practices in PE, which is seen as a learning space where students thrive regardless of their backgrounds and academic abilities. This is ultimately supported by Baily et al. (2009) whose findings indicate that inclusive teaching of PE fosters opportunities for young students who may not otherwise excel in other academic subjects.

Nevertheless, the presence of passion for working with children is prominent in both initial and long-term teacher motivation, suggesting a deeply embedded personal value system that goes beyond the sole love for the subject. Participants’ desire to nurture and shape children’s growth motivates their pursuit of such a profession, providing a clearer understanding of the motivators driving individuals towards the career of teaching Physical Education.

#### **4.3.4 Personal Identity**

The interrelation between the initial career choice and personal identity was yet another common sub-theme emerging across participants’ narratives, emphasising the alignment between self-values and characteristics, and the teaching profession. A strong intrinsic relation to the interest in the academic subject itself was noted from participants P2, P5, and P6. Participant P2 expressed, “It was my niche... it was my subject, and I really enjoyed the subject.” She continued, “The subject is still at heart, so I still persist in keeping my role.”. These reflections highlight the enthusiasm and love for the subject embedded in personal identity, which further reinforces findings by Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus (2012, 2014). Identity-based motives, which correspond to joy for the subject and being

intrinsically drawn to the teaching role, serve as solid predictors of the initial motivation for entering the career (Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus, 2012; Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus, 2014).

Further supporting the belief that the professional identity of PE teachers is directly extended to their sense of self is represented by participant P8's remark, "Still, I love teaching PE—it's part of who I am now." This statement reflects the construction of professional identity through initial passion for the subject combined with teaching experience, thus shaping one's sense of self even in later years within the career. Additionally, for many PE teachers, the aspect of the active nature of the profession corresponds to their own character, which can be noted by participant P6, who states, "I couldn't imagine sitting at a desk all day." This idea represents the physical demands of the job, which aligns with one's personality and interpersonal values. Consequently, the compatibility between the two components, personal and professional, strongly influences early career motivation as well as committed engagement (Watt & Richardson, 2008; Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus, 2012).

Findings from other participants reinforced the rationale of personal identity, by explaining that teaching PE "suited [their] personality" (P6), and how others recognised their suitability, as reflected through a response: "They saw that in me, I don't know what I transmitted" (P1). Such comments suggest both intrinsic and external affirmations that impact one's perception of their alignment with the teaching role. Ultimately, the personal identity that corresponds to the essence of teaching contributes to increased interest and meaningful engagement in the profession (Rushton et al., 2023; Day & Kington, 2008; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Rather than basing motivation on external rewards, self-expression and authenticity constitute crucial motivators by which individuals pursue teaching as a means to align their identity with the professional roles.

#### **4.3.5 Role Models**

Another core motivator identified across many participants' responses relates to the impact of role models in individuals' lives. The influence of role models, such as former teachers and family members, and their effect on career choice is widely recognised in educational literature. This recurring theme indicated how participants' values and

enthusiasm towards the teaching profession are shaped as a result of individuals' exposure to the environment and people. As participant P5 explains, "He [former PE teacher] once mentioned that I had what it takes to guide others, and it really made an impression on me". This instance reflects a personal moment that significantly influenced the participant's career direction and purpose. A study by Richardson and Watt (2010) highlights the positive influence of external validation, particularly stemming from teachers. This ultimately suggests that the impact of perceived competence is one of the major initial motivators shaping one's interest in teaching (Klassen et al., 2011; Richardson & Watt, 2010).

Aside from perceived competence, meaningful student-teacher relationships were also pivotal in fostering early aspirations to become educators. Participant P7 reflects, "My secondary school PE teacher played a huge role in that. She wasn't just passionate about the subject, but also genuinely cared about us", indicating the effect teachers have beyond the academic development. This is further evident in participant P6's narrative, who described her former PE teacher as "full of energy... fun but also really respectful toward all the students". Klassen and colleagues (2011) highlight that this behaviour and interpersonal dynamics substantially impact the development of teacher identity, thus reinforcing the belief that relationships inspire future professionals.

Other participants emphasised the impact of role modelling from a wider social context. Participant P2 suggested the influence of family, thus the impact her mother, as a kindergarten teacher, contributed to. Participant P2 explains, "She kept on pushing me through education and always moving me around from training to school and back-and-forth. She always encouraged me." This example aligns with the findings by Watt and Richardson (2007), which emphasise the significance of environmental and relational factors beyond the school setting in developing the initial motivators for pursuing the teaching profession.

Such an example reflects motivational processes of a broader network of role models, which are in turn consistent with findings by Watt and Richardson (2007), who highlight significant environmental and relational effects on initial motivation for the profession.

Nevertheless, a minority of participants also expressed certain negative impacts experienced with their previous PE teachers. Participant P1 stated, “Especially in the secondary, I had a very bad PE teacher, which wasn’t committed, while participant P3 mentioned, “Funnily enough, I didn’t have any influencing teachers that were good and inspired me...” These examples illustrate a reflective opposition, which typically relates to an individual’s inspiration from negative role models translating to the adoption of opposing behaviours and strategies of personal teaching practices (Lortie, 1975; Flores & Day, 2006).

Consequently, the presence of inspiring role models from distinct social contexts emerged as another significant motivator influencing individuals’ decisions to enter the profession of teaching PE. Through instilling confidence, perceived competence, and modelling of positive behaviour, these factors shape identity and initial aspirations of future educators.

#### **4.3.6 Job Attractiveness**

Whilst the majority of emerged initial influencing factors associated with intrinsic motivation, job attractiveness was highlighted by several participants. In the context of the present study, job attractiveness refers to its characteristics in terms of job stability, working hours, development opportunities, as well as other favourable conditions of the teaching profession.

Although secondary to passion for teaching for most participants, this extrinsic motivator plays a crucial role in influencing career choices. Participant P4 addressed the external influence by stating, “Teaching felt like a stable choice, with benefits like long holidays, summers off, and a secured pension”. This perspective reflects a balance between personal interest and solid work conditions. The interplay of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors is often examined upon deciding on a teaching career, which hence offers structured conditions and a stable future (Watt & Richardson, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Spittle & Spittle, 2014). This is additionally highlighted by participant P6, who expressed, “Teaching, especially in the public sector, gives you a bit of both [passion and security].” Ultimately, the predictability of work-life balance showcases the stability of the job, which is an evident attractor present due to its alignment with personal life commitments (Day & Gu, 2009; Sinclair, 2008).

Employment conditions and prospects additionally contribute towards the decision to enter the teaching profession (Padhy et al., 2015; Rots, et al, 2010). As explained by participant P8, “Back in the day, there was actually a decent demand for PE teachers...which assured me kind of...” This response indicates the idea of job availability being a practical factor in the choice of career pursuit. Other participants mentioned regular working hours and frequent holidays as additional reinforcing factors, which, although significant, did not play a primary role in entering the profession.

Interestingly, participant P1 displayed opposing views in comparison to the rest of the participants. His initial statement following the question regarding job attractiveness was: “No, I wasn’t interested in that too much to be honest... It was just pure love.” Such a response reflects high intrinsic motives, which are predominantly present in teacher candidates (Dotta et al., 2025) and thus often independently coexist along with extrinsic rewards (Richardson & Watt, 2010). Nonetheless, according to Deci and Ryan (2000), the absence of extrinsic motivators and predominant reliance on intrinsic factors may result in diminished motivation towards teaching over time. Ultimately, certain opposing perspectives of job attractiveness in recent years within the teaching profession, especially in the local context, will be discussed in Theme 2.

#### **4.4 Theme 2 – Sustaining Motivators throughout the Career**

While initial motivators play a significant role in the overall concept of teacher motivation, particularly focusing on the early stages of the profession, understanding the sustaining motives that directly impact the long-term commitment and well-being of PE teachers is essential. The profession of teaching Physical Education encompasses challenges stemming from different contexts, such as inclusion, curriculum adaptations, as well as physical demands, which together contribute to the level of job satisfaction and retention over time. In contrast to certain motivating factors for entering a teaching career, being driven by extrinsic components such as job attractiveness, sustaining motivators typically stem from internal rewards that target purpose and professional growth (Sinclair, 2008).

Extensive research on motivation within the education context suggests a direct impact of strengthened purpose, meaningful relationships with students, as well as the aspect of autonomy, on the factors influencing commitment to teaching (Klassen & Chiu,

2011; Watt & Richardson, 2012). Physical Education encompasses a unique set of motivators that address the fulfilment and joy of contributing to learners' personal and physical development. Theme 2, therefore, examines the second research question – “What role do motivations play in sustaining a long-term commitment to the profession of teaching?” The emerging subthemes portraying the major influencing motivators on sustained commitment to the profession are analysed and discussed in the following section.

#### **4.4.1 Positive Relationship with Students**

The most consistent component identified across participants' narratives, regarding the present factors affecting their current motivation to teach, relates to student-teacher relationships. The establishment of meaningful interactions and connections with the learners promotes a comprehensive educational experience, through which teachers' personal and professional fulfilment is reached (Vassallo, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015). Such relationships further shape teacher identity and well-being, which therefore enhance job satisfaction and maintain their motivation levels. In the context of PE, student-teacher relationships are strengthened through the dynamic nature of the lesson, which contributes towards increased relational growth, in comparison to the classroom setting of other academic subjects (Jowett et al., 2023).

The first subtheme was demonstrated by participant P1, who stated, “Luckily enough, our job gives you a lot in return. Because kids will love you...” This indicates emotional reciprocity, which promotes affection and a sense of belonging, thus compensating for the profession's demands. Vassallo's (2014) research on job satisfaction of long-service teachers in Malta supports such findings, ultimately associating close student relationships as intrinsic motives for in-service teachers and key motivational factors. Additionally, Day and Gu's (2009) study focusing on emotional labour found a positive correlation between emotional connection and resilience of teachers, especially in a challenging environment. Nevertheless, the PE-specific context of the present study recognises the interactive nature of the subject, which provides frequent opportunities for enhanced student-teacher bonding.

Students' feedback further reinforces the meaningful relationships formed over time. As participant P7 expressed, “They [students] give me a lot of positive feedback,

enthusiasm, that helps you want to do more and better, you know...” This allows for improved competence and relatedness, which strongly aligns with Deci and Ryan’s (2000) Self-Determination Theory, emphasising the achievement of fundamental psychological needs as crucial in ensuring motivation. Physical Education allows for instant feedback during lesson delivery, which, unlike in a classroom setting, provides a more effective motivational circuit. This is often reflected through smiles, expressions of joy and effort, together with recognising learners’ skill improvements, thus increasing teachers’ self-perceived efficacy and enhancing teaching practices.

Additional compelling responses were found in participant P2’s narrative: “What keeps me going is the attitude that I built with my students, the respectful manner that they respect me back”, and participant P8, who suggested, “Feeling appreciated and respected matters.” The significance of mutual respect in sustaining teachers’ motivation is yet another critical element of meaningful relationships. Contrary to the Split, Koomen, and Thijs (2011) study suggesting demotivation and emotional exhaustion, the present findings provide a more optimistic perspective, thus relating respectful and strong connections to the sustainability of a teaching career, as also supported by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015).

Ultimately, the present findings align with existing literature supporting the correlation of student-teacher relationships and their effects on teacher motivation. This highlights the idea of meaningful interpersonal connections within the PE setting that foster teaching effectiveness and satisfaction, hence serving as significant sustaining motivators within the profession.

#### **4.4.2 Student Outcomes**

Current findings identify the contribution to student development and success as another prominent factor among long-serving educators, which helps answer the second research question of the present study. Through several participants’ narratives, it has been found that witnessing students’ academic, emotional, as well as behavioural growth reinforces teachers’ enthusiasm and teaching efforts. Participant P6 articulated this belief through the statement: “Seeing them that they achieve good results... trying to improve the skills, that’s what keeps me going.” This emphasises the perception that facilitating and observing students’ achievements plays a significant role in teachers’ meaningful efforts,

thus portraying a source of occupational satisfaction. This idea is supported by Han and Yin's (2016) review article, whose comprehensive review of teacher motivation studies found a consistent correlation between motivation and positive student outcomes.

Klassen and colleagues (2012) indicate increased self-efficacy of teachers who derive their career fulfilment through seeing learners succeed and obtain milestones. Participant P4 directly conveys this view by suggesting, "Realising a student finally mastered a skill..." forms one of the most rewarding elements of their teaching career. Within the PE context, given the multidimensional nature of the subject, such an effect on teachers is additionally evident, particularly in noting the achievement of new and advanced motor skills of students. Witnessing student personal transformations also leads to an emotional impact on teachers. Participant P5 shares, "When a student who hated PE... suddenly starts engaging...", which reaffirms their teaching purpose. Split and colleagues (2011) identify this transformative shift of student active participation and visible progress as a means of relational dynamics which ultimately foster a motivating environment for both students and teachers.

Long-term teacher investment was also noted in the experiences of other participants, who highlighted the importance of fulfilment achieved through witnessing students' holistic growth. Statements such as "There's this sense of being part of their journey" and "Seeing students grow is, I think, the best part of this job" portray the idea of emotional rewards that impact personal bonds. This aligns with local research by Vassallo (2014), whose findings associate student development with strengthened emotional investment, forming an essential factor of long-serving teachers in Malta. Whilst the study identified external challenges, the findings emphasise the significance of connection with students in sustaining teachers' motivation over time.

Nevertheless, the emerging aspect of perceived student growth and emotional rewards cannot be established as comprehensive for all teachers. Several participants have shown a fragile sustained commitment in the face of contextual burdens such as lack of institutional support, which is discussed in the later subsection, regardless of positive student relationships. As suggested by Klassen and Chiu (2011), demotivation can occur despite positive student interactions, thus leading to a feeling of being overwhelmed. Therefore, aside from the significant effects of perceived student achievement, broader

systemic structures are necessary to support the long-term teaching commitment and motivation.

#### **4.4.3 Professional Growth**

Another common factor interpreted through participants' narratives relates to the opportunities for professional development and growth, which in turn increase PE teachers' drive for committed years within the profession. From emerging data, major aspects tied to this subtheme are identified as participants' opportunities to learn, self-develop, and adopt innovative teaching strategies in their practice. Day and Gu (2007) support the significant presence of professional growth as a long-term motivator. Their longitudinal research on the importance of ongoing, reflective, and contextually relevant professional development in teachers' sustained careers (Day & Gu, 2007).

The present study outlined a significant desire of PE teachers to evolve their practices and better contribute towards students' learning. As participant P2 expressed, "You need to keep up with your professional career and always challenge your students in a positive manner," highlighting the correlation between student engagement and teacher growth. Participant P3 similarly shared, "If you remain within your comfort zone and you don't try to see different activities or different thrills, then you enter into a vicious cycle." Such statements emphasise the critical nature of innovative practices with the aim of avoiding stagnation, thus indicating how teaching the subject of Physical Education might lead to demotivation if creativity is absent. Opfer and Pedder (2011) confirm this belief by associating enhanced reflective and instructional practices with increased job satisfaction, leading to teachers' resilience.

Whilst the context of intrinsic motivation for growth is evidently recognised, certain extrinsic rewards often represent inhibiting barriers. For instance, participant P8 stated, "The system doesn't always push you to grow or innovate", thus indicating that professional opportunities for advancement and development are often lacking or insufficient. Participant P4 also adds, "What would help is more structured professional development or clearer pathways to specialise or lead within PE". Opfer and Pedder (2011) mirror this view through their research, emphasising institutional and systemic effects on providing effective professional development opportunities, hence meaningful learning experiences of

teachers. This is additionally consistent with Darling-Hammond and colleagues' (2017) report, which identifies the provision of accessible and relevant professional growth opportunities as a means of enhancing teaching quality and therefore increasing teacher retention.

Nevertheless, participant P6 shared a significant perception on informal learning and adaptability, stemming from the intrinsic drive to improve and make a difference. The participant expressed, "I'm constantly learning... even how to adapt when things don't go as planned." This statement reflects that one's formation and growth of professional identity can be developed through daily teaching practices and experiences, which continually shape and advance teaching skills and their impact. Therefore, Beauchamp & Thomas (2009) interpret external conditions and experiences as significant factors aiding professional growth, linking lifelong learning to sustained teaching commitment. Whilst the structured opportunities may be lacking in the local professional setting, as identified through participants' narratives of the present study, PE teachers' drive for professional growth remains a significant sustaining factor of long-term commitment, thus mirroring the findings by Vassallo's (2014) local study on long-service teachers in Malta.

#### ***4.4.4 Institutional and Administrative Support***

Institutional support represents various stakeholders within the education system, ranging from school leaders to national policymakers, who aim to provide support, guidance, and resources, thus contributing to professional satisfaction and well-being (Norris et al., 2017; Lynn & Woods, 2010). The present study identified the influence of the support level on maintaining or diminishing teachers' motivation, hence affecting the long-term teacher retention. As participant P1 expressed, "The SMT, the assistant heads and the head play a big part as well in motivating you," underlining the significant role of the School Management Team (SMT) in providing an adequate professional environment which influences one's drive to teach. Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2011) study on teachers' motivation to leave the profession aligns with its findings, emphasising the importance of effective and supportive leadership for job satisfaction, hence allowing teachers to feel recognised and valued.

Similarly, the consistent provision of support in the early years of the profession seems to positively impact long-term engagement. This is noted through participant P2's narrative, suggesting, "When I entered here, it was the perfect spot and that it remained like that for the first seven, eight years." This view indicates the reinforcement of a sense of belonging and job satisfaction in the formative years of teaching, which ultimately translates to sustained motivation throughout the career. The establishment of a stable teaching environment in the initial stage of the profession appears to help mitigate future obstacles, aligning with Ingersoll and Strong's (2011) findings, linking early career support with enhanced retention rates and reduced risk of burnout.

The extensive research by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010; 2011) additionally stresses the importance of collaborative work with school leaders and thus establishing a well-structured school culture. Moreover, a local research by Bezzina (2004) further highlights the importance of collaboration with school staff as a strategy to maintain teachers' long-term commitment. Key contributors to sustained teacher engagement in the profession were correlated with a sense of empowerment and autonomy, which therefore align with the present study. Several participants shared their views on the importance of autonomy and recognition of their teacher role. Participant P7 stated, "There's very little recognition", whilst participant P8 added, "Sometimes the buzz wears off, especially when you don't feel like there's enough space to grow... no one backing you up..." Such experiences reflect a sense of tension between administrative recognition and support, which appears to be lacking in certain schools.

Nevertheless, the sense of autonomy is also described positively by several PE teachers. As participant P6 remarks, "They allow me to try new ideas, like using breaks for different activities, even starting a supervised morning walk routine." Through this narrative, it can be noted how administrative support allows teachers to engage in innovative practices, which ultimately benefit students' participation and development. This, in turn, promotes satisfaction for certain PE teachers, which drives their desire for additional effort and commitment. Collie, Shapka, and Perry's (2012) findings on autonomy-supportive leadership styles of school leaders correlate with teachers' motivation levels and professional satisfaction, thus supporting the results of the present study. It is therefore suggested that institutional and administrative support play a dual role, by positively

contributing to sustaining long-term motivation, as well as serving as a demotivating factor if inconsistently provided.

#### **4.4.5 Work-life Balance**

Another significant factor that directly addresses the second research question of the study relates to the aspect of work-life balance present in the teaching profession. Prominent among all participants, the balance between professional and personal commitments promotes several benefits, such as flexible schedules, structured routines, and effective management of personal responsibilities outside of school, ultimately supporting long-term career engagement.

Primarily, this factor is mentioned in a number of instances, relating to the benefit of family commitment. The statement by participant P3: “Especially if you're a female teacher and you're interested in having a family... and having to spend time with your children,” highlights the feasibility aspect of a teaching profession, particularly advantageous for balancing caregiving roles. Several other participants additionally acknowledged this factor, thus further stressing the significance of school holidays and adequate working hours as core elements of sustained motivation. This highlights the protective role of work-life balance in mitigating burnout and exhaustion occurrence, thus reducing teacher attrition rates (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Han et al., 2017).

Furthermore, participant P6 shares, “As someone in my twenties, trying to plan ahead... the idea of having a stable income... sounds promising”. This response reflects broad literature findings linking the teaching profession to adequate aspects of job security, which in turn results in increased job satisfaction (OECD, 2021). Additionally, Ingersoll and Strong (2011) convey the impact of experiencing a manageable workload and consistent schedules in the early years within the profession, paired with adequate recovery time, which together correlate with long-term professional fulfilment.

Nonetheless, the professional engagement of female PE teachers evidently presents slightly distinct experiences. Participant P2 supports this by noting, “It’s a good work-life balance, although at times it takes over since I am head of department.” This indicates that, whilst the role of PE teachers may include other duties such as extracurricular activities,

teaching remains conducive to personal well-being, forming one of the key influences for teacher retention (Bamford and Worth, 2017; Day & Gu, 2007).

The findings of the present study directly answer the second research question through participants' narratives, suggesting the accommodation of personal aspirations and parenting roles, whilst maintaining career continuity. Work-life balance, therefore, was found to support the retention of the participants' careers, reinforcing the maintenance of enthusiasm and long-term professional dedication.

#### **4.5 Theme 3 – Evolving Motivators Over Time**

The concept of motivation in the teaching profession adapts and shapes in response to various personal and professional changes. Broad literature findings support the occurrence of the change of motivators over the PE teaching career, hence emphasising the role of professional experiences, personal circumstances, as well as institutional dynamics (Richardson & Watt, 2010; Richards & Templin, 2012; Kul et al., 2018). Different stages of a career reflect shifts from initial aspirations and ideals to more sustained drivers encompassing individuals' priorities and purpose. The final research question of the present study sought to answer whether and how motivators change over the years within the teaching profession. Therefore, the third theme interprets the change of motivators over time and aligns with the prior research studies demonstrating the fluidity of PE teacher motivation, shaped by contextual and developmental influences as discussed in the following subthemes.

##### ***4.5.1 Navigating Burnout and Challenges***

Across the gathered data from participants' narratives, it was identified that the sole influence of intrinsic enthusiasm and passion for the sport and subject of PE was insufficient in maintaining long-term job satisfaction and engagement. Several PE teachers involved in the present study highlighted the aspect of demotivation in the form of emotional exhaustion and systemic pressures, which ultimately result in increased signs of burnout. This is evident through participant P1's remark: "As time goes by, you'll get older, the energy is getting lower...", whilst also adding, "...in the long-term it becomes demotivating as well." This perspective aligns with findings by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017), which suggest that increased emotional and job demands, particularly in the teaching profession, often result in

fatigue and hence reduced motivation over time. When applied to the context of PE, the subject's physical aspect and varying student behaviour further pose challenges to sustained teacher effort.

Other participants outline additional emotional sacrifice which potentially leads to a change of motivation across the career. Participant P2 expresses, "There are challenges every day and you ask yourself, why am I doing this?", while P5 shares, "Lack of support from the school...my drive varies at times..." Such sentiments illustrate the findings by Collie, Shapka and Perry (2012), emphasising the role of systemic rigidity in leading to impacted emotional resilience of teachers. Persistent lack of autonomy and support, as mentioned earlier, seems to contribute towards demotivation, impacting PE teachers' committed engagement. In addition, the behavioural challenges of students are also identified as a limiting factor leading to teachers' demotivation. The dynamic and outdoor setting of PE lessons contributes to increased complexity and effort of class management, as indicated by participant P7, "Students' behaviour also affects... I felt burnt out managing difficult behaviour." This factor aligns with other studies emphasising the management of disruptive behaviour as one of the common predictors of teacher burnout, which can, however, be mitigated with sufficient institutional support (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018; Heinz, 2015).

Nevertheless, whilst many participants shared certain feelings of burnout and exhaustion, others indicated reflective and self-evaluative practices. For instance, participant P2 suggests, "Sometimes I see teachers who always complain... and I question myself." Such a response shows that witnessing colleagues' signs of burnout may prompt reflection of own feelings and experiences, thus in turn, potentially enhancing one's adaptive strategies and encouraging their commitment to the profession. Day and Gu (2007) link a strong professional identity to the effective sustainment of long-term commitment, even in challenging circumstances, suggesting that a reinforced sense of purpose can help reduce the impact of burnout and demotivation.

Ultimately, whilst the impaired impact on motivation may result from cumulative demands and lack of support throughout the career, PE teachers tend to seek coping strategies, as well as shifting expectations. The present study highlights the dynamic and

evolving dimensions of motivation, thus suggesting a significant impact of intrinsic and extrinsic pressures on teachers' sustainability over the years within the profession.

#### **4.5.2 Change of Professional Identity and Purpose**

The change of motivation towards teaching can further be noted through the evolution of professional identity over the course of teachers' careers. The present study conveys findings related to the transition from initial motivators rooted in passion for sport and enthusiasm for teaching to a deeper pedagogical meaning and refined professional role. This often stems from accumulating experiences, personal growth, and a shift in values (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Several participants of the study highlight the ways of their growth as educators, thus transitioning their motivation towards more intrinsic factors. This is particularly evident through participant P6's response, "Now, I'm more focused on the impact of what I do...rather than just enjoying teaching sports...". This narrative reflects a change from task-oriented teaching to outcome-driven motives, which consequently shows a renewed purpose of the profession. Although some studies suggest a shift towards extrinsic motivators in forms of income, social status and job stability (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Fokkens-Brunsmas & Canrinus, 2012), literature supports the development of increased and deeper inner motives that sustain teachers within the career (Watt & Richardson, 2007; See et al., 2020). Through gaining experience, teachers' aspect of identity continues to incline towards long-term effects on students and their achievement in contrast to instant performance.

Nonetheless, the progress within the profession is not always linear, which participant P2 highlights by stating: "I'm not as satisfied with the head of department role as with actual teaching." This statement indicates that role advancement might restrict the personal fulfilment of authentic professional identity, hence the intrinsic core of teaching. Kelcherman (2009) supports this view by suggesting that such tensions between professional self-concept and internal passion may result in re-evaluation and transformation of career path.

Ultimately, entering the teaching profession with a sense of purpose grounded in passion for sport and working with children is gradually shaped by personal and professional

experiences. The findings indicate that long-term retention appears to be influenced beyond the early motivators. Therefore, the evolution of professional identity and purpose in the form of self-perception and value of work seems to play a significant role in sustaining one's motivation towards teaching PE.

#### ***4.5.3 Evolving Sense of Purpose***

The evolution of one's life priorities indicates an overall change of personal circumstances and professional aspects of a teaching career, hence encompassing a wide range of contexts, roles, and priorities. Teachers' views and connections to their profession are inevitably influenced and reshaped over the course of their careers (Watt & Richardson, 2012; Watt & Richardson, 2018). The findings of this study present an inclination towards personal life priorities as a central role in preserving PE teachers' motivation.

The changing life context, involving varying teaching effort, can be noted through the narrative of participant P5 having 11 years of experience within the profession: "Back when I was in twenties, I really wanted to prove myself and grow in this profession...these days, with the kids, I'm still committed, but I put my energy into more important things..." Another participant, P3, stated: "Now that I have a family, I cannot focus all my attention on my job...family comes before...". These sentiments reflect the redistribution of effort and better alignment with new priorities which result from greater self-awareness rather than diminished motivation. New commitments often develop in the form of personal time and family well-being, which ultimately influence perceived work demands, selection of extra duties, and overall motivation for career success (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Richardson & Watt, 2018). The aspect of cognitive and emotional drift from ambition-driven efforts is consistent with Day and Gu's (2010) longitudinal research on professional identity, proposing that personal life gradually shapes career outlook.

Additionally, the shift of life goals may arise beyond the major life events such as starting a family, hence further factors are conveyed in participant P2's remark: "I didn't and still don't have a family of my own, but having time for myself...and to travel...teaching allowed me that flexibility." Whilst not encompassing the effort of parenting responsibility, this finding highlights the sense of autonomy and fulfilment that arises from the personal time afforded by the teaching profession.

Nevertheless, whilst the importance of the prevalence of intrinsic motivation is linked to meaningful retention within the career, Ryan and Deci (2000) argue that the complete absence of extrinsic rewards may diminish overall motivation over time. Consequently, the shift in personal priorities correlates with the increased priority of external factors, such as job security, pension, and working hours, which appear to influence teachers' long-term engagement in the profession (Watt and Richardson, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Whilst this shift towards different priorities may not comprehensively indicate a decline in professional commitment and enjoyment, it leans towards re-evaluation of what is currently valued. Such a form of adaptive professionalism reflects a deeper personal and professional maturation which sustains individual identity and commitment.

#### **4.6 Synthesis of Findings**

In response to the three key research questions of the present study, related to identifying initial and sustaining motivators, and their potential change throughout PE teachers' professional careers, this chapter examined the findings from participants' interview narratives. The use of thematic analysis as an investigation tool uncovered three major themes, from which various subthemes emerged, constructing a nuanced picture of PE teachers' motivation.

The start of the career of teaching PE was primarily identified with factors that were intrinsic in nature, mainly stemming from the passion for sport and physical activity, making an impact on students and their achievement, as well as developing a significant vocational identity. The literature on teacher motivation supports the presence of such personal drivers as pivotal for pursuing the PE teaching career. Research, therefore, suggests the importance of fulfilment, satisfaction, and enjoyment as the initial motivators behind teachers' choice of profession (Spittle & Spittle, 2014). Nonetheless, findings also revealed certain extrinsic factors associated with job attractiveness, which, as noted by several participants, relate to job security, working hours, and holidays; these were not presented as equally strong but were noted as complementary benefits supporting the pursuit of the profession.

The second research question was answered through Theme 2, which discussed how motivation is sustained among PE teachers, distinguishing between the notable impact of

both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. For instance, the subthemes of student-teacher relationships, as well as witnessing learners' development and success, reflect internal motivation for teaching, which appears to support teachers' ongoing commitment and professional satisfaction. Additionally, major external factors identified across participants' narratives are associated with support from administration and institutions, alongside the elements of work-life balance teaching career provides. These findings are aligned with Kunter and colleagues (2013), who highlight the crucial component of teacher retention being linked to working conditions and leadership quality. Incorporated together, such factors integrate dynamically across distinct stages of career, with internal motives dominating initial experiences, and evolving personal and professional demands being supported by external rewards. Such factors seem to facilitate long-term commitment of PE teachers by reinforcing their continuous motivation.

The final theme investigated the ways motivators change and shape throughout the course of PE teachers' careers. The dynamic nature of the profession contributes towards motivational factors that shift across years and individuals' maturation. One of the common subthemes relates to navigation of professional challenges impacting demotivation and burnout, hence emphasising the decline of initial intrinsic motivation due to continuous stress and work demands. Whilst not universal across all narratives, experiences of emotional exhaustion and questioning of career choice were captured from several PE teachers. The study by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) resonates with these findings by suggesting the direct correlation between decreased autonomy and intrinsic motives and teachers' risk of burnout.

Nevertheless, the impact of evolving professional identity and newly emerging personal priorities underscores the possibility of a gradual shift from intrinsic to extrinsic motivating factors. The presence of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is essential for sustaining long-term engagement in the teaching profession (Watt & Richardson, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Roth et al., 2007). Therefore, sustaining a balance between personal fulfilment and external rewards represents a critical means of aiding teachers' satisfaction, well-being, and prolonged commitment to the profession.

## **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis and interpretation of the initial, sustaining, and evolving factors influencing PE teachers' motivation. The major themes have illustrated the motivation of PE teachers across different stages of their careers and highlighted the way such motivators evolve. Rather than static, the motivation reflects a dynamic interplay between various factors, ranging from personal values to professional challenges, which together shape and influence the long-term teaching commitment.

While the core motives for entering the profession are primarily intrinsic in nature, extrinsic motivators become increasingly significant in sustaining teachers' engagement. The final chapter will reflect on these findings and offer practical implications and recommendations for promoting teacher development, supporting retention, and informing educational policy within the field of Physical Education.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Examining the factors influencing PE teachers' motivation on a local platform offers an understanding of the complex reasons for the initial choice and long-term engagement in the profession. The concluding chapter aims to reflect on the key insights of the present research by offering a concise overview of the study, together with the importance of the findings. This chapter further provides the major strengths and limitations of the study and incorporates practical recommendations based on participants' suggestions.

### **5.1 Revisiting the Purpose and Research Questions**

The present study was set to explore the dynamic concept of motivation influencing individuals' decisions to pursue and commit to the profession of teaching Physical Education in the long term. In relation to the current challenges of recruitment and retention of teachers, particularly in the field of PE, this research investigates motivators reflecting both theoretical and practical significance. Designed in line with previous literature suggesting the influence of personal, social, and environmental factors, the present study identified a range of interconnected elements shaping individuals' motivation.

Through a qualitative approach to data gathering and analysis, through the use of semi-structured interviews with eight PE teachers from primary and secondary schools, diverse and authentic perspectives and experiences have been captured. The distinct background of the participants, including their age and years of professional experience within a specific type of school, offered deep insights into early attractors and the profession's evolving nature over time. Corresponding to this, the study underpinned three key research questions:

1. What factors influence individuals to pursue a career in teaching?
2. What role do motivations play in sustaining a long-term commitment to the profession of teaching?
3. How do motivators change over the years?

These guiding questions shaped the thematic approach to data analysis, whilst further eliciting meaningful data from narratives and patterns of teachers' experiences. The following section provides an overview of the major findings and their relation to the study's research questions.

## 5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The present study's findings demonstrate an understanding of the multidimensional concept of motivation, which underscores individuals' choice to enter and remain in the career of teaching PE. Through the analysis of semi-structured interviews with PE teachers of diverse backgrounds and different educational settings in Malta, several frequent themes and subthemes have emerged that align with the study's core research questions. Identified themes consequently correspond to intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, and represent their change over time within the profession.

Initial motivation for pursuing a career in teaching PE was fundamentally grounded in an internal passion for sport and interest in being physically active from an early age (Spittle & Spittle, 2014; Spittle, Jackson and Casey, 2009). The majority of participants shared their schooling and extracurricular experiences from childhood that eventually influenced their professional aspirations. Further tied to role modelling, career choice as one of the central factors was therefore reinforced through engaging individuals in early socialisation and an environment focused on physical activity (Watt & Richardson, 2010; Klassen et al., 2011). The alignment with personal interests and the role of teaching PE ultimately contributed to obtaining a sense of vocational identity from the early years (Watt & Richardson, 2008; Fokkens-Bruinsma and Canrinus, 2012).

On the other hand, the impacts on sustaining motivation of PE teachers were identified to predominantly stem from perceived student engagement and success, reflecting the significance of intrinsic motivation. The aspect of student-teacher relations which encompasses meaningful interactions and support was recognised in association with job satisfaction, aligning with broad research that emphasises the role of relational rewards (Watt & Richardson, 2019). Additionally, the factors linking demotivation with professional disengagement over time often stem from an unsupportive work environment influenced by external conditions, hence highlighting the importance of administrative support and recognition (Toropova et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

Ultimately, motivation over the course of a teaching career was reported as evolving in accordance with varying life priorities and circumstances. Several participants remarked on the importance of job security and work benefits in relation to starting a family and other

personal factors. Whilst increased motivation amongst certain participants was linked to renewed purpose and professional identity, others' experience of high work demands and systemic pressures translated to diminished drive for commitment. Such findings support the association between teacher motivation and the strong influence of life-stage development, across which long-term retention constitutes adapting to changing needs and values (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Day & Gu, 2007).

### **5.3 Strengths and Limitations**

Offering several strengths associated with the present research study, teachers' motivation in a local context was thoroughly analysed and discussed. The use of a qualitative approach encompassing face-to-face semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth investigation of personal experiences, together with valuable insights into major motivating factors through unique narratives. Additionally, the breadth and transferability of the results were targeted through the recruitment of participants from diverse school sectors, varying backgrounds and years of professional experience.

Nevertheless, the study reflects certain limitations which must be acknowledged. The aspect of generalisability was limited beyond the current context due to a small sample size. The data that emerged from the eight participants relies on self-reporting, which may trigger recall bias, leading to less accurate perceptions of past motivation through the present lens. The study additionally lacks the perspectives from the context of other stakeholders, which would provide a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the dynamics of motivation. Together, such limitations may impact the credibility and validity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018), resulting in limited interpretation and limited applicability of the conclusions to a broader population beyond the current setting.

Although the existing literature reflects the findings of the present study, further research is needed to provide greater evidence and, in turn, establish higher levels of transferability and validity to readers. Nonetheless, holistic support, as one of the key factors, must be further explored with the aim of enhancing teacher well-being, job satisfaction, and ultimately, motivation.

## **5.4 Implications and Practical Recommendations**

The findings of the present study reflect several significant implications targeting educational policy and leadership with the aim of supporting and retaining motivated PE teachers. By exploring initial and sustaining motivators across the PE teaching career, potential strategies may be derived both from personal and administrative standpoint, aiming to enhance teacher motivation.

### **5.4.1 Teacher Strategies**

The findings discussed in Chapter 5 highlight the need for teachers' personal commitment to maintain their motivation throughout their careers. Sustaining the major motivators is often challenged by insufficient support and recognition, increased work demands, as well as students' disengagement and behaviour issues.

Aside from working conditions and external support, Vermunt (2011) suggests that sharing experiences with colleagues, obtaining new knowledge, and reflecting on both successes and challenges can promote self-improvement and help mitigate demotivation. Reflective practice maintains individuals' growth mindset by encouraging teachers to evaluate their personal values and teaching competencies. This, in turn, supports self-directed professional development. Furthermore, reflection allows educators to connect to the core purpose of their role and, in collaboration with colleagues, strengthen professional identity and implement innovative teaching strategies. (Kelchtermans, 2005; Armour & Yelling, 2007).

A significant common demotivating factor identified in participants' narratives relates to students' disengagement and disruptive behaviour. Improving class management, particularly addressing behaviour challenges, translates to enhanced intrinsic satisfaction of teachers as well as their professional self-worth. To mitigate burnout, teachers may benefit from adopting more inclusive student-centred pedagogical approaches and tailored behaviour management. This would foster a more positive and engaging learning environment, ultimately contributing to sustaining teacher motivation.

#### **5.4.2 Administrative Actions**

Analysed data reflects the pivotal role of sport experiences in early years together with positive role models, in shaping what constitutes a fundamental base for initiating the decision to enter the profession of teaching Physical Education. Providing high-quality PE opportunities and programs, extending beyond a sole focus on physical activity, ultimately leads to promoting confidence, enjoyment and interest in sport, which together influence students' occupational socialisation. Motivated PE teachers, therefore, represent a critical role in fostering positive attitudes towards PE and consequently promoting future career considerations within the field (Spittle et al., 2009).

Emerging findings further represent the interrelated dynamics between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. Personal fulfilment and professional relationships have been correlated to sustained engagement in a career, which was noted through participants' remarks about the satisfaction of witnessing student progress and working in a collaborative environment. According to Ryan and Deci (2017), the establishment of adequate autonomy, competence, and relatedness among teachers translates to a supportive working environment. Such school climate recognises the values and efforts of PE teachers, hence enhancing their well-being, and ultimately, reducing attrition rates (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Education administrators are therefore encouraged to prioritise cultivating a positive school climate. This additionally contributes to a sense of perceived value and connectedness, particularly critical in the state and church school settings, where sufficient teacher support may be limited. Further administrative support can be provided by offering more frequent and ongoing Professional Development opportunities tailored specifically for the needs of PE educators (Armour & Yelling, 2007). These initiatives contribute towards encouraging the enhancement of pedagogical competences and job satisfaction, hence directly influence motivation levels and long-term professional fulfilment.

#### **5.5 Future Research Directions**

The present study provides significant insights into the motivating factors influencing Physical Education teachers' careers in Malta. Nevertheless, additional research is needed to broaden the understanding as well as the generalisability of data. Future research studies

may also involve longitudinal designs that explore contextual differences shaping motivation across various career stages, incorporating a more diverse sample of participants from distinct school regions and levels.

Additionally, examining factors in relation to policy-level, such as the National Curriculum Framework and other agendas, could accentuate the importance of systemic support in influencing motivation. Future research should consider how these educational policies are perceived and implemented within institutions, and whether discrepancies occur between proposed reforms and teachers' experiences.

Nonetheless, the adoption of a mixed-method approach may further elevate the validity and depth of findings. Such an approach could aid in establishing a stronger correlation between motivational factors and key outcomes in the form of job satisfaction, teacher well-being, and attrition (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). These would contribute towards better comprehension of the interrelation between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards within educational contexts, hence offering a deeper insight into a combination of policies and practices.

## **5.6 Concluding Remarks**

This study has investigated the complex nature of motivation among Physical Education teachers in Malta, providing in-depth insight into the initial and ongoing factors that influence their professional paths. While the significance of intrinsic rewards emerged in connection with a passion for sport and the desire to leave a positive impact on students, the growing influence of extrinsic factors such as administrative support and professional development opportunities was highlighted as essential for maintaining engagement over time.

Valuable insights into teacher motivation were further ensured through the analysis across different perspectives and teaching contexts, as well as the interrelation with both personal and systemic dynamics. This reinforced the importance of supportive environments from the teacher and school levels, aiming to maintain the long-term commitment to the profession.

As educational landscapes proceed to evolve, fostering resilient and motivated educators remains critical for student achievement and broader school enhancements. It is therefore hoped that the present research's findings serve as a foundation for future studies, together with guiding professional practice, inspiring improvements, and ultimately supporting the motivation and well-being of PE teachers in Malta and beyond.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix 1: Final FREC Approval



### Faculty of Education

University of Malta  
Msida MSD 2080, Malta

Tel: +356 2340 3058/2932  
educ@um.edu.mt

[www.um.edu.mt/educ](http://www.um.edu.mt/educ)

28<sup>th</sup> October 2024

### **RE: Application for Research Ethics Clearance EDUC-2024-00685 Jana Dabic**

Dear Jana Dabic,

With reference to your application EDUC-2024-00685 Jana Dabic for Research Ethics clearance, I am pleased to inform you that **FREC finds no ethical or data protection issues in terms of content and procedure.**

**You may therefore proceed to approach potential informants to collect data using the tools/documents outlined in this application.**

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Gravina", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Dr Joseph Gravina  
Chairperson Faculty Research Ethics Committee  
Faculty of Education

## Appendix 2: Interview Questions

### **Semi-structured Interview Questions**

#### **Research Questions**

- *What factors influence the choice of the teaching profession?*
  - *What role do motivators play in sustaining long-term commitment to the teaching profession?*
  - *Do motivators change over the years?*
- 

#### **Introduction**

1. How many years have you been teaching Physical Education?
2. Was there a specific moment of person who initially inspired you to pursue a career in teaching, specifically Physical Education? If so, how?

#### **Influencing Factors and Motivators**

3. What were the main factors that influenced your decision to become a teacher? (in terms of personal interests, inspirations, societal and cultural factors, etc)
4. Were there any external factors that played a role in your decision, such as job market conditions and education policies?
5. What personal motivators (intrinsic) led you to opt for a career in teaching Physical Education? (for instance, passion for working with children, interest in the subject, etc)
6. How important was the aspect of job stability and benefits in teaching choice?
7. How did the job prospects and employment opportunities for Physical Education teachers in Malta affect your decision?

#### **Long-term Sustainability**

8. What motivators help sustain your commitment to teaching *nowadays*?  
(For instance: Intrinsic – personal satisfaction, sense of accomplishment.  
Extrinsic – recognition, career opportunities)
9. Have you faced any challenges or obstacles that made you reconsider your career choice? How did you overcome them?
10. Are there any support systems that help you maintain devotion to teaching Physical Education (such as family, community, professional development, etc)?

#### **Change of Motivators Over Time**

11. Do you believe your motivators for staying in the teaching profession have changed over time? How?
12. Are there any new motivators that have emerged over the years?
13. Do you foresee your motivators evolving in the future?

#### **Conclusion**

14. What advice would you give someone considering a career in Physical Education teaching in Malta?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your journey as a Physical Education teacher or the motivations behind your career choice?

# Appendix: Informed Consent Form

## Participant Information Letter and Consent Form

### **Information about the study**

My name is Jana Dabic and I am a student at the University of Malta, reading for a Master in Teaching and Learning in Physical Education. I am presently conducting research as part of my dissertation titled 'Understanding motivators and influences behind the choice of the teaching profession of Physical Education teachers in Malta'; this is being supervised by Ms Samantha Farrugia (samantha.tabone@yahoo.com). The aim of my study is to obtain a better understanding of the motivation and factors within the teaching profession, both internal and external, as well as the initial and ongoing factors, and how they change over time.

### **Your Participation**

Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting 30 to 60 minutes. The interview will be composed of a set of open-ended questions that will capture your perspectives and experiences of teaching. The data collected will be thematically analyzed in order to examine the initial influences of choosing the profession of teaching Physical Education, as well as the role of motivation in the long-term commitment to the profession.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason.

You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from you will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is anonymized or published), unless the erasure of data would render it impossible or seriously impair the achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in an anonymized form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you as a participant. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

### **Data Management**

The data collected will be treated confidentially and it will be fully anonymised. The data gathered will be stored encrypted on a password-protected computer with sole access by myself (researcher) and the supervisor.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify, and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased. All data collected will be erased on 31/12/2025.

Your identity will be attributed only with your consent.

---

**Participant's consent**

- I hereby declare to have read the information about the nature of the study, my involvement and data management.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and my questions have been satisfactorily answered.
- I declare that I am 18 years or older.
- I understand that should I have any further queries, I can contact Jana Dabic via email at [jana.dabic.20@um.edu.mt](mailto:jana.dabic.20@um.edu.mt) or the respective supervisor Samantha Farrugia via email at [samantha.tabone@yahoo.com](mailto:samantha.tabone@yahoo.com).
- I agree to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's name (in block)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's name (in block)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

---

**Contact details**

Researcher - Jana Dabic

Supervisor: Samantha Farrugia

Mobile number: 77145338

Mobile number: 79290352

Email: [jana.dabic.20@um.edu.mt](mailto:jana.dabic.20@um.edu.mt)

Email: [samantha.tabone@yahoo.com](mailto:samantha.tabone@yahoo.com)