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Exploring teacher attrition, retention and relocation in a Dutch urban context

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Introduction: Teacher shortages are a growing concern, particularly in urban areas where retaining teachers is increasingly challenging. This study examines the factors influencing teacher attrition, retention, and relocation in Dutch primary education and explores how these factors differ across teachers who leave the profession, remain in urban schools, or relocate to schools outside Amsterdam.

Methods: A comparative qualitative design was employed, combining semi-structured interviews with a card-sorting task based on the four-capital model of teacher retention and attrition. The sample comprised former teachers ($n = 13$), current teachers in Amsterdam ($n = 9$), and teachers who had relocated from Amsterdam to another school ($n = 7$). This multi-method approach enabled both an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences and a structured comparison across groups.

Results: Workload, limited intellectual stimulation and task variety, and insufficient flexibility emerged as the main contributors to teacher attrition. Factors supporting retention included enjoyment of working with children, making a societal contribution, and positive collegial relationships. Relocation decisions were primarily driven by housing affordability, long commuting distances, and inadequate travel reimbursement, highlighting the importance of urban contextual factors.

Conclusion: The findings demonstrate that teacher attrition, retention, and relocation are shaped by distinct but interconnected factors. Strengthening school leadership, improving induction and classroom management support, and addressing housing and commuting barriers may help reduce teacher shortages and improve teacher retention in urban areas.

KEYWORDS

attrition, primary education, relocation, retention, teachers

1 Introduction

The persistent teacher shortage poses a challenge to educational systems worldwide, reflecting imbalances in the supply, retention, and distribution of qualified teachers. These shortages are problematic, as they often force schools to hire unqualified teachers, which can negatively impact student learning (Sutcher et al., 2019). They also exacerbate educational inequities as shortages are higher in schools with a greater percentage of disadvantaged students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Dupriez et al., 2016). The Netherlands faces a severe shortage, with 10% of primary education positions currently unfilled (Adriaens et al., 2023), a problem that is even more

pronounced in urban areas where schools often serve a higher proportion of disadvantaged students (Adriaens et al., 2023; Inspectorate of Education, 2024).

In the Netherlands, as well as in several other countries, teacher attrition and relocation are key mechanisms underlying these shortages in urban contexts, as attrition rates tend to be higher in large cities and many teachers relocate from urban to suburban and rural schools (e.g., Bedasso and Acosta, 2025; Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2023; Tan et al., 2026). In this study, teacher attrition refers to teachers leaving the profession altogether, teacher relocation refers to teachers who remain in the profession but move from urban schools to suburban or rural settings, and teacher retention refers to teachers who continue working in urban schools over time. To examine these dynamics in depth, this study focuses on Amsterdam, the largest city in the Netherlands, where the teacher shortage is among the highest in the country (18.7%; Adriaens et al., 2023). As a large urban context with acute staffing challenges, Amsterdam provides a relevant case for understanding the factors that shape teacher attrition, retention, and relocation in cities more broadly.

The Dutch primary education system is characterized by a high degree of flexibility in school choice for both teachers and parents, allowing movement across schools and regions beyond strict geographical boundaries. Virtually all schools are publicly funded. This context makes the Netherlands, and particularly urban areas such as Amsterdam, a relevant setting for studying teacher attrition, retention, and relocation.

A substantial body of research has examined teacher attrition and retention (e.g., Borman and Dowling, 2008; Madigan and Kim, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2020). A recent meta-analysis, which primarily included studies based on survey data or administrative records, found that teacher retention is influenced by administrative support, mentoring, induction programs, high-quality professional development, effectiveness of school leaders, and salary (Nguyen et al., 2020). However, studies based on surveys and administrative data are limited in scope, as they can only examine the specific factors related to teacher retention and attrition that are explicitly included in the data. Moreover, the interplay between these factors is generally not well understood (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Qualitative studies provide in-depth insights into the factors underlying teacher attrition, retention, and relocation, highlighting the importance of, for example, workload, autonomy, and professional relationships (Amitai and Van Houtte, 2022; Arthur and Bradley, 2023; Buchanan, 2009; Heffernan et al., 2022; Seelig and McCabe, 2021). However, qualitative research often focuses on specific groups—interviewing either former or current teachers, but rarely both within the same study. This limits direct comparison across groups and makes it difficult to understand how working conditions are experienced differently by teachers who stay, leave, or relocate to other schools. Furthermore, the urban dimension has received limited attention in qualitative work, leaving a gap in understanding how the specific characteristics of working in urban schools shape teachers' decisions to stay, leave, or relocate.

This study addresses these gaps through a comparative, multi-method design that examines which factors contribute to teacher attrition, relocation, and retention in urban schools. Including three different groups—teachers who left the profession,

teachers who moved away from Amsterdam, and teachers who remained teaching in Amsterdam—allows for a direct comparison of how these factors are experienced and interpreted differently within a single urban context, offering a more integrated understanding of the mechanisms underlying urban teacher shortages.

By combining semi-structured open interviews with a card-sorting task, we explore teachers' experiences in depth while situating them within Mason and Matas's (2015) theoretical model, which serves as an analytical framework for identifying the most salient factors in the Dutch urban context and any additional context-specific influences. This study is guided by the following research questions:

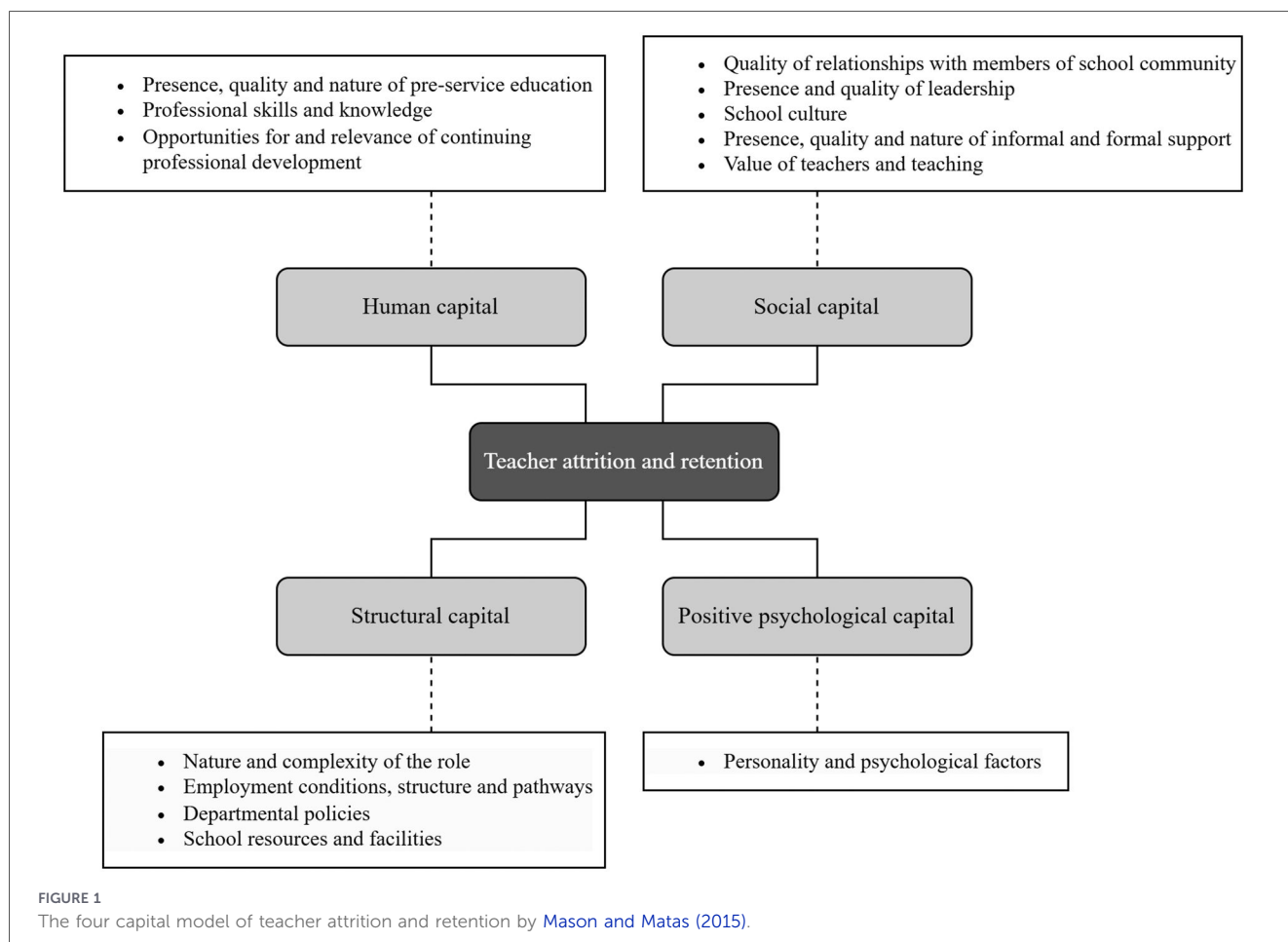
1. What factors contribute to teacher attrition, relocation, and retention in Amsterdam primary schools, and how do these factors differ across the three groups?
2. How do the factors contributing to teacher attrition, relocation, and retention interrelate, and how do these interrelationships differ across groups?
3. To what extent do the themes identified in Mason and Matas's (2015) theoretical model apply to the urban Dutch context, and what additional context-specific factors emerge?

1.1 Theoretical framework

This study uses the four capital model of teacher retention and attrition by Mason and Matas (2015) to gain a broad understanding of the different factors influencing teacher attrition and retention. Mason and Matas (2015) developed their theoretical model based on a thematic content analysis of Australian literature, identifying thirteen key themes influencing teachers' decisions to remain in or leave the profession. Mason and Matas (2015) organized these thirteen themes into four types of capital, as shown in Figure 1. Each capital type consists of a subset of these themes, which are discussed below.

Human capital refers to the skills, knowledge, and competencies teachers acquire and apply (Becker, 1962). Within human capital, Mason and Matas (2015) identified three themes. The first theme concerns teacher education, focusing on how well-prepared teachers feel when entering the profession. The second theme relates to teachers' professional skills and knowledge, such as their ability to implement effective behavior management strategies and to design and conceptualize lessons independently. The third theme addresses the opportunities for continuous professional development to help teachers improve their skills.

Social capital pertains to the relationships between individuals and the reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from those relationships (Mason and Matas, 2015). The distinction between human and social capital lies in their nature: human capital is personal and intrinsic to the individual, whereas social capital is shared among individuals (Leana, 2010). Within social capital, Mason and Matas (2015) identified five themes. The first theme within the social capital framework encompasses relationships within the school, such as with colleagues or students. The second theme involves leadership, which is closely related to school culture, as the strength of leadership largely determines this. High school leader turnover can negatively affect the



quality of the leadership. School culture, which is the third theme within social capital, is built over time, but can be felt immediately when teachers enter a new workplace. School culture can be strongly influenced by poor student behavior. The fourth theme concerns the presence of support, such as mentorship programs and feedback, which can help teachers feel supported in their work. Last, the theme value of teachers and teaching entails the profession's prestige and whether the public perception of teaching accurately reflects its demands and responsibilities.

Structural capital focuses on the context in which teachers work, including the physical infrastructure, such as school buildings, resources, technical equipment, and procedural elements within schools. Within structural capital, Mason and Matas (2015) identified four themes. The first theme is the nature and complexity of the teacher's role, which relates to workload, administrative tasks, and the level of responsibility teachers carry. It also refers to whether the expectations of the teacher's role align with the realities of the job. The second theme concerns employment conditions, which include salary, job security, and travel expenses. Departmental policies are the third theme and relate to organizational arrangements within schools. The final theme within structural capital is school resources and facilities, such as the availability of teaching materials and sufficient staffing, including support staff for students' social and emotional needs.

Positive psychological capital refers to personality traits of teachers that contribute to productivity, such as commitment,

resilience, and motivation (Mason and Matas, 2015). Positive psychological capital highlights that internal factors, such as personal motivation and coping strategies, significantly shape teachers' career paths.

In the next sections, we map the factors that influence teachers' decisions to leave, stay, or relocate from the city onto the four capital model by Mason and Matas (2015), allowing us to examine how different forms of capital relate to these decisions.

2 Methods and materials

2.1 Participants and recruitment

This study focuses on three subgroups of primary school teachers in Amsterdam: teachers currently teaching at a primary school in Amsterdam, teachers who previously taught in Amsterdam but relocated to schools elsewhere, and former teachers who left the profession entirely. Participants were eligible if they worked or had worked at least three days per week at a primary school. Former teachers and relocated teachers were included only if they had left the profession or Amsterdam within the past five years, and for former teachers it was required that their last school was situated in Amsterdam. The three-day minimum was chosen to ensure substantial engagement with the teaching profession, as part-time teachers

working fewer days may have different experiences, particularly concerning workload. The five-year limit was implemented to ensure that participants' experiences remained relevant to current school conditions, acknowledging that policies, work environments, and educational challenges can change over time.

Participants were recruited by emailing all schools in the city with a study invitation, including an online link and a request to share it with their current and former teachers. To further increase the sample size, the online invitation was also posted on a social media page for teachers in Amsterdam. Teachers could register by completing a brief online questionnaire providing personal information and details about their current or most recent school. This information was used to ensure diversity in school environments (regarding percentage of disadvantaged students, school denomination, size, and location) and individual characteristics (i.e., gender, years of experience, and career trajectory, including both early- and mid-career entrants).

Of the 121 initial registrations, 61 participants met the eligibility criteria for interview inclusion. The complete participant flow is presented in [Figure 2](#). From these 61 eligible participants, 29 were ultimately included in the final interview sample: 9 currently employed teachers, 7 relocated teachers, and 13 former teachers. Data collection continued until both code and meaning saturation were reached within each of the three subgroups ([Hennink et al., 2017](#)). Code saturation was determined through an inductive coding process in which multiple researchers independently coded subsets of the interviews; as new codes became increasingly rare across subsequent interviews, it indicated that the main themes and subthemes were adequately captured. Meaning saturation was reached when additional interviews no longer yielded new insights, confirmed by systematically comparing new data against existing themes. Together, these criteria ensured that the final sample of 29 participants was sufficient to address the research questions for each subgroup and to support the comparative aims of the study.

The characteristics of the participants are presented in [Table 1](#). The sample was predominantly female, reflecting the broader gender distribution in Dutch primary education. The sample was purposively selected to ensure variation in teaching experience, career trajectories, school type, and school context. This variation adds contextual richness to the data, though the study was not designed to systematically compare differences between school types or experience levels. All names used in the study are pseudonyms.

2.2 Data collection

Before data collection this study was reviewed and approved by the Scientific and Ethical Review Board (VCWE) of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (Protocol/Approval Number: VCWE-2023-110). The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. The data collection consisted of an interview followed by a card-sorting task, lasting approximately one hour per participant. Participants determined the interview location to ensure they felt at ease and were more likely to open up about their experiences ([Dempsey et al., 2016](#)).

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted using a narrative inquiry approach. This approach emphasizes the participant's personal and social considerations impacting their

choices ([Clandinin and Connelly, 2000](#)). Each interview began with questions about participants' motivations for entering the profession, their pre-service education, and their perceptions of how well this training prepared them for teaching. Participants then described experiences throughout their careers. This approach ensured that the focus remained on the factors participants identified as important, rather than those the researchers expected to influence attrition ([Kutsyruba and Stasel, 2023](#)). Finally, participants were asked to reflect on factors affecting their job satisfaction. Teachers who left the profession explained their reasons for exiting, while current teachers discussed whether they had considered leaving and why. Teachers who relocated from the city were asked about their motivations for moving to a school outside Amsterdam.

A potential limitation of interviews is that participants may be unaware of important factors influencing their career choices ([Bihu, 2020](#)). To address this, a post-interview card-sorting task was conducted, prompting participants to reflect on a broad set of predefined factors ([Faiks and Hyland, 2000](#); [Rugg and McGeorge, 1997](#)). The factors were derived from the themes within the theoretical model of [Mason and Matas \(2015\)](#) (see [Appendix A](#) for all cards). To enhance clarity and interpretability for participants, broader themes (e.g., nature and complexity of the role) were subdivided into more concrete factors, and some themes were simplified in wording to enhance clarity for the teacher participants. During the task, participants were asked to sort these factors (presented as cards) into a two-dimensional diagram. Specifically, they positioned each factor based on (1) how important they perceived the factor to be in their career decisions and (2) their level of satisfaction with that factor (see [Figure 3](#)). Importance and satisfaction were both measured on a five-point ordinal scale ranging from very unimportant/very dissatisfied to very important/very satisfied. These ratings were recorded for each participant and for each individual factor in a structured dataset, allowing systematic comparison of scores across participants and subgroups. As these ratings were systematically recorded for each participant and factor, the card-sorting task captured participants' own evaluations of both importance and satisfaction for each factor. This approach enabled us to examine how these evaluations aligned with or differed from the factors mentioned in the interviews, and it supplemented the interview data by prompting reflection on factors participants may not have initially considered. Participants were asked to think aloud during the task, offering insights into their decision-making and enabling follow-up questions ([Conrad and Tucker, 2019](#); [Goodman et al., 2012](#); [Saunders, 2015](#)).

Before data collection, a pilot study was conducted with six (former) teachers, two from each subgroup, to assess the interview duration and to identify potential issues with the instruments, such as unclear or abstract questions and cards ([Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001](#)). Based on feedback, several questions and cards were adjusted.

2.3 Analysis

The interviews and discussions during the card-sorting task were transcribed. Both deductive and inductive coding processes were used, ensuring a comprehensive analysis that balances

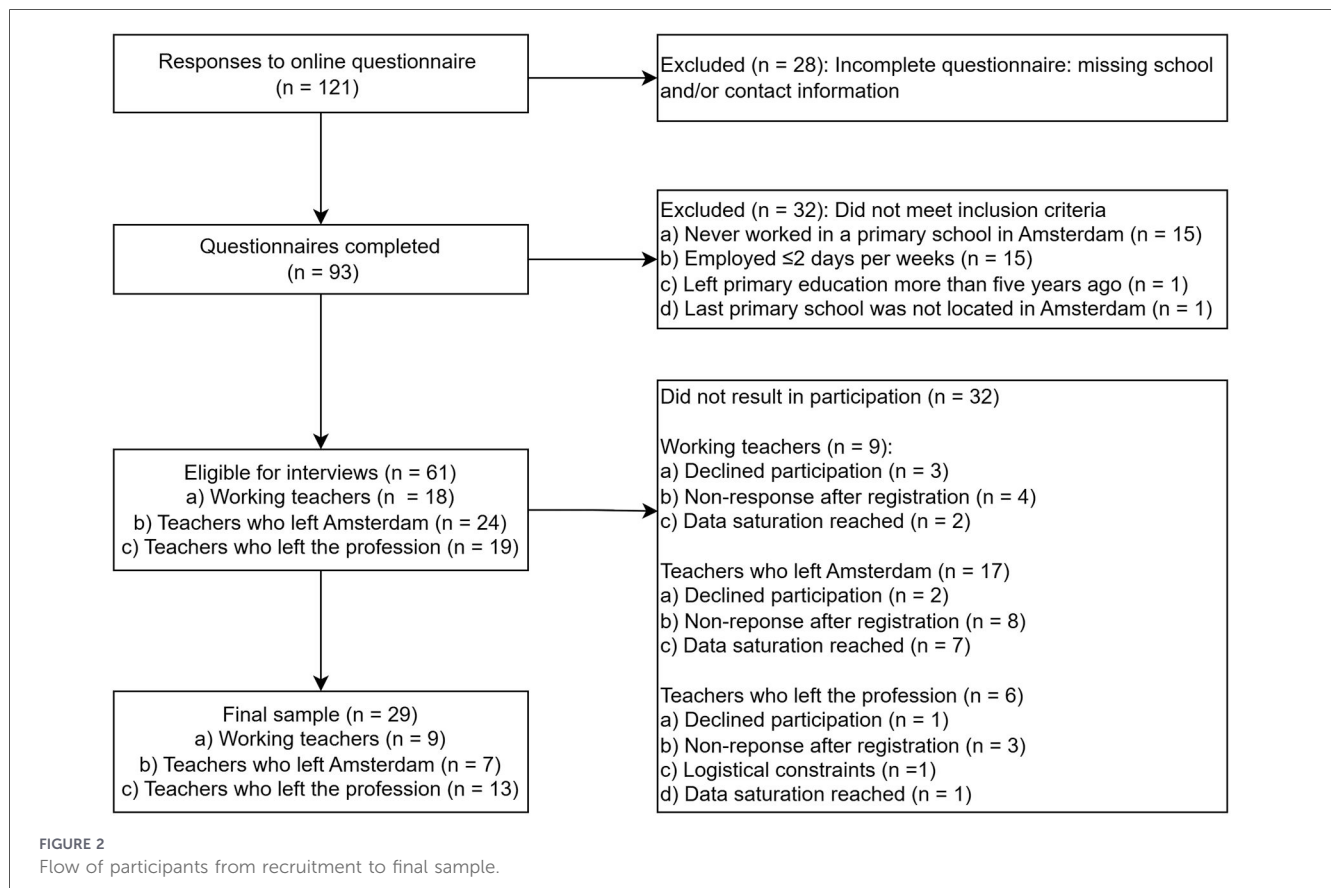


TABLE 1 Participant characteristics by subgroup.

Characteristic	Current teachers in Amsterdam (n = 9)	Teachers relocated from Amsterdam (n = 7)	Former teachers (n = 13)	Total (N = 29)
Female, n (%)	7 (77.8)	5 (71.4)	10 (76.9)	22 (75.9)
Male, n (%)	2 (22.2)	2 (28.6)	3 (23.1)	7 (24.1)
Years of teaching experience, M (range)	16.1 (3–40)	8.0 (5–13)	9.0 (1–26)	10.9 (1–40)
Regular primary education, n (%)	8 (88.9)	6 (85.7)	12 (92.3)	26 (89.7)
Special primary education (SBO), n (%)	1 (11.1)	1 (14.3)	1 (7.7)	3 (10.3)

Participants were purposively selected to ensure variation in career trajectories and school contexts.

insights from the literature with emergent themes from the data. First, a list of deductive codes was established based on the themes within the model of [Mason and Matas \(2015\)](#). The coding scheme was then refined by inductively adding new codes based on an analysis of a randomly selected one-third of the transcripts, proportionally distributed across the subgroups. This process allowed for capturing themes not initially included in the model. Codes were developed for specific questions, such as reasons for becoming a teacher, leaving the profession, and factors influencing this decision. If a clear negative or positive opinion about a factor was expressed, the factors were coded as such.

The intercoder reliability was calculated for each code based on a subset of coded transcripts for coding validation. Codes

with lower agreement were discussed in meetings involving all researchers to identify sources of disagreement and clarify code definitions. Following these discussions, the coding framework was refined and the transcripts were recoded until satisfactory agreement was reached. Final coding decisions were made through consensus among the research team. The refined coding template was then systematically applied to the entire dataset of interview transcripts to ensure consistency in coding between the researchers. Of the transcripts, 25% were independently coded by all four researchers. The interrater reliability was calculated using Krippendorff's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.81, indicating substantial agreement between the researchers ([Hayes and Krippendorff 2007](#)).



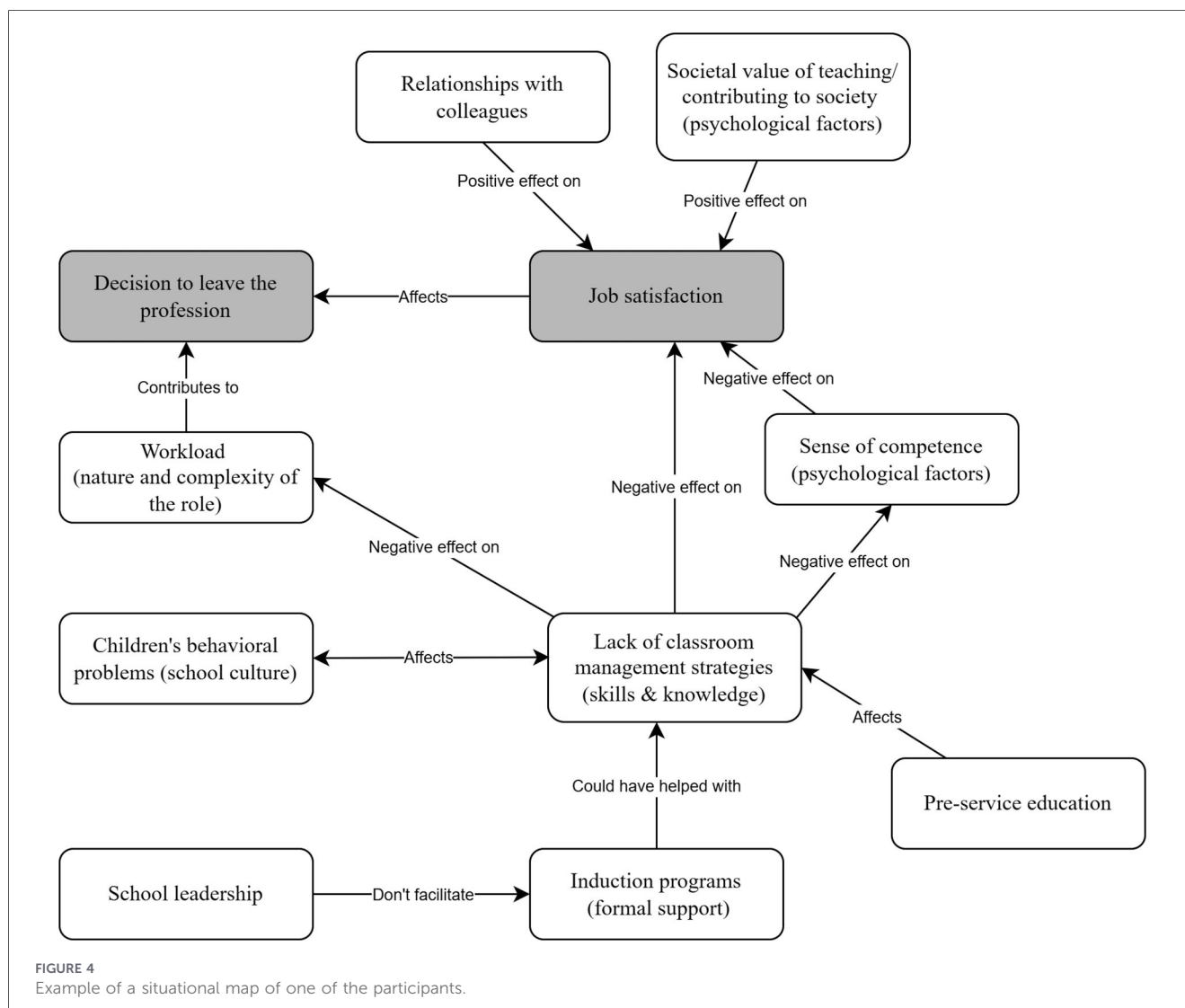
After coding the data, co-occurrence and code-document analysis were conducted to identify the most prominent combinations between specific questions, such as ‘reasons for leaving the profession’ and associated factors. Situational analysis was employed to gain deeper insight into the relationships between different job aspects (Clarke, 2005). Situational maps were created for each participant to determine how various factors were interrelated and how they influenced their job satisfaction and decision to stay or leave (see Figure 4). A spreadsheet was compiled to document all identified relationships for each subgroup, specifying whether each relationship was classified as positive, negative, or neutral. The factors identified as most influential for teacher attrition, retention, and relocation were determined through an iterative assessment of their prominence across participants and subgroups, the extent to which participants explicitly described them as influencing their career decisions, the depth with which they were discussed, and their position within the broader network of relationships identified through the situational analysis. Consistent with Braun and Clarke (2006), the identification of influential factors was informed by their analytical relevance to the research question rather than by frequency alone. Prominence was assessed by examining how widely a factor was represented across participants. Differences between subgroups were considered by examining whether a factor was common across all three groups or was particularly characteristic of one subgroup. Depth reflected the extent to which participants elaborated on a factor and connected it to their career decisions. The broader network of relationships was assessed through the situational maps by examining how often factors were interconnected with other factors and the extent to which participants emphasized the interconnectedness of the factors. Based on these criteria, an initial set of candidate factors was identified. Factors that consistently emerged across multiple criteria—for example, those that were widely represented,

discussed in depth, closely linked to career decisions, and strongly interconnected with other factors—were retained for further discussion by the research team. Where differences in interpretation arose, the researchers revisited the coded interview excerpts and situational maps, discussed alternative interpretations, and refined the factor definitions until consensus was reached. The resulting factors were then compared to the themes outlined in the model proposed by Mason and Matas (2015) to assess whether they could be incorporated within existing themes or whether new themes had emerged.

As a final step, the card-sorting data were integrated with the interview findings. Card placements were recorded for each participant, capturing their ratings of each factor on both importance and satisfaction. For each factor, mean scores were calculated per subgroup and compared across groups to identify patterns in how factors were evaluated. Additionally, participants’ think-aloud reasoning during the task was transcribed and coded using the same coding scheme as the interviews. These quantitative patterns and qualitative codes were then compared with the themes that emerged from the interviews, allowing us to examine convergence and divergence between what participants mentioned and how they evaluated predefined factors.

2.4 Trustworthiness

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were employed. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation by combining interviews with a card-sorting task, pilot testing of the instruments, and the continued collection of data until code and meaning saturation were reached. Dependability was supported through the systematic development and refinement of the coding framework, independent coding by multiple researchers, and the assessment of intercoder agreement. Confirmability was enhanced



through regular discussions among the research team regarding coding decisions and interpretation of the findings. Finally, transferability was supported by purposively selecting participants from diverse career trajectories and school contexts and by providing detailed descriptions of the study setting and sample characteristics.

3 Results

This section presents the key findings from the analysis regarding the factors that most strongly influence teachers' decisions to leave, stay, or relocate from the city. Table 2 provides an overview of the dominant patterns observed across the three participant groups, highlighting how key factors were experienced by current teachers in Amsterdam, teachers who relocated from Amsterdam, and former teachers. Table 3 summarizes the three most influential factors for each category and how the factors can be subsumed into the themes and capital types of the theoretical model by Mason and Matas (2015). Additionally, Table 3 shows which factors and themes are interrelated with other themes. In a few cases, the analyses revealed factors that were not explicitly included in the theoretical model (denoted by *), or that did not

align with the existing themes, leading to new thematic categories (denoted by **). It is important to note that a single factor rarely drove teachers' decisions; instead, they resulted from a complex interplay of multiple factors across different themes.

The following sections provide a detailed discussion of the factors outlined in Tables 2, 3. Specifically, we explore how each factor contributed to participants' decisions related to attrition, retention, and relocation, and examine the indirect influence of the associated themes. Given the prominent role of leadership quality across multiple factors, this theme is addressed in a separate section. Finally, the results of the card-sorting task are presented.

3.1 Three main reasons for leaving the teaching profession

3.1.1 Workload

Workload emerged as the most prominent factor associated with attrition. Mason and Matas (2015) subsumed workload into the theme 'nature and complexity of the role', which is part of structural capital. Although workload was discussed by all three participant groups,

TABLE 2 Comparison of the main factors influencing teacher attrition, retention, and relocation across participant groups.

Factor	Current teachers in Amsterdam	Teachers relocated from Amsterdam	Former teachers
Workload	Experienced as a source of dissatisfaction, primarily due to the volume of work	Mentioned as a source of dissatisfaction, but generally not a primary reason for relocation	Experienced as a source of dissatisfaction, primarily due to the intensity of the work; frequently cited as a reason for attrition
Intellectual stimulation and task variety	Experienced some dissatisfaction, but often mitigated by taking on additional responsibilities within education	Experienced some dissatisfaction; for some, this contributed to considering leaving the profession	Frequently experienced as a source of dissatisfaction and often cited as a reason for attrition
Flexibility	Experienced some dissatisfaction, but generally not considered important enough to leave the profession	Rarely discussed and generally evaluated positively	Frequently experienced as a source of dissatisfaction and often cited as a reason for attrition
Relationships with colleagues	Experienced as a strong source of support and retention	Experienced positively and often mentioned as a reason for delaying or reconsidering relocation	Experienced more variably; some reported dissatisfaction with collegial relationships
Enjoyment of working with children	Generally experienced positively and described as an important retention factor	Generally experienced positively and remained an important retention factor	Often experienced less strongly or reported to have diminished over time
Societal contribution	Experienced as an important retention factor	Experienced as an important retention factor both before and after relocation	Continued to be valued despite leaving the profession
School leadership	Generally experienced positively, particularly regarding support with workload, challenge, and flexibility	Experienced variably; for some, dissatisfaction contributed to relocation decisions	Frequently experienced negatively, with insufficient support and guidance reported in areas such as workload and flexibility
Housing affordability	Rarely discussed	Frequently experienced as a source of dissatisfaction and a major reason for relocation	Rarely discussed
Commuting distance and travel costs	Rarely discussed	Frequently experienced as a source of dissatisfaction and a major reason for relocation	Rarely discussed

important differences emerged in how it contributed to teachers' career decisions (see Table 2). Former teachers more often described workload as overwhelming and unsustainable, whereas current teachers generally reported that, despite experiencing high work demands, they were able to cope with these challenges with support from school leaders and colleagues. Teachers who relocated from Amsterdam also mentioned workload as a source of dissatisfaction, but generally did not identify it as a primary reason for relocation. Participants' workload experiences can be described in three categories: the intensity of the work, the work volume, and the maintenance of a healthy work-life balance.

The intensity of the work was the main driver of attrition. Both current and former teachers reported that the profession was physically and mentally exhausting, with contributing factors such as lack of breaks, constant noise, and challenging child behavior. Managing such behavior often required constant disciplinary efforts, which many teachers found exhausting. This issue was especially pronounced among less experienced teachers who struggled with classroom management and teachers working at schools with a larger proportion of disadvantaged students. Both teachers and former teachers attributed their lack of classroom management skills to inadequate preparation during pre-service teacher education.

However, important differences emerged between current and former teachers. Those who left reported more severe behavioral

challenges and a greater lack of support. They described minimal guidance from school leaders or induction programs, and mentors, when available, often lacked time to assist. Nearly half of the former teachers also expressed a lack of confidence in their competence, often due to a lack of classroom management skills. These challenges undermined their sense of efficacy and exacerbated student misbehavior, leading to increased exhaustion.

"I found it difficult that you had to be alert all day because I feared that a student would explode or run out of the classroom. And I did convey that feeling [to the school leader], but I felt that not much was done with it." – Nadia, a former teacher

In contrast, teachers who remained in the profession reported receiving more support and guidance from school leaders. Several teachers also received valuable advice and assistance from colleagues, which helped them manage challenging behaviors. Teachers who initially struggled with classroom management early in their careers often no longer faced these difficulties, possibly due to developing stronger skills and greater confidence over time. Notably, none of the current teachers reported feeling incompetent. Some chose to transfer to schools where school

TABLE 3 Factors influencing teacher attrition, retention, and relocation, with associated capitals and themes.

Decision Type	Key Factor	Capital	Theme within Capital	Related Themes
Attrition	Workload	Structural Capital	Nature and complexity of the role	Pre-service education, School culture, Skills and knowledge, School resources, Departmental policies, Support and guidance, Quality of leadership, Personality & psychological factors, Relationships with members of school community
	Insufficient intellectual stimulation/lack of task variety ^a	Structural Capital	Nature and complexity of the role	School resources, Quality of leadership
	Lack of flexibility ^a	Structural Capital	Nature and complexity of the role	Quality of leadership
Retention	Enjoyment in working with children	Positive Psychological Capital	Personality & psychological factors	Skills and knowledge
	Contributing to society	Positive Psychological Capital	Personality & psychological factors	–
	Relationships with colleagues	Social Capital	Relationships with members of school community	Presence, quality and nature of informal/formal support; School culture; Quality of leadership
Relocation (from the city)	Insufficient travel reimbursement ^b	Structural Capital	Commuting time and travel expenses	Quality of leadership
	Commuting distance ^b	Structural Capital	Commuting time and travel expenses	Housing affordability and accessibility
	Housing market ^b	Structural Capital	Housing affordability and accessibility	Commuting time and travel expenses

The table reports the most influential factors related to teachers’ decisions to leave, stay or relocate from the city.
^adenotes factors that were not explicitly included in the theoretical model by [Mason and Matas \(2015\)](#) but could be captured under existing themes.
^bdenotes factors leading to new thematic categories.

leaders provided more guidance and support or schools with fewer disadvantaged students, which helped alleviate behavioral challenges in their classrooms.

“I was promised a support group and a coach during my hiring, which initially gave me confidence. However, the group never formed, and the coach only appeared in mid-November, with no classroom observations in the meantime. Everyone just said the first three years are tough and that it’s normal.”— Anika, a former teacher

The second aspect of workload is the volume of the work. Both current and former teachers expressed frustration with tasks in addition to teaching, such as heavy administrative burden and lesson preparation, which often resulted in uncompensated overtime. Participants mentioned that schools with certain pedagogical approaches (e.g., Montessori or Jenaplan), which place greater emphasis on individualized instruction and teacher-designed materials, required them to invest additional time in lesson preparation. The volume of workload can be characterized differently between current and former teachers. Former teachers primarily emphasized the time required for lesson preparation. In contrast, current teachers were more

dissatisfied with the extent of non-teaching tasks, such as attending meetings and handling administrative duties.

Both teacher and teaching assistant shortages further increased the intensity and volume of work. These shortages compelled remaining teachers to take on additional responsibilities, such as teaching larger classes and managing more administrative tasks. Teaching assistants were often unable to assist, as they were required to cover classes in the absence of teachers.

The third aspect of workload involved maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Both current teachers and former teachers reported that the constant influx of emails and messages from colleagues and parents during their personal time and the inability to disconnect from work-related concerns hindered their ability to maintain a healthy balance. For some former teachers, the overwhelming workload negatively affected their personal lives, ultimately leading them to leave the profession.

“I realized that my work-life balance was off, and it was draining so much of my energy during the day that by the evening, I was no longer the partner at home or the person I wanted to be. At that point, you start to question whether it’s all worth it.” – Ivana, a former teacher.

Figure 5 presents an overview of the factors that directly or indirectly affect workload. Every factor is subsumed in one of the themes and the corresponding types of capital as proposed in Mason and Matas's theoretical model (2015). Arrows represent relationships between factors as experienced by the participants. As shown in Figure 5, workload—although part of structural capital—is shaped by all other forms of capital. For example, human capital influences how well teachers are equipped to manage challenges and how intensely they experience their work, while social capital—the people within the school—can help alleviate their workload.

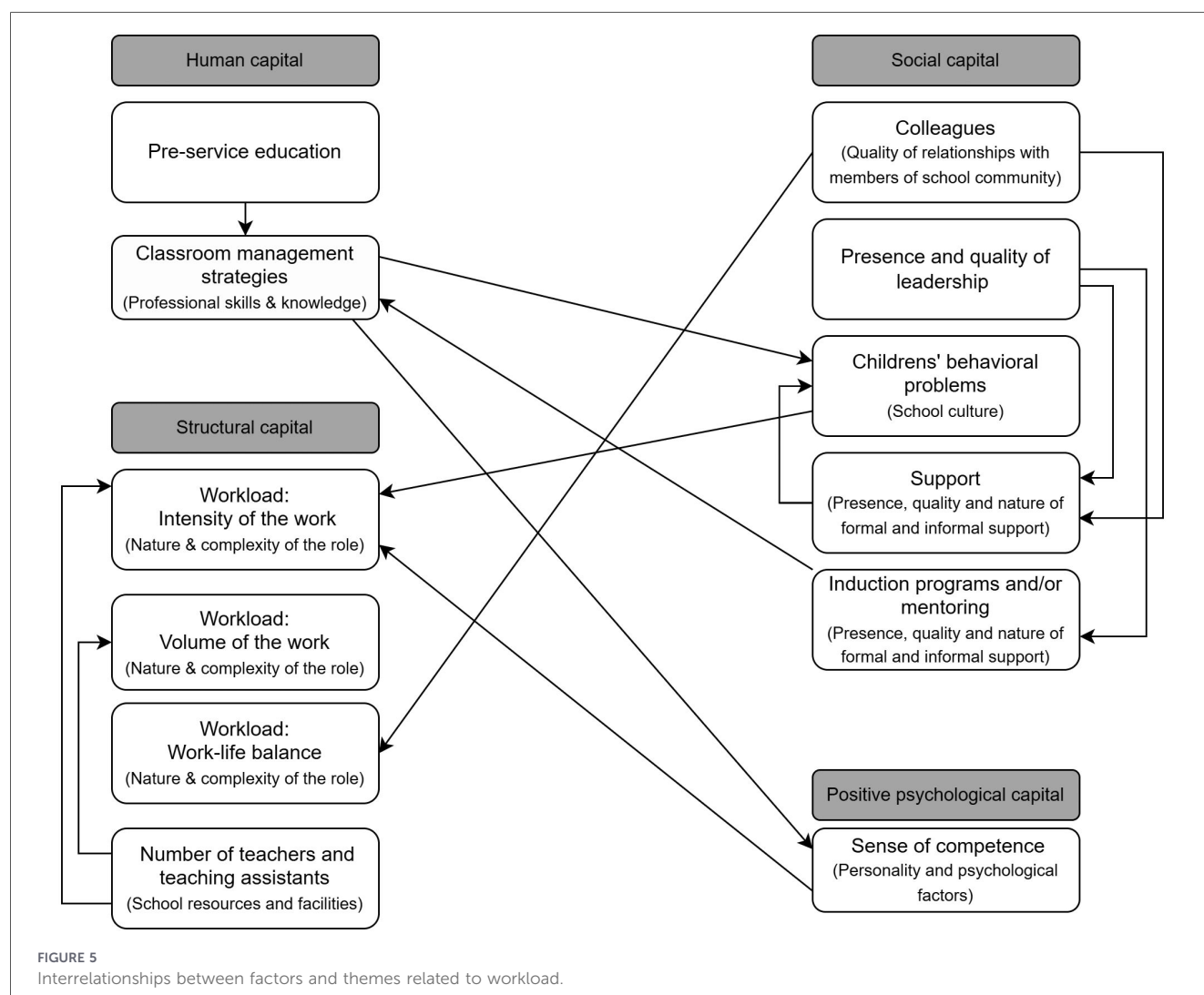
3.1.2 Insufficient intellectual stimulation and/or lack of task variety

Insufficient intellectual stimulation and/or a lack of task variety emerged as another important factor contributing to attrition. Although these may be considered as two factors, they are addressed as one, as participants often mentioned them together or experienced both. These aspects were not identified in the framework proposed by Mason and Matas (2015) and therefore do not naturally align with an existing theme. As participants perceived them as lacking elements of the job, it is most

appropriate to classify this factor under the theme 'nature and complexity of the role', situated within the broader category of structural capital. Although all three participant groups discussed intellectual stimulation and task variety, important differences emerged in how these experiences influenced their career decisions (see Table 2). Current teachers and teachers who relocated from Amsterdam generally described some dissatisfaction but often mitigated this by taking on additional responsibilities within education or by exploring opportunities for further professional development. However, for some participants, this dissatisfaction contributed to doubts about remaining in the teaching profession. Former teachers more frequently described a lack of opportunities for intellectual stimulation and task variety within their school, leading them to seek these opportunities outside the profession.

Current and former teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the level of intellectual stimulation and variety in their jobs. All teachers who indicated dissatisfaction had at least five years of teaching experience.

Former teachers suggested that roles such as special needs coordinator might have provided more variety and stimulation, but such positions were often unavailable due to staffing or budgetary constraints (i.e., school resources). For many, more



appealing external opportunities ultimately led to their departure. For others, the decision was driven by the accumulation of multiple factors, such as an excessive workload or a loss of enjoyment in teaching.

“I found working five days a week with the same group repetitive after a while. [...] I missed intellectual challenges.” – Eva, a former teacher

Although some current teachers also expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of task variety and intellectual stimulation, most remained committed to the profession, driven by their enjoyment of teaching. Many were exploring opportunities to take on additional roles within or outside the school to enhance their intellectual stimulation and task variety.

“I can see myself being a teacher for a long time, but in a combined role. Doing the same thing five days a week can become intense and monotonous.” – Yasmin, a teacher in the city

Not all teachers and former teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the level of stimulation and variety in their work. Some reported high satisfaction in these areas and found intellectual stimulation and practical challenges in addressing behavioral issues. They highlighted greater enjoyment in working with diverse student populations and, notably, reported fewer issues with workload.

“The school is located in a diverse neighborhood, reflected in its student population. [...] [The] school has a wide range of student abilities and needs. I find it rewarding to address such diverse needs and provide tailored support to different students.” – Mathilda, a teacher in the city

time off for personal circumstances, like a child’s illness or significant life events, was often difficult.

“When my son was born, I worked as a teacher for another year. He goes to daycare twice a week, which opens at 7:30, so I had to rush to drop him off and bike to work. This was difficult, as my child was my priority, and that’s why I decided to quit teaching.” – Carlos, a former teacher

Former teachers were more frequently dissatisfied with the level of flexibility than current teachers, though it was rarely the primary reason for leaving. Only one former teacher cited a lack of flexibility as the main reason, whereas for others, it was an accumulation of multiple factors.

Although some current teachers also expressed dissatisfaction with the level of flexibility, they were generally more positive than former teachers. A key distinction in their experiences was that current teachers often benefited from school leadership that allowed greater flexibility, such as accommodating leave requests or permitting early departures when necessary. Rather than outright rejecting these requests, school leaders typically collaborated with teachers to find workable solutions. Additionally, current teachers reported greater satisfaction with other aspects of their roles, such as enjoying working with children and relationships with colleagues, which often offset their dissatisfaction with flexibility.

“With other jobs, you can decide when to take a day off. But that’s not possible here. That is hard, especially when you have to take care of your parents or have a sick child.” “What kept you from quitting?” “A school leader who is supportive and ensures that you have the space to get things done.” – Francesca, a teacher in the city

3.1.3 Lack of flexibility

A lack of flexibility emerged as an important factor in participants’ accounts of attrition, although dissatisfaction with this aspect was not limited to former teachers and was also reported by some current teachers. However, current teachers were more often satisfied with the amount of flexibility due to supportive school leaders who accommodated personal circumstances and preferences. This factor was not addressed in the framework proposed by [Mason and Matas \(2015\)](#), and thus has not yet been classified under one of their themes. Participants referred to flexibility in terms of fixed working hours, the lack of opportunities to work from home, and limited autonomy in scheduling vacation days. As these are all inherent characteristics of the profession, it is most appropriate to categorize this factor under the theme ‘nature and complexity of the role’, which falls within the domain of structural capital.

Dissatisfaction with flexibility was particularly common among those with young children. They reported difficulties balancing work and family life due to fixed hours and required on-site presence. Many expressed a desire for greater flexibility, such as being able to drop their children off at school or childcare in the morning. Rigid holiday schedules added to frustrations, as leave was limited to school breaks, and taking

3.2 Three main reasons to remain in the teaching profession

3.2.1 Enjoyment of working with children

Enjoyment of working with children emerged as an important retention factor across all three participant groups (see [Table 2](#)). However, whereas current and relocated teachers generally continued to derive considerable satisfaction from working with children, former teachers more often described this motivation as having diminished over time. Given its highly personal nature, this factor aligns with the theme of personality and psychological factors, situated within the domain of positive psychological capital. This enjoyment often served as a key intrinsic motivator for remaining in the profession.

Both teachers and former teachers frequently indicated that their decision to pursue a teaching career was driven by a passion for working with children. They reported finding fulfillment in building relationships with students and enjoyed the opportunity to get to know them on a personal level.

Notably, several former teachers either lacked a passion for working with children or lost their enjoyment later in their careers, whereas all current teachers continued to find this

aspect rewarding. For some former teachers, this decline in enjoyment stemmed from the demands of balancing young children at home with teaching young children professionally. Both teachers and former teachers cited classroom management difficulties as a factor that diminished their enjoyment, as such challenges hindered their ability to teach effectively.

“It doesn’t make me happy when I realize I can’t teach because 90% of my time is spent disciplining. Discipline is part of education, but it shouldn’t dominate. I’m not finding much enjoyment in it.” – Talia, a teacher in the city

3.2.2 The feeling of contributing to society

The feeling of contributing to society through teaching emerged as another key factor motivating teachers to remain in the profession. Notably, there were no differences between teachers and former teachers in how they viewed the societal value and contribution of teaching, suggesting that this shared sense of purpose remained strong across both groups. Many former teachers even expressed that they missed this sense of fulfillment in their current professions.

Like the enjoyment of working with children, this sense of contribution is highly personal and closely tied to intrinsic motivation. While one could argue it fits within the theme of ‘the value of teachers and teaching’—a component of social capital—Mason and Matas (2015) define this theme as referring to society’s perception of teaching, rather than teachers’ sense of contribution. Therefore, this factor is best classified under ‘personality and psychological factors’ within the domain of positive psychological capital.

Teachers derived satisfaction from witnessing the children’s development and learning. Knowing that they played a crucial role in this development reinforced their sense of purpose and made them feel like they were positively contributing to society.

“It may sound a bit cliché, but what I value is the sense of coming home with the feeling that you’ve truly made a difference, that the kids have genuinely learned something.” – Amir, a teacher in the city.

3.2.3 Relationships with colleagues

Positive relationships with colleagues emerged as another key factor supporting teacher retention. Current teachers described collegial relationships as an important source of support and retention, while relocated teachers often indicated that supportive colleagues had delayed or discouraged relocation. Former teachers reported more varied experiences, with some describing limited collegial support. This factor falls under the theme of ‘quality of relationships with members of the school community’ within the domain of social capital.

Teachers indicated that colleagues contributed to their job satisfaction in two significant ways. First, positive collegial relationships contributed to a supportive school climate. Second, teachers noted that collaboration with and advice from

colleagues helped them manage classroom challenges more effectively, thereby reducing their stress and workload.

“I could have such tough days in the classroom, but my colleagues would always help me get through it, offering support and advice along the way.” – Fatima, a teacher who left the city.

While most teachers spoke positively about their colleagues, some—mainly former teachers—reported dissatisfaction due to strained relationships or minimal collegial interaction. This discrepancy in experiences may partly reflect differences in school leadership, as the dissatisfied teachers noted that collaboration and team building were not actively facilitated. Notably, these teachers had worked at schools with many disadvantaged students and more severe teacher shortages. This may suggest that school leadership in such contexts struggles to prioritize social cohesion and a collaborative work environment, as their primary focus lies in addressing the immediate challenge of staffing every classroom.

3.3 Three main reasons for relocating from Amsterdam

Three factors emerged as particularly important in teachers’ decisions to relocate from the city: insufficient travel reimbursement, long commuting distances, and the challenges of the urban housing market. These factors were rarely mentioned by former and current teachers. As these three factors are strongly intertwined and often mentioned in conjunction by participants, they will be discussed together.

Teachers who left Amsterdam often expressed satisfaction with their previous schools. Practical considerations frequently led them to move to other regions in the Netherlands. Travel costs and commuting distance were significant factors for all participants who chose to leave Amsterdam. These factors were directly attributed to the city’s housing market and high housing prices. Most participants relocated because they could not purchase a home in Amsterdam.

“Both my husband and I work in education, and we just can’t afford anything in Amsterdam.” – Zara, a teacher who left the city

Over time, the increased travel distance due to purchasing a home elsewhere and the often high and not fully reimbursed travel costs became burdensome. Although most participants preferred to continue working in Amsterdam, they eventually transferred to schools closer to their new homes.

“The commute was the biggest reason. I still miss my colleagues; they were wonderful, kind people, and we had a close-knit team. But the travel time, costs, and the minimal reimbursement made it tough. I ended up paying 100 to 150 euros per month for travel expenses.” – Fatima, a teacher who left the city.

Although insufficient travel reimbursement is already addressed under the theme of ‘employment conditions’, situated within the domain of structural capital, the city’s competitive housing market and long commuting distances cannot be directly incorporated into one of the existing themes. One could argue that these are contextual factors and part of the external environment. However, doing so would require adding a new contextual or environmental layer to the model. Alternatively, these factors could be subsumed under new themes within structural capital. This would preserve the integrity of the four capital model. The first new proposed theme would be ‘Commuting time and travel expenses’, capturing the first two important factors contributing to teachers’ relocation. The second proposed theme would be ‘Housing affordability and accessibility’, which captures challenges related to local housing and market dynamics.

3.4 Quality of school leadership

School leadership emerged as one of the clearest distinguishing factors between the three participant groups (see Table 2). Current teachers generally described receiving meaningful support from school leaders, particularly regarding workload, flexibility, and professional development. Experiences among relocated teachers were more mixed, with dissatisfaction contributing to relocation for some participants. In contrast, former teachers frequently described insufficient guidance and support as an important factor underlying their decision to leave the profession.

The quality of school leadership is one of the themes situated in the domain of social capital. Participants frequently cited that the quality of the school leadership played a crucial role in shaping teachers’ experiences. School leaders, for example, shaped the school climate by articulating a clear vision, establishing rules, and enforcing policies. These rules and policies affected flexibility, stimulation, and autonomy. Additionally, participants indicated that it was the school leaders’ responsibility to provide sufficient guidance and support on educational and personal matters. School leaders affected teachers’ sense of competence through expressions of trust and appreciation.

Both teachers and former teachers preferred school leaders who provided a well-defined vision, offered structure and stability, and fostered a safe working environment. Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of active engagement from school leaders, which involved being aware of daily matters and a visible presence in classrooms.

“The school is well-organized, with a strong structure and a shared vision. I feel much more aligned with this vision compared to my previous school. The school leader is excellent, fostering a very positive working environment. She knows exactly what she wants and takes great care of her staff.” – *Cloe, a teacher who left the city*

Current and former teachers reported considerable dissatisfaction with school leadership. Former teachers frequently emphasized a lack of guidance and support from

school leaders in addressing student behavioral issues and personal matters. In addition, they pointed to the ineffective functioning of school leadership, particularly its failure to establish a clear educational vision, and described instances of rudeness or actions that contributed to a negative school climate. Furthermore, the lack of engagement from school leaders and lack of autonomy were cited as additional reasons for dissatisfaction with school leadership.

Current teachers reported fewer issues, though some described feeling ignored, especially when requests for support with stress or student behavior were unmet. Additionally, current teachers noted that frequent turnover among school leaders created turmoil within the school and uncertainty regarding teacher expectations.

“After the Christmas break, I reached out for help again, acknowledging that I couldn’t manage independently and needed assistance. However, once more, my concerns were dismissed with the explanation that it was just my perfectionism and that I needed to learn to let go.” – *Talia, a teacher in the city.*

Some current and former teachers shared positive experiences, citing instances where they felt trusted and appreciated by their school leaders. Others expressed satisfaction with the support they received or with the flexibility provided by school leaders in handling leave requests.

“What I appreciated about school leaders was their willingness to help, open-door policy, and positivity. All the school leaders were very positive and had a good sense of humor, which I found very enjoyable.” – *Eva, a former teacher.*

3.5 Findings from the card-sorting task

To complement the interviews, participants completed a card-sorting task reflecting on work-related factors derived from Mason and Matas’ (2015) four-capital model. Participants rated both satisfaction and importance. Results showed that most participants considered nearly all aspects important, emphasizing the role of human, social, structural, and psychological capital in decisions to stay in or leave urban schools or the profession. However, satisfaction with these aspects varied, shedding light on why some teachers stay while others leave.

Many findings from the card-sorting task aligned with the interviews. Both highlighted teacher dissatisfaction with their workload and the support they received, particularly regarding induction programs. Participants were most positive about their enjoyment of working with children, their relationships with colleagues, and the act of teaching itself. Former teachers rated their enjoyment of teaching lower during the card-sorting task, which was consistent with the interview findings. The task also highlighted the importance of school leaders, with factors such as leadership, relationships with the school leader, and appreciation from school leaders being rated as important. Consistent with the interviews, teachers who left the city expressed dissatisfaction with secondary benefits, particularly

inadequate travel compensation and longer commuting distances, compared to both teachers who remained in the city and those who left the profession.

The card-sorting task also revealed some additional insights. Participants were dissatisfied with the lack of teaching assistance and were satisfied with opportunities for permanent contracts and part-time work. However, the latter were rated among the least important, which may explain their limited discussion during the interviews.

The card-sorting task also provided additional insights into teachers' views on salary, a topic only a few participants mentioned during the interviews. Results revealed a division: nearly half were dissatisfied with their salary, citing inadequate pay and limited financial growth, particularly among experienced teachers or those transitioning from higher-paying careers. Conversely, satisfied participants appreciated the financial security and stability of their salaries. The importance of salary varied, with teachers supporting families or seeking to buy a house placing greater emphasis on this factor. Although no major differences in salary importance or satisfaction were found between the three groups, salary influenced career choices: those prioritizing salary often moved to higher-paying roles. In contrast, others opted for lower-paying positions with reduced workloads, reflecting a trade-off between salary and working conditions.

4 Discussion

This study examined three related questions: which factors contribute to teacher attrition, relocation, and retention in Amsterdam primary schools and how these differ across groups (RQ1); how these factors interrelate and how these interrelationships differ across groups (RQ2); and to what extent the [Mason and Matas \(2015\)](#) framework applies to the urban Dutch context and what additional factors emerge (RQ3). By combining semi-structured interviews with a card-sorting task, this study allowed for the identification of diverse factors shaping teachers' decisions to stay, leave, or relocate in an urban context. This urban setting has been underexplored in existing research. The open interviews provided rich, context-specific insights from teachers' personal experiences, while the card-sorting task, grounded in the theoretical framework of [Mason and Matas \(2015\)](#), enabled a more structured investigation of how teachers perceive various factors related to retention and attrition. Together, these methods not only surfaced unanticipated factors but also deepened our understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities that influence teacher retention and attrition in urban schools.

4.1 Factors contributing to attrition, relocation and retention (RQ1)

The findings show that teacher attrition, relocation, and retention are shaped by a combination of structural, social, and personal factors rather than by a single determinant. However, the relative importance and interpretation of these factors differ across groups.

Workload, limited intellectual stimulation and task variety, and a lack of flexibility emerged as the main factors contributing to teacher attrition. Workload remains a well-established predictor of teacher turnover in the literature ([Li and Yao, 2022](#)). In contrast, research on professional development has primarily focused on hierarchical career progression ([Amitai and Van Houtte, 2022](#); [Kelchtermans, 2017](#); [Nguyen et al., 2020](#)), leaving less attention to horizontal dimensions of development within teaching roles. The present study extends this literature by showing that teachers also emphasize these horizontal dimensions, including task variety, intellectual stimulation, and meaningful non-instructional roles ([Nias, 1989](#)). Moreover, flexibility is a distinct but underexplored factor in teacher attrition ([Amitai and Van Houtte, 2022](#); [Harland et al., 2023](#)).

Across groups, workload, task variety, and flexibility were consistently relevant, but they were experienced differently across current, relocated, and former teachers. Former teachers described a cumulative pattern of high workload, limited task variety, and low flexibility, with workload primarily experienced as sustained emotional and cognitive demands rather than volume, contributing to a broader sense of repetitive and constrained work. Current teachers more often framed workload in terms of overall volume and reported that limited task variety was partly offset by opportunities to take on additional roles within education. Relocated teachers occupied an intermediate position, reporting some dissatisfaction with workload and task variety but less frequently identifying these as decisive factors in their decision to leave Amsterdam. Flexibility was experienced more variably across groups, but among current teachers it was generally not sufficient to prompt leaving the profession, whereas among former teachers it formed part of a broader accumulation of constraints. Together, these patterns suggest that attrition is less driven by single factors than by how multiple job characteristics accumulate and are experienced in combination over time.

As consistent with previous studies, social and motivational factors were particularly important in explaining retention ([Arthur and Bradley, 2023](#); [Burke et al., 2013](#); [Casely-Hayford et al., 2022](#); [Van Daalen-Visscher et al., 2025](#)). These factors were also valued by relocated teachers and often delayed or complicated their decision to leave Amsterdam. Former teachers likewise recognized the societal value of teaching but generally reported weaker experiences of collegial support and enjoyment of the work, reducing their motivation to remain in the profession.

Importantly, this study extends existing research by identifying relocation as a distinct outcome shaped by structural conditions outside the school context. Housing affordability, commuting distance, and travel costs were key drivers of relocation among teachers who remained committed to teaching but left Amsterdam. These factors were rarely mentioned by current teachers or by teachers who had left the profession. A possible explanation is that these factors were less salient for these groups because they did not face the same housing-related constraints as relocated teachers, for whom these issues directly affected the feasibility of remaining in Amsterdam. This suggests that these factors are specific drivers of relocation rather than attrition. As such, these urban-specific constraints are largely absent from existing studies on teacher turnover, which tend to focus primarily on attrition within the profession.

4.2 How factors interrelate and how this differs across groups (RQ2)

Rather than operating in isolation, the factors identified in this study were strongly interrelated and shaped teachers' decisions through processes of accumulation, trade-offs, and buffering. Across all groups, no single factor determined whether teachers stayed, left, or relocated; instead, decisions emerged from combinations of reinforcing or offsetting conditions across domains of capital.

A key finding is that structural demands, particularly workload, limited flexibility, and low task variety, rarely led to attrition on their own. Their impact depended on the extent to which they were counterbalanced by social and positive psychological capital. Collegial support, leadership quality, enjoyment of working with children, and a sense of societal contribution functioned as buffering resources that mitigated structural strain. Differences between groups can be understood in terms of the stability of this balance. Among current teachers, structural pressures were present but generally offset by strong buffering resources. Among former teachers, this balance had broken down, due to both higher structural strain and weaker buffering resources, particularly reduced support and diminished intrinsic rewards. Relocated teachers showed a mixed pattern, with strong intrinsic motivation and collegial support, but structural constraints outside the school context (housing, commuting) that could not be compensated for within the school environment.

Whereas previous quantitative reviews have primarily identified individual predictors of teacher turnover (e.g., [Li and Yao, 2022](#); [Nguyen et al., 2020](#)), the present study demonstrates how these factors interact and accumulate differently across teacher career trajectories. These findings suggest that teacher trajectories are shaped by the point at which buffering resources are no longer sufficient to counterbalance cumulative demands, rather than by any single dominant factor. This contributes to the literature by moving beyond the identification of individual turnover factors toward an understanding of how these factors interact and accumulate across different teacher trajectories. In doing so, the study also extends earlier qualitative research by explicitly differentiating between attrition, retention, and relocation as distinct trajectories shaped by different configurations of these interacting factors.

4.3 Applicability of the four capital framework and urban-specific extensions

The findings largely confirm the relevance of the [Mason and Matas \(2015\)](#) framework in the urban Dutch context, while also suggesting two key extensions. The first concerns a refinement of the theme 'nature and complexity of the role' within structural capital. Within this theme, the findings distinguish between the amount of work and the intensity of work. Work intensity refers to the cognitive complexity and sustained attentional and emotional effort required in core teaching tasks. This distinction aligns with [Creagh et al. \(2023\)](#), who differentiate between workload and work intensification, and indicates that reducing workload alone may not sufficiently address the qualitative demands of teaching. Beyond this distinction, the findings suggest that the "nature and complexity of the role" is more heterogeneous than currently captured in

the framework. Participants described limited task variety, insufficient intellectual stimulation, and restricted flexibility as important aspects of their work experience. While these factors are not explicitly differentiated within [Mason and Matas \(2015\)](#), they point to a broader interpretation of role complexity that extends beyond workload and teacher responsibility.

The second extension concerns relocation as an outcome that falls outside the original scope of the [Mason and Matas \(2015\)](#) framework. Housing unaffordability, long commuting distances, and insufficient travel reimbursement—issues also documented in other high-cost urban contexts such as Australia ([Eacott, 2024](#))—were key drivers of teachers leaving Amsterdam while remaining committed to the profession. These factors reflect structural conditions external to schools, indicating that teacher mobility in urban contexts is also shaped by broader housing and transport systems. Accordingly, the study proposes two additional themes within structural capital: commuting time and travel costs, and housing affordability and accessibility.

4.4 Limitations

A potential limitation of our study is the possibility of self-selection bias in our participant sample. While we intentionally selected participants based on a range of individual and school characteristics related to teacher attrition and retention, there remains a concern that those who agreed to participate may differ from those who declined. For instance, teachers with particularly negative experiences might have been more motivated to share their perspectives. At the same time, those with heavier workloads or time constraints may have been more likely to opt out. This could have resulted in the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of certain factors influencing attrition and retention. Although the frequency of theme occurrence may not be entirely accurate, relevant themes were likely captured, as data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached.

Another limitation is that while some heterogeneity in the experiences of different teachers could be identified, these inferences regarding variations among individual teachers were limited due to the sample size. Further research with larger, more diverse samples is necessary to identify specific trends and patterns across subgroups of schools and teachers.

4.5 Practical implications

The findings show that multiple factors impact teachers' decisions to leave the profession, but they do not provide a clear-cut solution. Some attrition is unlikely to be prevented, as some teachers leave due to personal circumstances or are dissatisfied with factors inherent to the profession, such as working with children.

However, the findings point to several areas where targeted interventions could support teacher retention. Notably, the theme Quality of Leadership—part of social capital—emerged as a central influence on many factors shaping teachers' decisions. Effective school leaders were found to enhance retention by providing emotional and instructional support, articulating and

enacting a clear vision, and enabling greater flexibility in teachers' roles. The findings suggest that school leaders can directly influence several of the factors identified in this study, including the quality of induction and mentoring, the support available to teachers, opportunities for collaboration, school climate, and the flexibility afforded to staff. School leaders may also help retain experienced teachers by creating opportunities for horizontal career development, such as specialist, mentoring, or leadership-related responsibilities that provide greater intellectual stimulation and task variety.

In addition, school leaders may indirectly influence factors such as workload, classroom management challenges, teachers' sense of competence, and opportunities for intellectual stimulation through staffing decisions, professional development opportunities, resource allocation, and organizational policies. At the same time, several of the factors that supported retention in this study, including enjoyment of working with children and a sense of societal contribution, are rooted in teachers' intrinsic motivations and therefore fall largely outside the direct influence of school leadership. School leaders may help preserve these motivations by fostering supportive working conditions, but they cannot create them in the same way that they can influence factors such as support, school climate, or induction practices.

These findings are consistent with a recent systematic review that identifies leadership support and transparent communication as key factors in teacher retention (Shell et al., 2023). Interventions aimed at strengthening school leadership, particularly through targeted professional development, are therefore a promising strategy for reducing attrition, as supported by experimental studies (Jacob et al., 2015; Steinberg and Yang, 2022).

Furthermore, the present study highlights the critical importance of effective induction and guidance, particularly in managing behavioral challenges, as novice teachers frequently struggle with disruptive behavior. As such, induction programs in these schools should prioritize equipping teachers with robust classroom management strategies to address these challenges effectively. Additionally, the findings revealed that many planned induction programs and other support initiatives were not implemented as intended. This shows the need for a stronger focus on monitoring and ensuring the consistent execution of these programs. Finally, in urban settings, housing affordability and commuting costs are important factors in teachers' decisions to relocate, which may also provide viable policy levers. Unlike factors such as school climate, support, and induction, these challenges largely fall outside the control of individual school leaders and are therefore likely to require broader policy interventions at the municipal or national level.

4.6 Conclusion

This study examined teacher attrition, retention, and relocation in an urban context by comparing the experiences of current teachers, former teachers, and teachers who relocated from Amsterdam. The findings demonstrate that these career decisions are shaped by a complex interplay of factors rather than by a single cause. While workload emerged as an important factor in attrition, teachers' decisions were also influenced by the degree of intellectual stimulation, flexibility,

social support, and the personal meaning they derived from their work.

The study further highlights the importance of considering the urban context when addressing teacher shortages. In addition to factors commonly discussed in the teacher retention literature, housing affordability, commuting distance, and travel costs played an important role in teachers' decisions to leave urban schools. Together, these findings show that retaining teachers in urban areas requires attention not only to teachers' working conditions within schools, but also to the broader context in which they live and work.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because the data contain information that could potentially be traced back to individual participants. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to p.k.de.vries@vu.nl.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Vaste Commissie Wetenschap en Ethiek (VCWE). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

MG: Formal analysis, Methodology, Data curation, Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Project administration, Validation, Investigation, Visualization. PV: Validation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Data curation, Visualization, Project administration, Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. NR: Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. CK: Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition. IW: Supervision, Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

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Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared that this work was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declared that generative AI was not used in the creation of this manuscript.

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Appendix A: Cards used in the card-sorting task

The following 25 factors were presented to participants as cards during the card-sorting task. Participants were asked to

position each card in a two-dimensional diagram based on (1) the perceived importance of the factor in their career decision and (2) their level of satisfaction with that factor.

Cards were originally presented to participants in Dutch. The factors were derived from the theoretical model of [Mason and Matas \(2015\)](#) and adapted for clarity and relevance to the Dutch primary education context.

#	Factor
1	Sense of competence in teaching
2	Relationship with the school principal
3	Degree of influence within the school
4	Appreciation from school leadership
5	Relationships with colleagues
6	Support and guidance for the teacher
7	Leadership from school management
8	Living close to work
9	Relationships with students
10	Professional development opportunities
11	Full-time/Part-time contract
12	Workload
13	Societal appreciation for teaching
14	Enjoyment of tasks beyond teaching
15	Temporary/Permanent contract
16	Secondary employment benefits (e.g., vacation days, travel reimbursement)
17	Salary
18	Space and support for personal circumstances
19	Working with children
20	Enjoyment of teaching
21	Autonomy: ability to determine what happens in the classroom
22	Availability of teaching support staff
23	Relationships with parents/guardians
24	Student population
25	Career advancement opportunities