



Exploring the Satisfaction of Finnish Secondary Teachers' Basic Psychological Needs

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Abstract

Introduction:

Finland's education system has had a strong and positive reputation throughout the world, however in 2021, the Trade Union of Education in Finland found that out of 2,619 respondents, 57% of Finnish teachers have been considering changing jobs, with 83% of respondents citing the burdensome nature of their work as a major reason. This research, based on self-determination theory (SDT) and basic psychological needs theory (BPNT), aims to find what factors are influencing Finnish secondary teachers' satisfaction of their 3 basic psychological needs (BPN). These three BPN are the needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Another aim of this study is to explore in what ways the return to schools after distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic have influenced teachers' BPN satisfaction.

Methods:

Using a case study approach, seven secondary teachers from three secondary schools in Vasa, Finland were interviewed. Teachers shared how they subjectively perceived that their BPN were being satisfied and offered insights on their own as well as other Finnish teachers' well-being. Thematic analysis was used to find themes and sub-themes throughout the interviews, identifying which factors are influencing teachers' BPN.

Results:

Five themes were identified throughout interviews with teachers: (1) freedom as a teacher, (2) increased workload, (3) worry for students, (4) professional support, (5) respect for teachers. Within these five themes, 11 more detailed sub-themes were also identified, each of which either works to satisfy or frustrate one or multiple BPN.

Discussion:

Out of the 11 sub-themes, seven either help to satisfy or frustrate teachers' need for relatedness, emphasizing that in the teacher's profession the need for positive relatedness with students, co-workers, and parents is crucial. The freedom that Finnish secondary teachers have highlights the importance of the autonomy support that is given by Finnish principals and educational policies, since they directly influence each of teachers' BPN. Furthermore, many mentions of the struggles of teachers in the capital region of Finland suggests that there is a large gap in BPN satisfaction within different areas in Finland, with the Helsinki region possibly holding the most dissatisfied teachers, due to several probable factors. Surprisingly, teachers did not mention a large impact of post-COVID returning to schools on their BPN satisfaction. Implications of this research on the educational policies of digitalization, teachers' cooperation with parents, increasing teacher benefits, and curriculum changes are also discussed in further detail.

Keywords: Self-determination theory, basic psychological needs, Finnish, secondary teachers, Finland

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Abbreviations Used:

SDT: Self-Determination Theory

BPNT: Basic Psychological Needs Theory

BPN: Basic Psychological Needs

TA: Thematic analysis

T(1): Teacher (1)

I: Interviewer

Introduction

Teachers are the backbone of any nation's educational system, so the importance of identifying teachers' motivation and fulfillment of basic psychological needs is paramount to the continued development of students. Finland's educational system has been held in high esteem ever since its students ranked 1st in the world in literacy, 4th in mathematics, and 3rd in science when the first PISA results were published in 2000 (Sahlberg, 2015). In Finnish society, teachers are very highly educated and have been identified as essential players in building the Finnish welfare society and in sustaining Finnish national culture (Sahlberg, 2015). Indeed, historically and contemporarily, Finnish teachers have been considered 'candles of the people', who lit the way to independence (Booth, 2014). Teaching, as a profession, has been considered a high status and a 'favorable occupation' in Finland (Stehlik, 2018). Surprisingly, a recent survey by the Trade Union of Education in Finland found that out of 2,619 respondents, 57% of Finnish teachers have been considering changing jobs, with 83% of respondents citing the burdensome nature of their work as a major reason (OAJ, 2021). Indeed, it has been found that, in general, teachers' negative emotions are key factors influencing teachers' decisions to drop out of the profession (Goetz et al., 2010). Why then are teachers in one of the most educationally successful nations in the world, considering leaving such a 'favorable occupation? Indeed, because of this present phenomenon in Finland, it is of utmost importance to understand what factors might be influencing the well-being of teachers in the Finnish school system and how they believe they might be helped by their coworkers, administration, and educational policies.

The present research examines Finnish teachers' well-being through the lens of self-determination theory (SDT) and basic psychological needs theory (BPNT, Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to SDT, there are three general types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Extrinsic motivation is

determined by external incentives and circumstances and does not inspire self-driven action. In contrast, intrinsic motivation is self-driven, where one enjoys an activity and does it for the intrinsic pleasure of the task itself. It has been discussed that having intrinsic motivation is optimal in all situations in life, especially in work. In order to attain to intrinsic motivation, it has been found that as a prerequisite, there are three basic psychological needs (BPN) that must be satisfied. Firstly, there is the basic need for autonomy, the idea that one is in control of one's own choices and actions and has the freedom to choose how to complete a task free from excessive external pressures. Secondly, there is the need for competence, which is the perception of the individual that they are capable and good at what they are doing in overcoming optimal challenges. Thirdly, there is the need for relatedness, which is the sense that relationships with coworkers, bosses, and/or students are healthy, respectful, and stable through a feeling of belonging. If all these needs are met, it has been found that teachers have a higher degree of intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, confidence, and effectivity when facing challenges in their job (Klaeijssen et al., 2018). Even among student-teachers, it has been found that fulfillment of the basic needs corresponded with positive emotions and personal perceptions of their own teaching (Evelein et al., 2008). In contrast, Van den Berghe et al. (2014) found that teachers' lack of the three BPN satisfaction leads to exhaustion and depersonalization. Furthermore, in order for teachers to actively support students' basic psychological needs, they themselves must experience support for their own needs (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When teachers are nurtured and their basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence are supported and cultivated, their well-being will be significantly improved which might result in intrinsically motivated teachers, which tends to result in intrinsically motivated students.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about worldwide lockdowns, which has decreased people's BPN satisfaction and negatively affected mental well-being (Cantarero et al., 2020).

Internationally, teachers have been experiencing new stresses and more challenging situations because of the pandemic (Cantarero et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2021). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been felt in schools, as teachers have had to cope with the stress induced by distance learning, as is evident in Portugal where the pandemic has reduced teachers' perception of well-being and has caused concern about their professional future (Alves et al., 2020). For teachers in England, distance learning and school re-openings have caused many unique challenges in satisfying teachers' BPN (Kim et al., 2021). Thus, it is important for us to understand teachers' satisfaction of basic psychological needs as life transitions 'back to normal' after years of living under the pandemic.

I believe that the results of this research are of immense value in promoting the well-being of teachers in Finland by giving us a detailed and personal view of the subjective psychological well-being of teachers at this unique point in time. This study will allow teachers to identify areas in their lives lacking well-being as well as allow school administrators further information to make necessary changes in their schools to support the psychological well-being of their teachers. Indeed, I believe that we owe it to the teachers, who have endured great difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic, to hear their voice and listen to how they are doing.

Aim of the Study:

The major aim of this study is to identify how Finnish secondary teachers perceive their own subjective well-being from the lens of SDT. The main research question and four sub-questions are below:

- 1) In what ways are Finnish secondary teachers' basic psychological needs (BPN) being satisfied and/or frustrated in secondary schools?
 1. What factors are influencing Finnish secondary teachers' need for autonomy in the school setting?

2. What factors are influencing Finnish secondary teachers' need for relatedness in the school setting?
3. What factors are influencing Finnish secondary teachers' need for competence in the school setting?
4. In what ways has the return to schools during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic influenced Finnish secondary teachers' BPN satisfaction?

Because of my personal inclination to secondary education, I have decided to place the focus of this research solely on secondary school teachers, understanding that there may very well be a large difference between comprehensive and secondary school teachers' well-being. Thus, the goal of this study is to interview Finnish secondary teachers, asking them to describe their subjective feelings/observations of their own autonomy, relatedness, and competence in their workplace, allowing us to identify common themes between interviews which will provide a glimpse into how Finnish secondary teachers view their own basic psychological needs within their workplace and what issues are influencing them. This also allows us to more deeply understand the possible strengths and weaknesses in the Finnish secondary school system, which has seen an increase in teacher turnover intention. What is SDT and what are the implications for using it in this research? In the following section we will explore the theoretical basis of this research, which will provide a firm understanding of the well-established theories that guide this research.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in self-determination theory (SDT) and the sub-theory basic psychological needs theory (BPNT; Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT has been a widely cited and researched theory of motivation in many fields, being a broad theory of human development and wellness with solid implications in the arena of education. SDT assumes that people are naturally prone to psychological growth and integration towards learning, mastery, and

connectedness with others (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In general, SDT states that there are different kinds of motivation: *intrinsic motivation* (or autonomous motivation), *extrinsic motivation* (or controlled motivation) as well as *amotivation*. Intrinsic motivation is defined as “the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 70). In other words, intrinsic motivation is when an individual feels a sense of excitement and volition when doing an activity which gives them motivational energy and a desire to continue to do a task. An example of this in an educational context would be a teacher who is inherently interested in how children develop and authentically enjoys spending time with students, thus feels a sense of volition when working with children and does not need external incentives to continue to work with children but has an internal drive to improve oneself.

In contrast, extrinsic motivation is defined as “the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71). Extrinsic motivation is when an individual’s motivational energy is based on external stimuli (i.e. reward or punishment given by others). An example of this in the classroom would be a teacher who performs for an increase in salary or monetary bonus or simply to avoid negative consequences.

Finally, apart from intrinsic and extrinsic motivation there is *amotivation*, which “is a state in which people lack the intention to behave, and thus lack motivation” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 237). An example of this might be a teacher who feels no internal desire to work and is not motivated by salary or punishment.

A large amount of research has confirmed that across many different domains and fields, intrinsic motivation tends to lead to better psychological health and better outcomes in heuristic activities (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Therefore, it is evident that intrinsic motivation is the desired type of motivation, but it is important to note that there are prerequisites to obtaining intrinsic motivation, which the basic psychological needs theory illuminates.

Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT)

Based on years of research, Ryan and Deci (1985) found that there are universal basic psychological needs (BPN) that are imperative for achieving intrinsic motivation and for general psychological health throughout all domains and cultures. The three basic psychological needs are the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs are considered “nutriments that are essential for growth, integrity, and well-being.” (Baard et al., 2004, p. 2046). Just like physical needs, satisfaction or frustration of these needs brings about direct objective observations in growth, integrity, and wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Autonomy

The basic psychological need of autonomy can be defined as “the need to self-regulate one’s experiences and actions” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 10). Autonomy should not be confused with independence or self-reliance, but is more associated with having a sense of being voluntary and that one’s actions are their own and not forced by someone else. Within SDT, actions can either be self-regulated and autonomous, or regulated by external forces and forced. The subjective feeling of autonomy “is supported by experiences of interest and value and undermined by experiences of being externally controlled, whether by rewards or punishments” (Ryan & Deci, 2020, p. 1).

Competence

The basic psychological need of *competence* concerns mastery of skills, having a sense that one can succeed and grow (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The need for competence is reflected in people’s need “to feel able to operate effectively within their important life contexts” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 10). Competence satisfaction aids individuals to adapt to complex and changing environments, whereas frustration of competence can result in helplessness and a lack of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Individuals have the need to feel like they are good and effective at whatever task they are doing, and if this need is thwarted,

they will lose confidence in their competence and lose motivation to operate in certain tasks. Successfully coping with difficult challenges is an important aspect of gratifying an individual's need for competence. A feeling of competence can also be thwarted when challenges are too difficult, or if others continuously give negative feedback.

Relatedness

The basic psychological need of relatedness “concerns feeling socially connected. People feel relatedness most typically when they feel cared for by others.” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p 10). Relatedness is facilitated by conveying respect and caring (Ryan & Deci, 2020). An individual who feels respected, supported, and that they belong, will have a high satisfaction of relatedness which will positively influence their psychological well-being. However, an individual who has conflicts with coworkers, who does not feel supported or accepted will tend to have a frustrated need of relatedness, which negatively influences their intrinsic motivation.

Important Characteristics of BPNT

Van den Broeck et al. (2010) identified several important characteristics of the basic psychological needs that should be understood in contrast to other need theories (e.g., Maslow, 1943; McClelland, 1965). First, SDT does not require a specific order of the needs to be met (in contrast with Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*; Maslow, 1943), but simply considers that all three needs are important to be met for an individual's psychological health. Second, SDT considers the basic psychological needs to be innate and fundamental inclinations, similar to physical needs. Third, SDT does not emphasize on individual differences in need *strength*, or that individuals might have a higher demand for a certain need, but simply considers the degree to which an individual is able to satisfy their needs. Finally, according to SDT, people do not experience a deficit of other needs when a particular need is satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to Maslow, particular needs become less

forceful after being satisfied, whereas in SDT the three needs are constant and not waning after satisfaction, but individuals are likely to engage in more need-fulfilling activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, depending on the situation and circumstances, one need may prove to be more vital in terms of wellness outcomes, even as the other two remain important (Ryan & Deci, 2017). A plethora of research grounded in SDT has been conducted throughout countless fields of work, in the following section we will review relevant literature that pertain to teachers' psychological well-being.

Literature Review

In the context of the Finnish educational system, Räsänen et al. (2020) conducted insightful longitudinal qualitative research throughout a period of 5 years, aiming to determine reasons for turnover intentions of Finnish comprehensive school teachers. In 2010, 2310 comprehensive school teachers were interviewed and again in 2016 1450 were interviewed again. Researchers found that 50% of teachers had turnover intentions, remaining persistent throughout the study. Reasons for turnover intentions varied significantly from teacher to teacher, but five main reasons were identified: (1) multiple factors, (2) the school system, (3) challenges of interaction, (4) workload, and (5) a lack of commitment. Indeed, teachers perceived that there were multiple factors that accumulated over time that caused them to consider leaving their careers as teachers, the most significant of them were a disappointment in the school system (i.e. changing curriculum, bad management, etc.), challenging interactions with parents and students, an increasing workload (i.e. more paperwork and 'busy-work'), and a perceived low appreciation (i.e. low salary, disrespect from parents). Whereas this research is incredibly insightful to understand factors of teachers' difficulties in their schools, the huge scope of the research makes it difficult to identify specific difficulties that are based in different school systems, since primary and middle schools, subject teachers and classroom teachers are all classified together. Furthermore,

secondary teachers were not included in their study, which begs the question, what factors are influencing Finnish secondary teachers' turnover intentions?

Basic Psychological Needs and Teachers

Brien, Hass & Savoie (2012) conducted interesting research with teachers, grounded in SDT and BPNT, looking to see if fulfillment of the basic psychological needs (1) increases psychological health and (2) increases job performance. Research was conducted in Canada and included 380 teachers from 14 different schools and used quantitative statistical analysis. The researchers found that those teachers whose needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence were satisfied appeared to be in better psychological health. Furthermore, those teachers who had better psychological health were found to perform better than those with poorer psychological health.

Research grounded in SDT has also been done in the USA on the influence of the basic psychological needs on teacher well-being (Hutcheson, 2016). The researcher chose a phenomenological approach with only two participants for her study, which allowed her to go deep in the four interviews she conducted with each participant. The results of this research found that in both teachers the fulfillment of their needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy in school were directly related with their well-being at work, however relatedness was considered as the most crucial in both participants. The teachers both admitted that relatedness with coworkers was valuable and influenced their overall well-being, however the relatedness with students was most favored. Teachers also highly valued the amount of autonomy that they received within their schools, and both mentioned that their at-school well-being would greatly decrease if they were to lose their autonomy and perform scripted lessons. The participants acknowledged a high level of autonomy support from their principals for their well-being, mentioning that the autonomy supporting environment created a relaxed environment and a sense of freedom to teach in the way they wanted. However,

there were elements of rigidity in the mandated curriculum (educational policy) that caused frustrations among teachers. Finally, competence was also a valuable factor in the participants' well-being, finding that previous education and good work ethic contributed to the teachers' perception of competence. The researcher realized the limitations of her research, encouraging further research in this area of investigating teacher well-being, having a larger number of participants, additional diversity in subjects taught, years of experience, etc.

Teachers' Relatedness

Soini et al., (2010) conducted some interesting qualitative research on the pedagogical well-being of teachers in Finland. Researchers examined primary and secondary teachers' well-being by looking at situations in which teachers felt engaged/empowered or burdened/stressed in their work. The study interviewed 68 teachers from nine schools, and was grounded in SDT, assuming that pedagogical well-being is based upon the teachers' sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in everyday interactions within school. Results found that teachers' pedagogical well-being was constructed on three contexts of daily work life: (1) teacher-student interaction, (2) peer interaction with other teachers, and (3) teacher-parent interaction. Indeed, these social interactions were found to be both the most rewarding and most problematic part of teachers' work. It is important to note that this research focused mostly on the human interactions and situations that influenced pedagogical well-being, meaning that the largest focus of the research was on the teachers' relatedness. The results found that "interaction with pupils in socially and pedagogically challenging situations constitutes the core of teachers' pedagogical well-being" (p. 735). Although teachers may receive support from their relationships with the teacher community, however they are individually and solely responsible for their own subjects and classes, thus the relatedness with other staff did not factor as heavily as with students.

In their influential research, Klassen et. al. (2012) explored the relationship between teachers' basic psychological need satisfaction and their self-reported levels of teaching-related engagement, emotions, and emotional exhaustion. The researchers conducted three quantitative studies with 1049 primary and secondary teachers as participants in Canada. The first study (with 409 participants) examined how autonomy support is associated with relatedness with students and colleagues and how relatedness might predict teaching engagement. The second study (with 455 participants) examined whether or not teachers' perceptions of autonomy support lead to satisfaction of BPN with students and colleagues, which then might lead to teachers' engagement and expression of emotions. In the third study (with 185 participants), researchers used hypothetical scenarios to test participants' beliefs about relatedness with colleagues and students. The researchers found that the need for relatedness in teachers is **dual-faceted**, meaning that teachers have needs of relatedness with colleagues *and* students. Results of the studies consistently found that teachers' fulfillment of their need for relatedness with students "leads to higher levels of engagement and positive emotions, and lower levels of negative emotions, than does satisfaction of the need for relatedness with peers" (p. 150). Researchers found that teachers who had strong relatedness with students were more engaged in their work. In contrast, teachers who have poor quality relationships with their students may experience lower levels of engagement and enjoyment as well as higher levels of anxiety, anger, and emotional exhaustion. The researchers assumed that, in comparison with primary school teachers, secondary school teachers would have a lower need of relatedness with students, since it has been well-documented that primary school teachers spend far more time with their students, know their educational backgrounds, and have closer relationships with their students (e.g. Eccles et al., 1993). Surprisingly, it was found that "relatedness with students operated in the same way across elementary and secondary teachers" (Klassen et al., 2012, p. 156), meaning there was no significant difference

between the two and that positive relatedness with students is a vital need for secondary teachers.

Teachers' Autonomy Support

Autonomy support is a term within SDT referring to an individual's basic need of autonomy in the workplace, and how much support they receive in that respect. More practically defined, "*autonomy support* involves the supervisor understanding and acknowledging the subordinate's perspective, providing meaningful information in a non-manipulative manner, offering opportunities for choice, and encouraging self-initiation" (Baard, et. al., 2004; p. 2048). Gagne & Deci (2004) state that autonomy support is "the most important social-contextual factor for predicting identification and integration, and thus autonomous behavior" (p. 338). In the educational environment, autonomy support is an interpersonal climate that is created by the principal in relating to teachers and carrying out management tasks, such as decision making, goal setting, and work planning (Baard, et al, 2004). Educational policies and curriculum can also influence perceptions of autonomy and those educational systems that have rigid curricula and heavy emphasis on testing tend to undermine teachers' perceptions of autonomy (Klassen et al., 2012). If teachers' satisfaction of autonomy is undermined, they will have less enthusiasm and creative energy within their teaching (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). In Finland it has also been found that teacher engagement in classrooms is also directly influenced by their perceptions of support from their supervisors when negative impacts of student misbehavior are being felt (Bakker et al., 2007).

In the aforementioned study by Klassen et al. (2012), the researchers found that positive autonomy support was a significant predictor of all teachers' BPN, meaning that it plays a significant role in satisfying teachers' need of relatedness (with students *and* coworkers), competence, and autonomy. Indeed, as postulated in SDT, when leaders are

autonomy-supportive, “they are responsive to the perspectives and important issues faced by the individuals they lead, guide, or care for, and that this will in turn facilitate satisfaction of multiple needs” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 247).

Basing their study on SDT, Eyal & Roth (2010) sought to understand the impact of principals' leadership style on teachers' well-being and motivation in Israel. Their study was anchored in the full range model of leadership, which focuses on two styles of leadership: transformative and transactional. Researchers have equated transformative leadership as being *autonomy supportive*, namely because of its focus on (1) individualized consideration, (2) intellectual stimulation, and (3) inspiration by articulating a clear and justified vision (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Sheldon et al., 2003). In their study on principal's leadership styles on teacher's motivation, the researchers found that transformative leadership (or autonomy support) lead to increases in teacher well-being as well as intrinsic motivation, which decreased the risk of burnout. Thus, the amount of autonomy support a teacher receives from their principal is a direct predictor of their at-school well-being. Similarly, Pelletier et al. (2002) examined teachers of 1st-12th grade in Canada and observed that the more teachers perceive pressure from above (e.g., following a strict curriculum and/or feeling pressure to have students achieve well on tests), the less autonomous they are in their classrooms teaching students, leading to more strict control of students' behavior.

In China, Nie et. al. (2015) implemented quantitative research on the effect of teachers' perceived autonomy support on their well-being. The researchers studied 266 teachers from two government schools within China, desiring to find whether or not greater autonomy support would be associated with intrinsic motivation, which would in turn improve job satisfaction, work stress, and physical illness. Findings supported the researchers' hypothesis, finding that teachers' perceived autonomy support indeed predicted job satisfaction both directly and indirectly by improving intrinsic motivation.

Teachers' Competence

Teachers feel competent in the classroom when they feel able to execute their job properly and when they can accomplish challenging tasks (Van den Broeck et al., 2010). It has been found that there is a direct link between the need for competence and general job performance and achieving organizational goals (Brien et al., 2012). However, although a plethora of research has been conducted in the areas of teacher's relatedness and autonomy, comparatively little SDT research has been done to research teachers' competence in the classroom. Competence in the realm of SDT has often been compared to Bandura's concept of self-efficacy (1997), yet there are some major distinctions that must be made between the two. Self-efficacy has been defined as "person's judgements of his or her capabilities to organise and execute courses of actions required to attain designated types of performance" while "perceived competence is the extent to which a person feels he or she has the necessary attributes in order to succeed" (Kremer et al., 2012; p. 86-90). In SDT, competence need satisfaction concerns the internal fulfillment that an individual feels when effectively meeting a challenge, whereas self-efficacy is a cognitive process that concerns the degree in which an individual believes that they have the power to be effective (Moller & Ryan, 2018). Therefore, whereas there may be an overlap between the two, the basic psychological need of competence cannot be equated with self-efficacy since the former is a present subjective feeling while the latter is a cognitive process that involves upcoming tasks.

The basic need of competence in the realm of teacher well-being seems to be a rather complex issue because of the multifaceted nature of the teaching profession. Collie (2014) found, in her quantitative SDT grounded research on teacher well-being, that the BPN need for competence was not significantly related to any of the well-being and motivation outcomes that were being researched. She suggests as other scholars have, that competence was not related to the other needs because it is based on the concept of *current* or *past ability*

rather than personal judgments of future ability. For example, a teacher might feel competent in one class that they have taught for years but might happen to have a particularly difficult class the next year that influences their confidence in their ability. Therefore, whereas a teacher might consider themselves particularly competent and self-assured in general, they might tend to keep a sense of caution and humility, understanding that every class of students can vary greatly.

Because of the nature of the teachers' profession, a teacher's need for competence is tightly intertwined with the needs of relatedness and autonomy. Indeed, reciprocal or mutually supportive relationships between the different psychological needs have been observed in many fields of research (Moller & Ryan, 2018). When the need for relatedness with students and coworkers as well as the need for autonomy are satisfied, teachers are more effective and engaging, which increases their ability, which in turn satisfies their need for competence.

Teacher Well-Being during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Kim et al. (2021) conducted qualitative research that was grounded in SDT during the COVID-19 pandemic in England, aiming to determine how primary and secondary school teachers' basic psychological needs were being influenced by the partial re-openings of schools after a period of distance learning. 24 primary and secondary teachers were interviewed from 20 schools across England. Results showed that teachers experienced challenges to all their basic psychological needs throughout distance learning and the school re-opening process. Six themes were found by the researchers: (1) uncertainty, (2) practical concerns, (3) worry for pupils, (4) importance of relationships, (5) teacher identity, (6) (personal) reflections. Teachers' needs for autonomy and competence were challenged through teachers' anxiety over school opening as well as uncertainties in practically navigating the re-openings. Their need for relatedness was challenged by the difficulties in

connecting with pupils and their families as well as with the teachers' coworkers. Indeed, uncertainties were commonplace because of the pandemic and changes in education were essentially beyond teachers' control.

Conclusion

Through this literature review, it is evident that there is a plethora of foundational educational research that is grounded in SDT which provide excellent insights into the role of BPNT in the context of teachers' well-being. It is evident that teachers must have adequate autonomy support from principals and educational policies, as well as have positive relatedness with students *and* coworkers, and that they must have a positive perception of competence and autonomy in order to achieve optimal well-being. Much of BPNT research previously conducted inside and out of the educational realm has been quantitative, measuring the degree to which individuals' BPN are being satisfied in their workplace. Indeed, there are plenty of inventories to measure the degree of satisfaction of workers, teachers, and students' BPN (e.g., Van den Broeck et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2015; Schultz et al., 2014). However in this research I have decided to focus on exploring what factors are influencing Finnish teachers' BPN, listening to teachers' voices and going deeper into the issues that they wish to address, which will be further detailed in the following segment.

Methodology

A qualitative case study was chosen as the methodology for this research due to its ability to provide tools to study complex phenomena within their contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Stake (1995) and Yin (2003), the case study approach is based on a constructivist paradigm, which claims that truth is relative to the individual and depends on each person's own perspective. A case study approach is advantageous for this qualitative research because of the close collaboration between researcher and participant and the ability of the participant to share their stories and perspectives, through which the researcher is able

to better understand the participant's view of reality and understand their actions (Baxter & Jack, 2015). According to Merriam (1988), case studies are "an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena" (p. 2). Case study research is "anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insight and illuminates meanings to expand its reader's experience" (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). Furthermore, case studies allow the researcher to answer "how" and "why" questions while considering how a phenomenon is influenced by its context (Baxter & Jack, 2015). Therefore, I have determined that in order to understand how each teacher perceives the subjective satisfaction of their basic psychological needs, the case study was found to be the most suitable because of the freedom it gives to closely collaborate with teachers, listen to their viewpoints, experiences and opinions, and to ask how and why their needs are being satisfied or frustrated.

Context and Participants

Data was collected from seven teachers in different Swedish and Finnish speaking secondary schools in Vasa, Finland. Invitations to join this research were sent to teachers via email, with no limitations on gender, age, or subject of teaching, but trying to diversify the sample by having teachers from different subject fields, ages, and number of years taught, in order to have a more complete picture and generalized sample. Individualized emails were sent to a large number of teachers' professional emails, with seven positive responses. Interviews were conducted from all three secondary schools in Vasa, with 2-3 interviews per school in order to obtain as complete a picture as possible. There are three secondary schools in the city of Vasa: one public primarily Finnish-speaking, one public primarily Swedish-speaking, and one teacher training secondary school which is also primarily Swedish-speaking. For more information on the participants, see Table 1.

Table 1*Participants' Information*

	Participant	Subject	Years of experience
School A	Teacher 1	English	13
	Teacher 6	History, Social Science	10
	Teacher 5	History, Social Science	20
School B	Teacher 2	History, Philosophy	10
	Teacher 4	Geography, Biology	28
School C	Teacher 3	Art	30
	Teacher 7	Religion, History	8

The location of the interviews were held according to each teacher's preference, either privately in a closed and quiet space, or publicly in a café. Consent to record and use the interviews for research purposes from the teachers was received via signature and formal consent form. Two devices were used to record the interviews, which were later transcribed for qualitative research. A list of 13 questions (see Appendix A) were asked to each teacher, with interviews lasting from 25 minutes to one hour depending on the amount that the teacher desired to share. All but one interview were conducted in English, with one teacher preferring to speak in Finnish, which I translated into English with the teacher's permission.

Ethics

Informed consent was obtained from all participants who were included in this study. To assure participants' anonymity and confidentiality, all personal information that might allow one to recognize a teacher was removed from transcripts and analysis software. Participants and their educational institutions are thus referred to in code, for example: Teacher 1 (T1) and School A.

Method of Analysis

I used thematic analysis (TA) to systematically identify, organize and to gain insights into the patterns and themes across interviews. TA can be applied across a broad range of theoretical frameworks and allows researchers to observe and make sense of shared meanings and experiences and to identify common ways in how a topic is talked about (Braun & Clarke, 2012). I used an inductive, bottom-up approach to data coding, which allowed me to be driven by what is in the data, rather than having pre-existing notions about what the teachers might talk about. In this research, teachers were asked questions directed to share about each of their BPN in their school setting. Throughout the interviews TA allowed me to identify commonalities, codes, themes, and sub-themes within teachers' answers.

Before analyzing the data, I transcribed each interview as its own document, including the interviewee's name, gender, subjects taught, years of experience, and the date of the interview. After transcribing the interviews one by one, I uploaded them individually to NVivo, the qualitative data analysis software, which I then used to code the transcripts, construct categories, and identify themes within and between interviews. I read and re-read the data, assigning initial codes from the first observations. Throughout the coding process, I deductively compared participants' experiences with one another making note of repeated codes between interviews and revising these codes. After initial codes were assigned to participants' response to each question, I re-read all of the transcripts, edited and consolidated the codes, which resulted in a permanent set of codes. Afterwards, I reviewed each code and organized similar codes together, generating sub-themes, placing each code underneath a specific sub-theme. For example, the codes that teachers mentioned "students' mental health struggles", "computers in class", and "digitalization" were organized together under a sub-theme of "The effects of digitalization". Realizing that I had a large amount of sub-themes (11), I decided to organize sub-themes together into larger themes (5) for the sake of clarity. I

defined and named each theme and sub-theme systematically, making sure that there is no significant overlap and that the codes were suitable for each sub-theme.

Results

Five themes were identified throughout interviews with Finnish secondary teachers regarding their basic psychological needs: (1) freedom as a teacher, (2) increased workload, (3) worry for students, (4) professional support, (5) respect for teachers. These themes reflect the individual experiences of each teacher approximately 6 months after secondary schools re-opened in Vasa, Finland. Within each theme are 2-3 specific sub-themes that fit within the theme and explain the topic further (see Table 2).

Table 2

Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Freedom as a teacher	Increased workload	Worry for students	Professional support	Respect of teachers
Sub-themes	Principal's trust	Changing curriculum	Effects of digitalization	Support from coworkers	Students' respect
	Maintaining healthy boundaries	Extra-curricular activities	Students' mental health	Professional development	Respect from parents and society
		Class size			

Theme 1: Freedom as a Teacher

A major theme throughout all interviews was the importance of freedom for the psychological well-being of each teacher. Every participant strongly felt that they have a large amount of freedom in their classrooms, in how and what they teach. All mentioned that there are general guidelines from the national curriculum, but the day-to-day planning and in-class activities are totally in their control.

T4: I also like the independence I have to be a teacher, you can plan your teaching courses and lessons. You have to, of course, follow what the national curriculum says, but otherwise you can be very free to teach what suits you and the students best.

T5: I think that is the best part of my job. I really feel that I have autonomy and I really feel that I can decide. We have the national curriculum, but it is very broad and not so specific like in many other countries. I feel that I have the power to decide what I want to do, and how I want to do it.

It is evident that this independence that teachers feel they have helps to satisfy their need for autonomy within their workplace

Within this theme are two sub-themes that are related to the freedom teachers have, namely the trust that principals give to their teachers and the freedom that teachers have to set their own boundaries and schedules.

Principal's Trust

Most teachers mentioned that they believe that they have a voice with their principal and feel heard if they bring up something with their principal. Teachers mentioned that principals are very trusting towards them and that they generally leave the teachers to teach how and what they choose.

T2: The principal doesn't care what I do, really. He doesn't look at how do I teach and how do I do in the class and so I can freely do pretty much how I want and the principals they don't mind. They trust me that I do a good job and I think that's good too.

Teachers mentioned the ease with which they can speak with their principals, and that if they choose to voice an opinion they feel heard and respected.

T5: If I feel like I have something important that I need to say, it's not a big step for me to go to my headmaster to discuss whatever I feel.

In the SDT context, this positive relationship that teachers have with their principals is considered as *autonomy support*, which works to satisfy teachers' needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, which will be further explored in the discussion section.

Maintaining Healthy Boundaries

Another repeated sub-theme that teachers' mentioned was the freedom that they have to set their own boundaries in work and plan their own schedules within schools. Indeed, Finnish teachers are given very much personal autonomy in setting boundaries between work and home, with most teachers mentioning the importance of setting healthy boundaries between work and personal life in order to maintain their psychological well-being at school.

T2: When I listen to the warning signals I know to de-stress and not work so hard. Because there are more important things in my life than being a teacher. I have to draw the line somewhere. I don't think I should work to sickness. I mean teaching is very important. It is important to teach our kids, but it can't be on my health. It shouldn't be bad for my health...I try to not take the work with me home, because I have two small kids as well. And I know they require my time, so I can't work from home. Well I try not to do it. But of course, the time isn't enough here before 4 o'clock, so I have to take home some work, pretty much every week, but not every day. Yeah, sometimes weekends too.

Some teachers shared about the difficulty in setting up their own work/home boundaries, which has resulted in burnout or strained relationships with families. However, throughout years of experience the majority of teachers have struck a healthy balance for themselves.

Teachers are not required to be in their office space when not teaching, but have the freedom to choose how they spend their non-teaching schedule. Many teachers mention the importance of how they are able to take advantage of free time between classes for personal

health, such as exercise, while yet others use this time to plan future lessons, grade assignments, or just relax.

T6: We have 75 minutes of skip blocks, I always go to the gym. I always make sure that I take care of my personal health. I have never skipped prioritizing my personal health. Of course there might come a few days when I can't make it, but generally the plan is that I go to the gym or go for a run. It might be 30 minutes, but it's better than nothing. I think that has been really helpful and staying in shape also gives you effectiveness.

In the context of SDT, this freedom that teachers have to set their own schedules and boundaries greatly satisfies their need for autonomy in the sense that teachers feel that they have a choice in what and how they spend their work time, spending their time in ways that they feel is efficient and valuable.

Theme 2: Increased Workload

A steady increase in workload throughout the years was also a strong theme observed throughout virtually every interview. Teachers mentioned that the amount of work to be done has been increasing throughout their careers as teachers, having more and complex responsibilities. Within this theme are 3 sub-themes: changing curriculum, extra-curricular activities, and class size all are factors that contribute to an increased workload.

Changing Curriculum

Several teachers mentioned the burdensome nature of a constantly changing curriculum which increases their workload in the sense that they must plan, prepare, and update their yearly lesson plans, assignments, among other things every time a new curriculum is given to them.

T6: I think that if we look at the changes in curricula and what a teacher did 10 years ago, one could rely on things going the same way for 5 or maybe 10 years. But now

we live in cycles of, to be honest, I feel we live in cycles of 3 years at a maximum, then it feels like something new comes. If we look at the curricula, we did get one in 2016 and the next came in 21. And we didn't really get to teach that curricula many times before you have to change it. These things are really becoming a problem.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic added additional policy and practical changes, which has caused even more pressure among teachers.

T7: But in the past two years there have been much more discussions and even sometimes arguing about what should we do with the changes that have come; the curriculum has changed, and corona has changed. I think that teachers are resisting the changes more because there are so many changes ... But that has come more and I think that [COVID-19] brought so many changes and when more and more changes come, it's overloading teachers a lot. All these changes all the time.

In the context of SDT, the increased workload from the ever-changing curriculum can frustrate teachers' needs for autonomy and competence. Teachers have less choice in what they teach as the curriculum is being changed, as they feel that their lessons are being externally controlled by policy. Furthermore, their feeling of being effective teachers is frustrated as they have less confidence in the new lesson plans that they need to draw up after every change.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Another factor that had many of the teachers feeling an increase in workload are the extra-curricular activities and meetings that they must attend. Almost every teacher mentioned the burdensome nature of weekly meetings and how they would prefer to have far fewer. Some teachers felt that their time teaching in the classroom is decreasing and extra-curricular activities are steadily increasing.

T4: I don't like the meetings we have. We have a meeting for this and a meeting for that. That's not so necessary in my experience. That could take too much time.

A few of the teachers were group leaders, who are in charge of a whole class of students until graduation, being responsible for students' well-being and being in contact with their parents. Each teacher who mentioned that they were a group leader also mentioned the burdensome nature of this aspect of being a teacher. One teacher expressed their frustration when asked about if there were any obstacles to their well-being in school:

I: According to the teacher's union OAJ in 2021, 57% of teachers were considering leaving their jobs, as you've heard probably. In your opinion, what do you think the main factors are for this?

T2: [Quickly and confidently] All the extra activities. Less teaching and more of everything else. Because I think every teacher became a teacher because of the teaching. At least that's what I like of being a teacher, I like to be in the classroom teaching these kids the things I know. But...it's less and less teaching and more and more other activities. That makes one wonder if this is the right choice. Myself, I've been thinking about doing something else, too, when I'm really stressed out and feel like I don't teach that much but doing everything else instead. I think that could be one main factor to teachers thinking about changing occupation.

In the context of SDT, too many extra-curricular activities can frustrate teachers' need for autonomy, as school policies externally control teachers' schedules and demand that they attend meetings and other school activities which may not be appealing to teachers, giving them less time to use on subjectively more meaningful tasks.

Class Size

An increase in class sizes throughout the years has also contributed to a feeling of overwork among many teachers, with several teachers mentioning a desire to have smaller groups of students.

T5: Yes, the size of the groups have grown. We had quite small groups 10 years ago.

A normal group in our school was 15 students and now it is 30 students. That is because of economic reasons. I feel that I cannot help students as much today as I could before.

Indeed, an increase in class size also means that grading assignments and assessments is an ever more time-consuming task.

T6: Assessment is becoming more time-consuming and tiring, because you need to show different types of competences that the students have or the lack thereof, and you have to consider their fact-based knowledge, and to some extent to educate them as human beings. So if you factor all of that and you start to look at if there's 15, 20, 25, or 30 [students] there is a great difference.

In the context of SDT, the increased workload from having an increased class size can work to frustrate teachers' needs for relatedness and competence. Teachers are not able to develop close relationships with students when class sizes increase, which influences their need for a positive relatedness with students. Furthermore, as class sizes increase, teachers' feeling of competence can easily be frustrated as they must grade more assignments (leaving less time for lesson planning) and keep track of more students' progress, which can decrease the quality of teaching and individualization of lessons for student needs.

Theme 3: Worry for Students

Every teacher mentioned several factors of worry that they have for their students.

This theme has two sub-themes, namely the worry that teachers have about the possible

negative effects of digitalization on students' ability to focus and the worry about students' mental health in recent times.

Effects of Digitalization

Worry about the effects of digitalization stems from recent policy changes, where Finnish high school students are now given laptop computers by their respective high schools with which they read digital textbooks and write virtually all of their assignments, forgoing the need for any physical books. Because of this, some teachers have noticed a recent change in students' ability to focus in classes.

T5: And the computers...I am not a big fan of digitalization. We do not have any more paper textbooks. Everything is in the computer. When the students come into the classroom, they open their computer and are sitting, staring at the computer almost all the lesson unless I tell them to put it down. They write at the computer, they read, they do all work at the computer. Because most of them do that, but it is so easy to not listen or to not do the work that you should do. And we have a big problem, especially among male students, where they are playing. They pretend that they work, but they are sitting there playing on their computers. If I could decide, I would bring back the paper textbooks and paper writing to the classroom. It was much more fun to be a teacher during that time.

T7: Yes, that is the problem. Of course we say to put the cell phone away, but we work with our computers. You can see that the students are doing everything else and you cannot walk around telling them to "close, close, close".

I: So it's difficult to manage the class now.

T7: Yes, and I know myself, if the teacher is talking and I'm looking at something else, I cannot concentrate.

In the context of SDT, students' lack of focus because of the digitalization policy changes can frustrate teachers' need of relatedness with students, as teachers struggle more to manage students within the classroom and build connections with students. Furthermore, teachers' need for competence might also be frustrated in that teachers feel less effective when students do not listen or learn as they ought to in class.

Students' Mental Health

Many teachers also revealed a deep concern for changes in students' mental health, which has been heavily influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning. Many teachers have explained how students' decreased well-being has caused them worry and an increased workload, especially for those teachers who are group-leaders. Teachers observe students struggling with mental health issues and some have a desire to help them, however struggle with the workload of it all.

T2: ... of course now among students there are lots of problems, and [COVID-19] has caused much more. Students are not doing well, and COVID increased this bad feeling to many... Sometimes I think 'well what am I doing here is it teaching or something else?' And more and more I feel like a social worker also.

I: How so?

T2: Because as a teacher, I have to take care of all sorts of social problems within the school. And students who are not feeling that great and I'm obligated...I just can't look away. It's my duty to take care of that. So, that's quite a lot of work and I don't like it so much but I of course understand that it's my duty and I need to do that as well.

Schools have a plethora of resources, with coaches, psychologists, and counselors to help students who struggle with mental-health issues. However, many teachers still carry the burden of assisting their troubled students as they observe them struggling in their classes. In

the context of SDT, this directly influences teachers' need for relatedness, since relatedness with students is a key to teachers' professional well-being, so observing students' struggle with mental health issues can be heart-breaking and burdening.

Theme 4: Professional Support

Another important heavily repeated theme is the professional support that teachers felt that they receive within their schools. This theme has two sub-themes, namely the importance of support received from co-workers, and the opportunities for professional development in and outside of school.

Support from Co-Workers

Almost every teacher mentioned the importance of their co-workers, especially those fellow teachers who teach the same subject group as themselves. The cooperation between teachers and the comradery felt between them has had the effect of encouraging as well as emotionally and practically supporting teachers in their own classrooms.

T2: Well, I have the support from my closest colleague. There is one other who teaches the same subject as me. We have a very tight cooperation. And we support each other, and I would say that is pretty important. And I feel that I have support from the principal and the rest of the colleagues as well for what I do.

T5: I have good relationships with my colleagues. We have a subject group, we are four history teachers and we have a common working room, so we sit close to each other and meet every day and discuss... We are quite the same age and have same interests...

I: So you feel well taken care of?

T5: I feel, yes, that I am a part of a group community.

It is interesting to note that the extent of the need for a positive and close relationship with co-workers is different for every teacher, depending on their teaching subject or

personality. Several teachers mentioned that the close cooperation with fellow teachers is crucial to their workplace well-being, whereas others (especially veteran teachers) value their own independence, but appreciate the positive work environment they have.

T4: Of course, in every group you have people who you are closer to and not so close to. So of course, you can share. I think that the relationships, the bigger the groups of teachers is, the more different kinds of people there are. But I think we have quite good relationships here. We are not fighting each other.

I: So you feel supported by...

T4: Yeah, I think so. I feel quite independent. They don't ask so much how I do it, and I don't ask about them. But when we work together, I think it's ok.

In the context of SDT, this support from co-workers works to satisfy teachers' needs for relatedness and competence in the sense that teachers feel support and care from fellow teachers as well as suitable guidance and advice for pedagogical practices, which positively influences teachers' feeling of competence in the classroom.

Professional Development

It is important to note that one of the schools (School A) is a teacher training secondary school, meaning that it does not conform to the same budget or policies as the two other schools. As such, teachers within this school were comparatively even more highly educated than other schools (holding multiple higher education degrees or PhD) and had ample opportunities for professional development, joining research projects, and joining professional courses for personal development. For these teachers, professional development was an essential aspect of their well-being as teachers, without which they might not desire to be teachers.

T5: If I go to my headmaster and say "Can I go to this interesting course in Italy?"

The answer is probably "Yes". If I ask for a new computer or new textbooks, the

answer is almost always “Yes”. And that is also important for me, that I can express myself and train myself. I have been, for the past year, to several courses. I was in Helsinki last week for a course. So that is absolutely one of the things that I would not want to change schools. I wouldn't be able to travel or do professional training outside of my school.

There was also mention of all the benefits that teachers used to have, and how wonderful it would be to receive such benefits now, but because of budget limitations, the benefits had to be cut back. The opportunities that these teachers have to join extra projects are vital for the continual learning of these teachers and to develop their professionalism in their subject field.

T6: I have a very good opportunity to develop myself. I have been lucky, I have been encountered for several projects and interesting opportunities. If those hadn't happened, or if I hadn't the opportunity to join these ventures, then that would be a problem. For me it's very important, I'm not looking for titles but I'm looking for challenges. For me it is very important to stay hungry.

In the context of SDT, professional development works to satisfy teachers' need of competence in that their professional knowledge and skills are further developed and their sense of pedagogical efficacy is increased.

Theme 5: Respect of Teachers

Throughout the interviews, a repeated theme of appreciation and respect was quickly evident. Almost every teacher mentioned the importance of being appreciated and respected as teachers. The specific sub-themes include respect with students as well as respect from students' parents and society in general.

Students' Respect

When asked about relationships with students, teachers highlighted the importance of mutual-respect between teacher and student for their own professional well-being. In some cases, teachers felt that students appreciate school and teachers even more after school re-openings.

T2: And I think since COVID-19 and our [distance learning], I think our students appreciate it to be here in another way from earlier. And I think that we have a mutual respect towards each other. So, I think we have a good relationship. Because that is the most important thing, the mutual respect.

Many veteran teachers mention a neutral and professional relationship with their students, since the time they spend with individual students can be very limited due to large classes.

I: Do you feel that you have positive relationships with your students?

T4: I think so, yes. It's not negative. Neutral. I have quite big groups. The first year, I teach every student, and I don't get to know them, but those that choose the extra courses, the electives, you get to know them better. So with many students I don't have a close relationship with them. I am the teacher, they are the students. It's not bad. It's teacher-student relationship.

In the SDT context, positive student-teacher relationships are vital for teachers' need for relatedness, so the mutual respect that these teachers feel that they have with their students works to satisfy their need for relatedness.

Respect from Parents and Society

For teachers who are group leaders and who are responsible to be in contact with parents, a difficult aspect of teacherhood has been a feeling of a lack of respect and appreciation from parents. Several teachers have felt a change in attitude towards teachers from parents as well as society in general throughout their lifetimes.

T2: I mean, when I was in high school, parents would never criticize the teacher, or call the teacher, or email the teacher and ask, 'why did my son or my daughter get this grade and not that grade?' ... It did not happen in the late 90's when I was in high school, but nowadays it's quite normal. Parents send me an email and require me to motivate why I only gave an 8 or 9 or 7 or 6 to their daughters or son.

For teachers who are class leaders, the stress of communicating with parents is only too real, as some parents do not trust or appreciate the teacher's observations and judgments of their children.

T2: It's my responsibility to be in contact with their parents. To have meetings with them and their parents. And just those things, I don't like. Teachers don't get any education about how to do this. How do you talk with someone's parents in a meeting where you have to say that their daughter or son misbehaves or has bad grades, why is it so? And the parents are like this [arms crossed], and say 'my child would never!'. So, it can get really bad.

Similarly, there was a repeated idea of a lack of appreciation from society. Some teachers felt throughout their careers that parents and other members of society are holding less and less appreciation for the vocation of teacher.

T6: I also think that if we look at how the school as an institution has changed, formally it has been a very high ranked to be a teacher. It has been very respected. Nowadays, it is not that way in many ways. I wouldn't say that people hate you for being a teacher, but we see this kind of curling generation, where parents maybe are not always on the same side as the teachers, and not even trying to understand the problems because the problems might lie within the family itself.

For other teachers, salary in comparison to workload was a main indicator of appreciation. Indeed, those teachers who felt strongly about appreciation also noted that they

would desire an increase in salary to correspond to their workload. In the teacher training secondary school, teachers mentioned with sadness about the decrease in benefits, as well as a strong desire to give teachers more benefits. Indeed, benefits like these indicate a strong sense of appreciation from school and society.

T5: When I started 20 years ago, you received 500 euros from the school that you could use at the gym. So in practice, they paid for gym activities. But they don't anymore. And the best thing of all, every 10th year as a teacher – I never experienced this – you could leave for a fully paid vacation for half a year. This was only at [School A]. You had your normal pay, but you didn't have to work. You could stay at home and study. I understand that it is not possible to bring those things back, but it would be fantastic and nice.

In the context of SDT, this decrease in feeling appreciated and respected from parents and society can work to frustrate teachers' needs of relatedness and competence. Parents' criticism and lack of trust in teachers can heavily negatively influence teachers' need for relatedness and competence in that they may feel ineffective as teachers. Furthermore, when teachers feel that they are not being compensated fairly for the amount of work that they do, their feeling of competence might be frustrated.

Conclusion

In summary, 7 Finnish secondary teachers were asked to share about how they feel that their three basic psychological needs are being satisfied or frustrated within school. They also freely shared about their general well-being within schools and their own insights on Finnish teachers' well-being. These five themes and their contents were found throughout each interview, and include both empowering and burdensome factors. In the following section, we will discuss how these themes and sub-themes influence teachers' BPN.

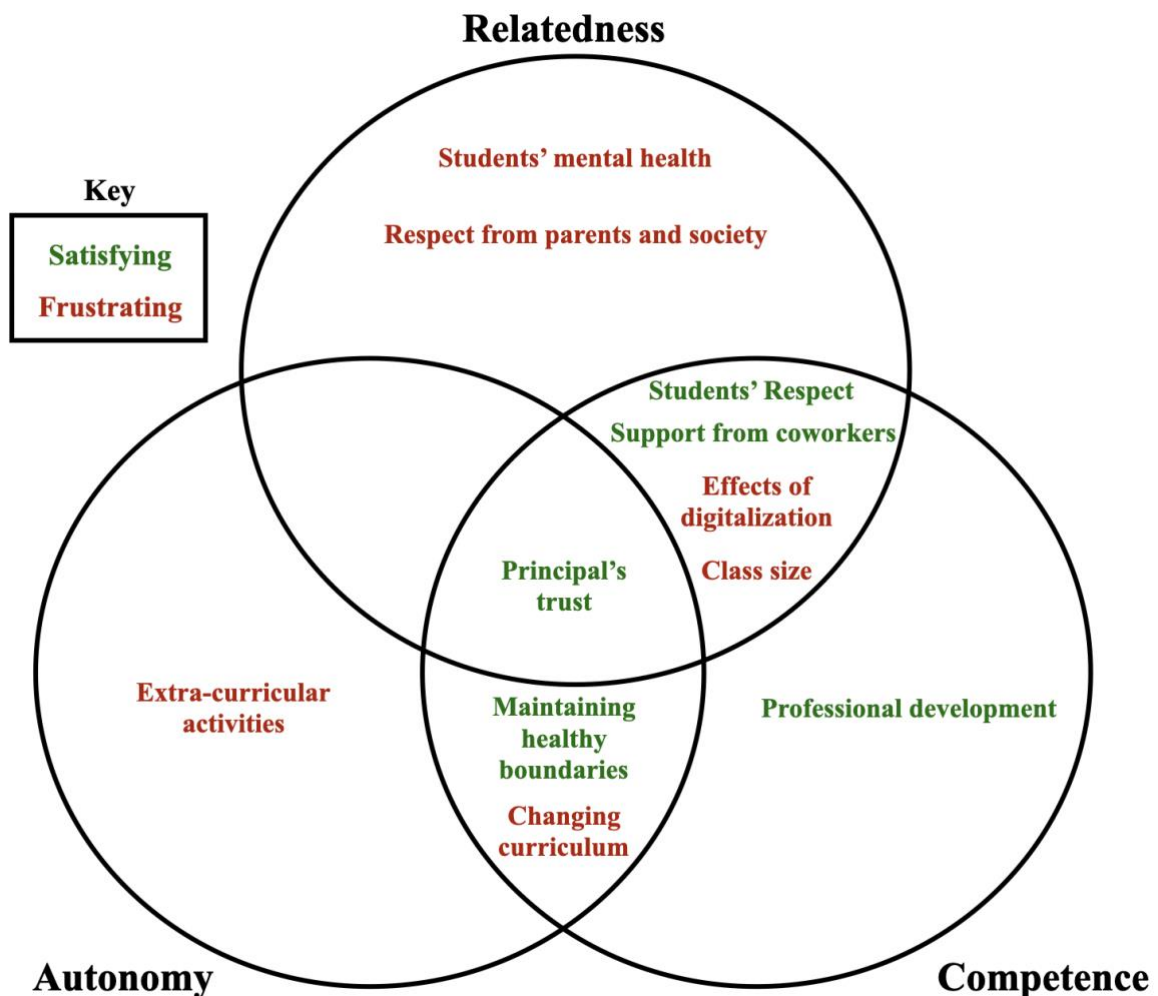
Discussion

The aim of this research was to understand the general satisfaction of Finnish secondary school teachers' basic psychological needs and what factors influence these needs. The results of the thematic analysis of the interviews show that there are five themes (and 11 sub-themes) throughout teachers' accounts: (1) freedom as a teacher, (2) increased workload, (3) worry for students, (4) professional support, and (5) respect for teachers. Some of these themes and sub-themes frustrate certain BPN and are burdening elements to teachers' well-being, while others satisfy certain BPN and are empowering to teachers' well-being. In this section, I will show where the sub-themes might fit within the BPNT, discuss interesting sub-themes and their influence on BPN, consider implications of this research, and make recommendations for future research.

Because of the broad nature of the themes, I determined that exploring the relation of the more specific sub-themes would be more appropriate in this discussion. Figure 1 shows the three BPN and which sub-theme might help to satisfy or frustrate that specific need. It is important to note that many of the sub-themes do not only influence one psychological need, but may help to satisfy or frustrate two or all three of the needs. Indeed, SDT expects that the three needs are interdependent and highly intercorrelated (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The sub-themes have also been color-coded to show whether they help to satisfy or frustrate needs.

Figure 1

The effect of sub-themes on teachers' BPN



As evident in Figure 1, the sub-theme of principal's trust is at the very center of all the BPN, helping to satisfy all the BPN. Each teacher clearly noted how personally important it is to have the freedom to choose how and what to teach to their students. Klassen et al. (2012) found that the effect of good autonomy support from principals not only satisfies teachers' need for autonomy, but significantly increases connectedness with their students and colleagues, as well as increases workplace engagement. In this respect, autonomy support from principals helps to satisfy teachers' relatedness with students and colleagues and also

helps to satisfy teachers' competence by increasing their workplace engagement. Indeed, SDT posits that positive autonomy support facilitates the satisfaction of all 3 needs in those to whom it is given (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Therefore, it would seem that principals and the autonomy support that they provide are the catalysts in creating a positive and trustful work-environment and that autonomy support might be one of the most crucial aspects in a teacher's psychological well-being. Thus, it has been very encouraging to see the presence of high autonomy support from principals and management within Finnish secondary schools in Vasa, which seems to be significantly increasing teachers' overall psychological well-being.

An interesting trend in Figure 1 shows that the majority (7 out of 11) of the sub-themes mentioned by teachers seem to influence their need for relatedness. As Klassen et al. (2012) mentioned, "Teaching is a unique occupation in its emphasis on establishing long-term, meaningful connections with the 'clients' of the work environment (i.e., students) at a depth that may not be found in other professions" (p. 151). Similarly, Soini et al. (2010) found that teachers' relationships and interaction with students, parents, and coworkers are the most rewarding and problematic aspects of a teacher's profession. It should be no surprise then, that the majority of the themes and sub-themes are connected to the need of relatedness. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that many of the sub-themes influence both relatedness and competence. This might be due to the relationship-oriented nature of the teaching profession, in that a teachers' relationships with students, parents, and coworkers directly influence their feeling of competence as a teacher, which further emphasizes the importance of teachers' need for relatedness in schools.

It seems that in secondary schools, the cooperation between teachers of the same subject is highly beneficial in satisfying teachers' needs for relatedness, and may heavily influence their feelings of competence through the support that they receive. Klassen et al (2012) found that teachers' need for relatedness in the workplace is dual-faceted, needing

positive relationships with both coworkers and students, however the latter being more important for their well-being. It is important to note that positive cooperation with fellow teachers and the teacher community also plays a very important role in teachers' occupational well-being (Soini et al., 2010).

Surprisingly, it would seem that the effects of digitalization may have the greatest negative impact on teachers' needs for relatedness and competence in classrooms. From 2015 to 2019, increasing digitalization for learning was one of the main goals of the Finnish government, and now it is commonplace to use laptops and the Internet in everyday life in secondary schools (Nikula et al., 2020). Indeed, while distance learning, students were expected to pay attention in class while on their computers at home but it was not directly evident whether or not they were. However, after school re-openings, the fact that students have laptops open in class and can often be found playing games or doing things that are unrelated to class seems to frustrate a teachers' feeling of competence and relatedness with students. In their research with university students Gupta & Irwin (2016) found that even among university students, the use of social media during a high-interest lecture significantly reduced students' comprehension, and even moreso with low-interest lectures. Junco (2015) found that social media use was significantly negatively influencing grade 9 students' grades, but surprisingly less so for older students. This digitalization of textbooks and school materials, whereas vital for distance learning, seems to heavily impact classroom engagement, adding yet another hurdle for teachers to jump over.

In Finnish news in 2022, teachers in Finland's capital region threatened to go on a strike in protest of a lack of wage increases (Yle News, 2022). Because of this present phenomenon, it was expected that salary would be a major theme in this research. Contrary to expectation, only two out of seven teachers in Vasa mentioned that they are largely unsatisfied with their salary in schools. These teachers had relatively fewer years of teaching

experience compared to other participants in this research, suggesting that perhaps veteran teachers (of over 20 years of experience) might not struggle as much with a dissatisfaction in salary because of the accumulation of pay raises. The participants who expressed a dissatisfaction with their salaries also mentioned struggling with the burdensome nature of their work, similarly to the 83% of teachers polled by the OAJ (2021). This suggests that when feeling overworked, teachers might demand an increase in salary to match the amount of work that they feel they are providing. Indeed, SDT postulates that workers need to feel that they are being fairly compensated for the work that they do in addition to having their BPN satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2017). When asked why many teachers throughout Finland are considering leaving their profession, many of the interviewed teachers suggested that there might be a large gap between being a teacher in the capital region in comparison to smaller cities throughout Finland (such as Vasa), and that the most dissatisfied and tired teachers in Finland are probably primary school teachers in the capital region due to a higher standard of living (compared to salary) as well as larger class sizes, more communication with difficult parents and perhaps more anti-social behavior among students in the capital region. Indeed, it has been found that there tend to be higher levels stress and risk for mental health issues for people living in large cities compared to smaller cities and rural areas (Gruebner et al., 2017), which may explain this phenomenon.

Surprisingly, teachers did not mention a large impact of post-COVID returning to schools on their BPN satisfaction. There were indeed some mentions of differences of some changes in students' attitudes (e.g. students appreciate to be in school more) as well as some difficulties (e.g. increase in students' mental health issues). Yet these mentions were not repeated very often and do not seem to have any heavy impact on teachers' BPN satisfaction. Indeed, at the time of the interviews, schools had been meeting in-person for around six months and mask mandates were taken away. Re-introduction to in-class learning seemed to

have been quick and efficient, with things returning to 'normal' rather quickly. However, one of the larger effects of returning to schools had more to do with the changes that happened during the pandemic, namely more policy changes, the implications of which will be discussed in the following section.

Implications

Based on the evidence given from teachers themselves, I believe that there are several areas that Finnish secondary schools might be able to improve upon. It is my recommendation that the policies of digitalization for secondary school students be reassessed within the classrooms to reduce the amount of distractions and to address students' difficulties to focus. As one teacher so honestly shared, "If I could decide, I would bring back the paper textbooks and paper writing to the classroom. It was much more fun to be a teacher during that time" (Teacher 5). It might be advantageous to allow the teachers to decide for themselves which classroom materials should be digital and which should not, in order to match the needs and teaching styles of that teacher. Indeed, allowing the teachers a choice on this matter might further satisfy their needs for autonomy, relatedness with students, and feeling of competence as a teacher.

Cooperating with parents who supported their children's efforts is a positive resource for teachers, however, when parents question the teachers' authority and pedagogical efforts, teachers feel burdened and stressed (Soini et al. 2010). Many interviewed teachers expressed that there seems to be a change in culture throughout their lifetime, where many parents' trust and/or appreciation for teachers has been declining. As one teacher shared, "Teachers don't get any education about how to do this. How do you talk with someone's parents in a meeting where you have to say that their daughter or son misbehaves or has bad grades...?" (Teacher 2). Indeed, just as teachers are trained to be skilled as educators for their students, they are also required to have the knowledge and skill to effectively communicate with parents

(Graham-Clay, 2005). For this reason, it would seem that additional support from the principal and staff is necessary to aid and assist teachers in communicating with parents, providing credit to the teacher and a strong backing in difficult cases. It might also be beneficial for the availability of further education and intermediary assistance for teachers who struggle with communication with parents.

Several teachers also mentioned that decrease in benefits among teachers has been felt throughout their years as teachers. In fact, it has been found that removal of bonuses and benefits can have the effect of reducing workplace productivity, and all types of bonuses have been found to increase workplace productivity by 5%, with non-monetary short term bonuses being slightly more effective (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016). It seems that it may be beneficial for secondary education institutes to again provide choices of different bonuses and benefits for their teachers to show appreciation for their work, to recognize teachers' hard work and increase their feelings of competence. Indeed, Ryan et al. (1983) found that monetary rewards can enhance intrinsic motivation (and as a by-product several basic psychological needs) when there is an autonomy-supportive context.

Lastly, the constant educational reforms as well as the changes brought about by COVID-19 throughout recent years seem to have had a heavy negative impact on teachers who have had to adjust to national/local policy and curriculum changes. Ongoing educational reforms require new professional training and seem to put more pressure on teachers, which in turn may lead to turnover intentions (Räsänen et al., 2020). My suggestion is that principals and educational reformers might consider reducing the amount of policy changes and educational reforms that directly influence teachers, thus providing more stability and constancy to teachers' lives and reducing the increased burden that comes from constant change. This is by no means easy, as one teacher so empathetically put it, "I don't envy the

principals or the management, because they have to balance these [development and stability]" (Teacher 7).

Limitations

I believe that I received a fairly accurate picture of Finnish secondary teachers' basic psychological need satisfaction within Vasa, Finland, however there are a few possible limitations to this study. For one, there are teachers of several subject fields that were not included in this study (e.g. mathematics, physical education, etc.) that might add additional insights and themes to this research. Indeed, many subject teachers struggled with different issues, for example, the art teacher feels a lack of appreciation and understanding from the principal, whereas the history teacher receives plenty of attention from the principal but struggles with communication with parents. Because of the specificity of this research, it cannot and should not be generalized to primary school teachers in Vasa, or to all secondary school teachers throughout Finland. Indeed, three of the teachers interviewed were from a teacher's training secondary school, which can vary quite drastically from the average Finnish secondary school in terms of professional development, funding, etc. Two of the interviewed teachers from this school hold multiple higher level degrees (one a PhD and the other multiple degrees, including one from Harvard University) and are above average professionals in their subject fields. Teachers from these schools might be considered a minority in Finland, and may have provided some data that is not necessarily reflective of the average secondary teacher in Finland.

Recommendations for Future Study

It is highly recommended to study the effects of digitalization in classrooms on students' leisure activities, mental health, ability to focus in class, as well as grades. Through this research it is obvious that teachers' satisfaction of BPN have been influenced by the policies of digitalization and that they have observed some unsettling new realities within

their classrooms. This recent change in educational policy that has happened in the past few years can be described as extreme - the complete replacement of paper textbooks and material - which is why the effects of this digitalization are of utmost importance to understand how this generation of students have developed and will continue to develop.

As aforementioned, according to many of the interviewed teachers it would seem that the majority of stress and dissatisfaction among teachers in Finland originate from primary school teachers within the capital region of Finland. Therefore, my recommendation for future study would be to assess the BPN satisfaction of primary school teachers through a similar process of qualitative case studies, being able to see themes that teachers share. Furthermore, whereas qualitative studies can discover themes, they do not measure the severity of a theme, therefore, it may be worthwhile to add quantitative elements to the research in order to investigate the degree to which the themes influence teachers' BPN, which in turn will help researchers to estimate the seriousness of particular themes.

Conclusions and Reflections

This research aimed to find out what factors and circumstances are influencing Finnish secondary teachers' basic psychological needs within their schools. Throughout my interviews with 7 teachers in Vasa, Finland, I found that there were five common themes among teachers that frustrate or satisfy their BPN: (1) freedom as a teacher, (2) increased workload, (3) worry for students, (4) professional support, and (5) respect for teachers. In the discussion section, we identify how autonomy support from principals is vital for the satisfaction of all the BPN of teachers, the importance of teachers' relatedness with students, coworkers, and parents as well as the effects of digitalization on teachers' BPN. Several implications for application were also discussed for principals and policy makers. To answer the question of why 57% of teachers have had turnover intentions last year, teachers mentioned an increase in workload, a constantly changing curriculum, difficulties with

parents as well as mentions of difficulties of teachers in the capital region. I believe that this research has succeeded in provided interesting and thought-provoking data and has filled a gap in exploring elements of Finnish secondary teachers' psychological well-being.

From the seven interviews that were held, it would seem that the BPN of secondary teachers in Vasa, Finland are being satisfied reasonably well. Of course the Finnish education system is not perfect by any means and teachers have many aspects of work that are burdensome and stressful, and as the results show, there are many areas that can be improved from a teacher's perspective. However, from the researcher's perspective, overall it seems that Finnish secondary teachers are doing quite well and that the re-opening of schools due to COVID-19 have not significantly influenced teachers' well-being. I have found that the amount of autonomy support, trust, and freedom Finnish secondary school teachers receive is commendable, which works to greatly satisfy their need for autonomy. The relationships teachers hold with students and coworkers are respectful and amiable, which satisfy their need for relatedness. The teachers that I interviewed are true professionals in their subject areas, with each teacher loving their subject area and believing in its importance for the students' education, and feeling quite strongly that they are effective teachers, which satisfies their need of competence. I have grown a respect and appreciation for Finnish secondary teachers (and principals) throughout this research and hope that measures will be taken to further satisfy their basic psychological needs, which will not only increase their own well-being, but also the well-being of their students.

Appendix A

Interview Questions

Biographical information and professional orientation:

1. Describe your educational background and working history.
2. What made you want to become a teacher?

General Questions

1. Can you share about the amount of autonomy that you feel you have as a teacher? Is it enough or too much? Do you want more/less? Why?
2. How much say do you have when teaching? Do you have a voice with your coworkers? Administration?
3. Can you share about your relationships with your fellow teachers and principal in recent times?
4. Can you share about your relationships with your students during this time?
5. Can you share about the amount of support you feel you get from your coworkers? From school administration?
6. How effective do you feel as a teacher to your students? Why?
7. How good do you feel you are at your job?
8. What are the main enablers of helping your professional well-being at school?
9. What are the main obstacles to your professional well-being at school?
10. According to the OAJ in 2021, 57% of teachers have considered leaving their jobs. In your opinion, why do you think that this is the case?
11. If you had a magic wand to increase your well-being at school, what would you do? Why?

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