The Relationship Between New Zealand Primary School Teachers' Experiences of Balancing Work and Leisure and Their Career Intentions

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Abstract

Teacher attrition is a critical issue worldwide, with many primary school teachers struggling to manage the balance between their professional and personal lives due to conflicting priorities. While work-life balance research is extensive, the work-life balance of primary school teachers and the effect of this on their career intentions is significantly underexplored, particularly within the New Zealand context. Research that has been conducted has often investigated the balance between teachers' work and personal life from a work-family balance perspective, neglecting other aspects of personal life such as leisure. The aim of this research was to explore New Zealand primary school teachers' experiences of balancing work and leisure and the potential effect of this on their career intentions. A qualitative study was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews on a sample of 16 New Zealand primary school teachers. The findings were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach. The study identified a variety of factors hindering participants ability to balance work and leisure. These included workload, teaching experience, dual roles, personal priorities, job intensity and workplace support. While many participants indicated struggling to engage in regular leisure activity, their responses highlighted that engagement in leisure was not a primary factor affecting their career intentions. A significant factor influencing participants' career intentions was a desire to make a difference to their students. However, the study found that this came at a cost to their personal well-being and time, chosen priorities, role responsibilities and leisure engagement. Participants identified areas which may assist them to achieve their ideal work-life balance, such as meaningful workplace support and a simplification of work-related tasks. Further research is recommended on ways to support teachers in these areas in order to address the work-life balance of New Zealand primary school teachers and the critical issue of teacher attrition.

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Memoriam

In memory of my brother, Tom, whom I love and miss so much. Tom, you have been the best brother and role model to me, showing me how to be strong, stay true to myself, work hard and strive to reach my goals. You have been an inspiration throughout my life, and even in your absence, your influence continues to shape and inspire me every day. I would not be here writing this thesis if it were not for you and the impact you've had on my life.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my fellow teacher friends and colleagues in New Zealand and Australia.

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Abbreviations

AP: Assistant Principal is a school administrator who supports the principal in managing key areas such as daily school operations, instructional leadership, staff support and student well-being.

BT: Beginning Teacher refers to a teacher who is in their first two years of their teaching role and is completing a beginning teacher programme.

ILE: Innovative Learning Environment refers to an adaptable learning environment with break-out spaces and flexible learning spaces. Teachers who work in these environments typically share classroom space with other teachers and classes.

ITL: Information Technology Leader is a within-school role that helps school leaders and teachers learn and understand how to effectively use technology to improve student learning.

SLT: Senior Leadership Team refers to a group of school leaders who manage daily school operations. SLT members include the principal and deputy principals.

WST: Within-School Teacher refers to an in-school role which focuses on mentoring and leadership and works collaboratively with other schools in what is known as a Kāhui Ako or Communities of Learning.

Chapter 1

Thesis Question and Critical Literature Review

Teachers play a critical and foundational role in shaping our society. By imparting knowledge, fostering critical thinking and supporting skills and competences required for modern-day life, they significantly contribute to society's social, cultural and economic progress (Tulqin o'g'li et al., 2024). Through their roles, teachers can positively impact the minds and lives of our next generation, inspiring, guiding and supporting children to reach their dreams. This ability to support the aspirations of young children aids the advancement of society's professional landscape, inspiring upcoming professionals and innovators. As Sedgwick eloquently writes, "teaching is the profession that creates all others" (Sedgwick, 2012, p. 1). Thus, teaching is a form of highly pro-social work.

While the act of teaching could be considered simply the practice of improving students' academic learning, the work role of a teacher is multifaceted and involves many work responsibilities. According to Kudryashova et al. (2016), teachers take on seven different roles while aiding the facilitation of successful active learning: motivator, authority figure, controller, trainer, moderator, facilitator and leader. Beyond academic learning, teachers are also facilitators of mental, emotional, physical and social skills. Through their work roles, teachers foster student interest, support intrinsic student motivation (Butera et al., 2020), guide the values, attitudes, behaviours, and characters of children (Tulqin o'g'li et al., 2024) and aid the development of students' gross motor skills (Abusleme-Allimant et al., 2023). Teachers are sources of guidance and support (Zak-Doron & Perry-Hazan, 2024), taking on the role of counsellors by aiding the development of important social and emotional skills, such as emotional regulation and conflict resolution (Greene, 2005). Frank McCourt wrote an accurate description of a teacher's role in his book, *Teacher man: A memoir*, drawing upon his prior experience working as a secondary teacher:

> In the high school classroom you are a drill sergeant, a rabbi, a shoulder to cry on, a disciplinary, a singer, a low-level scholar, a clerk, a referee, a clown, a counsellor, a dress code enforcer, a conductor, an apologist, a philosopher, a collaborator, a tap dancer, a politician, a therapist, a fool, a traffic cop, a priest, a mother-father-brother-sister-uncle-aunt, a bookkeeper, a critic, a psychologist, the last straw. (McCourt, 2005, p. 19)

Unlike traditional teachers, who were considered the transmitters of knowledge (Kudryashova et al., 2016), 21st-century teachers are continually navigating and adapting their roles to meet the ever-changing needs and advancements of society. Modern-day teachers must remain up to date with technological advancements, meet the needs of digital-aged students, adapt to current learning and teaching methods (Singh, 2018), actively collaborate with students and parents (Kudryashova et al., 2016) and manage the impact of globalisation on their working environments and conditions (Saeed & Farooqi, 2014). Teachers must also adapt to increasingly challenging government demands and reforms, which have been shown to affect teachers' well-being (Nwoko et al., 2023), increase teacher accountability, which can compromise the best interests of students, and increase teachers' workloads (Stacey et al., 2023). Furthermore, 21st-century teachers have been required to adapt to the global 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in online teaching, hybrid learning environments, increased workloads and high levels of stress (Engelbrecht-Aldworth, 2024). Due to the immense pressures and demands experienced by modern-day teachers, it is not surprising, therefore, that teaching is considered one of the most stressful occupations among the helping work professions (Hemanna & Amuyla, 2024).

Worldwide, research has associated teacher stress with high levels of workload (Kreuzfeild et al., 2022; Engelbrecht-Aldworth, 2024). High levels of workload have also been found to increase teachers' working hours (Bridge & Searle, 2011). According to Stacey et al. (2023), teachers in New Zealand, South Korea, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom have reported unmanageable workloads. A study of 35 countries reported that teachers working in Japan, New Zealand, Uganda, the United Kingdom and Singapore worked the longest hours (Dolton et al., 2018). Teachers who complete work tasks outside of their standard work hours, as a result of excessive workloads, can be hindered in their ability to pursue a healthy lifestyle (Cho et al., 2023). Furthermore, high workloads, long work hours, and intense job challenges can increase teachers' worries and job dissatisfaction and significantly impact their achievement of a work-life balance (Hafeez & Akbar, 2015).

According to Lewis and Beauregard (2018) work-life balance is a social construct, with a variety of contextual layers influencing how it is understood and interpreted. Although no single consensus exists about what work-life balance is and how to achieve it (Raja & Stein, 2014), this thesis will be guided by Kalliath and Brough's definition: "the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities" (2008, p. 326). This definition describes

work-life balance as being determined by the individual, who can choose to prioritise work over personal life and vice versa.

The inability to achieve a work-life balance has been reported as a significant factor influencing teachers' decision to leave the education profession (Hafeez & Akbar, 2015; Quinzio-Zafran & Wilkins, 2020). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2024) has identified teacher attrition as a critical global issue. According to UNESCO (2024), the global rate of attrition among primary school teachers had almost doubled between 2015 and 2022, with teachers often leaving the profession within the first five years. In 2023, the UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (TTF) estimated that 44 million additional teachers were required globally in order to meet the fourth Sustainable Development Goal: "The attainment of quality education for all by 2030" (UNESCO & TTF, 2023, p. 2). These shocking statistics emphasise the dire state of the teaching profession worldwide and the urgent need to address the global issue of teacher attrition.

Recent studies conducted locally have brought focus to the issue of teacher attrition within Australia and New Zealand. Longmuir (2023) reported that almost 70 percent of Australian teachers were considering leaving the profession, citing the influence of COVID-19 in exacerbating teachers' already high workloads. In 2023, 58 percent of New Zealand teachers also reported that they would likely leave the profession within the next five years and cited stress and workload as their most significant concerns (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2023). In 2019, a survey was conducted on former New Zealand school teachers and principals and reported that 76 percent of primary school teachers had left due to workload and burnout, as well as 81 percent as a result of work-life imbalance (New Zealand Educational Institute, & Deakin University (2019).

While New Zealand makes significant contributions to academia on work-life balance (Verma et al., 2024), my review of New Zealand-based literature found a lack of research on the relationship between the work-life balance of New Zealand primary school teachers and their career intentions. Furthermore, although work-life balance is extensively researched (Gragnano et al., 2020), research on the balance between work and personal life is often focused on the balance/conflict between work and family life (Aquino et al., 2023; Bullough, 2015; Fatima & Sahibzada, 2012; Hafeez & Akbar, 2015; Li et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2012). This narrow approach overlooks individuals who have no family responsibilities and neglects other aspects of life, such as leisure engagement. As leisure is considered crucial for the achievement of work-life balance (Akçakese et al., 2024) and is underexplored, this

thesis will aim to investigate work-life balance from a work-leisure balance perspective. For the purpose of this thesis, leisure can be understood as an existential experience in which individuals consciously choose to engage in activities based on the anticipated outcomes of their choice (Kelly, 2019).

As primary school teachers play an essential role in guiding, inspiring and shaping our next generation and society, it is crucial that research gaps, such as teacher work-leisure balance be addressed to understand ways to improve teachers' working conditions and retention rates. To contribute to the advancement of research, this thesis will conduct a qualitative study on the following question: *How do New Zealand primary school teachers' experiences of balancing work and leisure influence their decisions to remain or leave the profession?*

The Evolution of Work-Life Balance

While work-life balance is often considered a modern idea (Brough et al. 2020; Pendleton et al. 2021), the notion that work hours should be limited dates back to the 1800s when work-hour restrictions were placed on women and children (Raja & Stein, 2014). The construct of work-life balance is deeply rooted in the work and life experiences of women and was initially intended for women who were balancing their dual roles as mothers, wives and workers. While it was important for women to maintain a balance between work and family, the benefits of achieving a work-life balance soon expanded to include men (Raja & Stein, 2014). This occurred through a shift in focus from the balance between work and family life (work-family balance) to the broader approach of work and personal life (work-life balance) (Raja & Stein, 2014). Despite shifting to a broader approach, research often continues to investigate work-life balance from a family focused lens (Delecta, 2011; Jones et al., 2006; Khateeb, 2023; Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Pendleton et al., 2021). This approach has been argued as problematic as it fails to recognise the needs of all employees, particularly those who are childless or single (Drago & Kashian, 2003).

The Importance of Work-Life Balance

The ability to achieve a work-life balance can have significant benefits for both men and women employees and the organisations they work for. Employee benefits include: reduced work-related stress and depression and increased satisfaction in life, family and leisure (Gragnano et al., 2020; Sirgy & Lee, 2018). Organisational benefits can include:

organisational commitment and citizenship behaviours among employees (Haar & Brougham, 2020), increased workers' productivity and performance, enhanced work attitudes and motivation among employees, decreased absenteeism, reduced turnover and turnover-related costs (Gragnano et al., 2020; Haar & Brougham, 2020; Panda & Sahoo, 2021; Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Wong et al., 2023). Despite these reported benefits, difficulties in achieving a work-life balance can have significant outcomes for employees and organisations.

Conflict between work and personal life (work-life conflict) can lead to employees experiencing life and job dissatisfaction, psychological distress, poor well-being, reduced sleep, fatigue, burnout, leisure dissatisfaction and developing unhealthy behaviours, such as alcohol consumption (Borowiec & Drygas, 2022; Meenakshi et al., 2013; Md Shah et al., 2024; Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Wong et al., 2023; Hsieh et al., 2005). For organisations, it can lead to decreased work performance and productivity among employees, increased staff absenteeism, reduced staff motivation, staff turnover or intention to leave (Adawi et al., 2022; Borowiec & Drygas, 2022; Haar & Brougham, 2020; Raja & Stein, 2014; Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2020; Sirgy & Lee, 2018; Hsieh et al., 2005).

The Inclusion of Teachers in Work-Life Balance Research

Although research on work-life balance is extensive (Gragnano et al., 2020), covering a range of subjects and professions, my review of existing literature found a significant discrepancy in the inclusion of teachers, specifically primary school educators, in general work-life balance research. Silva and Fisher (2020) noted a similar discrepancy, arguing that greater attention is given to research on non-teaching professions than teachers and the teaching industry. The following section will critique three articles found in the Google Scholar database, which collectively reviewed 2,918 work-life balance publications, highlighting the research gap on teacher work-life balance in general academic literature.

In 2023, Wong et al. (2023) reviewed 99 publications written between 2006 and 2020 and across 17 industries and 24 countries to provide a comprehensive overview of research on the antecedents and outcomes of work-life balance. Despite citing the inclusion of nine studies from the "education industry", no details were provided regarding which educational sectors were reviewed (Wong et al., 2023, p. 6). Wong et al.'s use of the term 'education industry' may suggest an inclusive representation of teachers across the education industry. However, upon further investigation, the nine articles included in the

review only focus on higher education employees, ignoring other education sectors such as the early childhood, primary and secondary sectors and the potential differences between them.

A bibliographic study conducted in 2024 reviewed 2,733 work-life balance papers published between 2011 and 2022 to understand the evolution and trends of work-life balance research within the academic domain (Verma et al., 2024). The review was guided by five research questions that focused on advancement and direction of work-life balance research, as well as individual and organisational outcomes, consequences and policies for "all people and groups" (Verma et al., 2024, p. 3). The review analysed a wide range of factors including authors, journals, countries and subject areas, such as social science and psychology. Despite the inclusion of research on a variety of professions and roles, such as human resource management, construction, remote workers and the software industry, only one article investigated work-life balance among educational workers, specifically higher educators. As the aim of this study was to explore the outcomes and consequences for "all people and groups" (Verma et al., 2024, p. 3), it provided an inadequate representation of educational employees across the various educational sectors by only including one article specific to higher educators.

A similar disparity was also noted in Bardoel et al.'s (2008) review, which aimed to explore prominent themes and research methods used in locally-based work-life balance publications. Bardoel et al. reviewed 86 publications that met their eligibility criteria: a) focused on the balance between work and life, b) conducted in New Zealand and Australia, c) peer reviewed, and d) published between 2004 and 2007. Despite including publications across a range of professions and subjects, only two papers focused on the balance between work and personal life among educational workers. There was also no clarification on the educational sectors included. As such, this review only provided a limited insight on teacher work-life balance.

The three articles included in this section highlight the underrepresentation of educational workers in work-life balance research. The tendency for research to focus greater attention on higher educators neglects other teaching sectors, such as primary school educators. Furthermore, the generalised use of the term '*education industry*' overlooks potential work-life balance differences between teaching sectors, such as the experiences of higher educators and primary school teachers.

As work-life balance can differ across various groups of people (Verma et al., 2024), it is essential that a range of perspectives are considered to fully understand the relationship between work-life balance and teachers' career intentions. In particular, the limited literature on primary school teachers' work-life balance raises significant concerns. Firstly, without adequate research the challenges faced by primary school teachers may be overlooked, hindering their critical role as contributors to society (Tulqin o'g'li et al., 2024). Secondly, insufficient research neglects important issues, such as the reported global teacher shortage (UNESCO, 2024). It is due to this underrepresentation of teachers in work-life balance research, particularly teachers outside of the higher education sectors, that this thesis aims to explore the work-life balance experiences of primary school educators.

Work-Life Balance Among Teachers

As the work-life balance of primary school teachers is underexplored, the following discussions explores what is currently known on teacher work-life balance across various educational sectors. The studies included in the following section highlight the positive outcomes associated with achieving a work-life balance and the negative outcomes reported to result from a work-life imbalance.

Research conducted by Žnidaršč and Marić (2021) examined the impact of work-life balance, specifically work-family balance, on work engagement among higher education lecturers from Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Serbia, and Slovenia. The authors surveyed 164 participants to empirically test the relationship between work-life balance, job and life satisfaction, and work engagement. Their findings show that work-life balance positively impacts work and life satisfaction among higher education lecturers. While no direct relationship was found between work-life balance and work engagement, an indirect relationship was noted, with work-life balance leading to life satisfaction, which in turn led to work engagement. To improve work engagement among lecturers, the authors suggested that organisations consider not only how they can meet their employees' needs within the workplace environment, but also to focus on their life satisfaction in general and on improving their work-life balance.

The benefits of teacher work-life balance have also been reported in a quantitative study conducted in Pakistan (Rashid et al., 2022). This study found a positive relationship between work-life balance and supervisory support on private faculty teachers' work performance. A further quantitative study surveyed 455 Swedish teachers from compulsory

schools and found four key variables associated with work-life balance: time experiences at work, life satisfaction, self-related health and recovery (Nilsson et al., 2017). The authors emphasised the role of school management in reducing teachers' time pressures and supporting workplace resources to aid the achievement of teacher work-life balance and promote employee well-being.

A qualitative study in New Zealand identified a relationship between perceived role challenges of primary school teachers in maintaining a work-life balance and their experience of stress and poor well-being (Jain, 2021). The achievement of work-life balance has also been reported to play a key role in Australian primary and secondary teachers' well-being (Vo et al., 2024). Furthermore, poor health outcomes, such as work-related stress and depressive symptoms, challenging working conditions, workload and work-life imbalance were cited to significantly influence Australian primary and secondary teachers' intentions to stay or leave their teaching roles (Arnold & Rahimi, 2025).

Factors reported to hinder teacher work-life balance not only affect participants' ability to balance work with their personal lives, but also their ability to maintain their well-being, experience job and life satisfaction and sustain their motivation to remain in the profession. As teacher attrition is now a critical global issue, it is vital that more research is undertaken to address the issue. The following section will examine what is already known about the relationship between work-life balance and teachers' career intentions.

Teacher Work-Life Balance and Career Intentions

A study in Turkey conducted relational surveys to investigate the relationship between 368 primary school teachers' perceptions of their quality of work (QoW), job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Ertürk, 2022). Although work-life balance was not the central focus of this study, the construct was one of six QoW dimensions investigated. The authors reported that as participants' QoW increases, their level of job satisfaction will also increase and their intentions to leave will decrease and vice versa. The authors draw attention to the negative implications of job dissatisfaction and teacher turnover on students and schools, stating that poor QoW can hinder teachers' ability to focus on educational activities and motivation to use their skills. To aid teachers' QoW, the authors recommend that schools support the balance between work and family and demonstrate care for both life domains.

A qualitative study by Clandinin et al. (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews on 40 second- and third-year teachers to better understand the issue of attrition among beginning teachers in Alberta, Canada. The authors reported that their participants struggled to compose their professional and personal lives due to conflicting work and home responsibilities and their ability to sustain relationships and their well-being. While the authors identified seven central themes to demonstrate influential factors, they argued that by considering each theme in isolation would overlook the complexities shaping participants' individual lives and experiences. They reported that participants' experiences were too complex to determine factors directly associated with teachers' career intentions and suggest that remedying teacher attrition "requires that we know [teachers] as people" (Clandinin et al., 2015, p. 13). While it is important to recognise and address the diverse ways in which teachers' experience work and personal life, the ability to meet every teachers' needs could be seen as impractical.

While the studies included in this review highlight the many positive and negative outcomes of teacher work-life balance, such as work performance, job satisfaction, well-being and turnover, it was noted that many of these studies investigated work-life balance by adopting a work-family approach (Ertürk, 2022; Arnold & Rahimi, 2025; Rashid et al., 2022; Vo et al., 2024; Žnidaršč & Marić, 2021). Nilsson et al. (2017) argues that literature on work-life balance has primarily focused on the balance between work and domestic life, neglecting other areas, such as leisure. Leisure was reported as a resource for enhancing well-being and health and buffering life adversities. As previous studies emphasise the relationship between work-life balance, teacher well-being and turnover, the following section will examine existing literature on the balance between teachers' work-life balance, work-leisure balance and career intentions.

Teachers' Work-Life Balance, Work-Leisure Balance and Career Intentions

Syuzairi et al. (2023) conducted online questionnaires to investigate how work-life balance affects teacher turnover among Indonesian teachers and lecturers, using job satisfaction as a mediating factor. The authors conceptualised work-life balance broadly, focusing on the balance of multiple roles, commitments, non-work priorities and activities, such as family, health, social life, leisure, hobbies and spiritual activities. While the authors reported a relationship between work-life balance and career intentions, their discussion focused solely on the balance between work and family, overlooking other life aspects discussed in their work-life balance definition, such as leisure.

Cho et al. (2023) surveyed 485 Singaporean school teachers to understand the outcomes of work-to-leisure conflict and leisure-to-work conflict, such as turnover intention. The authors describe work and leisure as two important components of work-life balance, assisting in the achievement of well-being and quality of life (QoL). Cho et al. investigated the conflict between work and leisure by focusing on three dimensions, time, strain and behaviour. The authors reported that work-to-leisure conflict had a negative impact on teachers' job satisfaction and intentions to remain in the profession. Leisure-to-work conflict, however, was cited to only impact teachers' work performance. Cho et al. argue that the conflict between work and leisure among teachers is typically overlooked and that greater attention should be given to the relationship between work-to-leisure conflict and job satisfaction. The authors highlight the importance of job satisfaction as dissatisfaction can reduce teachers' performance and increase turnover intentions.

In conducting this critical literature review, it was noted that a significant lack of research exists on teacher work-life balance, leisure engagement and career intentions within the New Zealand context. As work-life balance has typically been conducted through a family focused lens, this thesis aims to provide a deeper understanding into teachers' work-life balance experiences and career intentions, focusing specifically on the influence of teachers' leisure engagement.

To understand the influence of work-leisure balance on New Zealand primary school teachers' career intentions, three work-life balance theories will underpin this study: boundary theory, spillover theory and compensation theory. Boundary theory posits that individuals manage the transition between work and personal life by either segmenting work and life with strong boundaries or integrating life domains with flexible and permeable boundaries (Pheng & Chua, 2018). Spillover theory describes how life domains can either positively or negatively impact each other through the spillover of experiences, attitudes, behaviours and skills (Battur & Jaydatta, 2024). Compensation theory describes how individuals counter negative experiences in one life domain for positive experiences in another, by either supplemental or reactive compensation (Jones et al., 2006). According to Jones et al. (2006), supplemental compensation involves pursuing desirable experiences in one life domain to compensate for insufficient desirable experiences, behaviours or psychological states in another. Reactive compensation is a response to deprivations in one life domain, prompting individuals to mitigate them in another domain, such as countering work-related fatigue by relaxing at home.

The three work-life balance theories selected provide a framework for understanding teachers' strategies for managing their work-life balance and leisure engagement and its relationship to the work and life domains. Observing the relationship between the work and leisure domains will provide a deeper insight into how teachers manage their work-leisure balance and how their experiences influence their career intentions.

Definition of Work-Life Balance

This research project was guided by Kalliath and Brough's (2008, p. 326) definition of work-life balance: "The individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities." This definition was chosen as it acknowledges the individual nature of work-life balance, suggesting individuals determine their own desired balance.

Research Question

The purpose of this research was to understand teachers' work-life balance experiences and career intentions in New Zealand. To explore this issue, the guiding research question was: *How do New Zealand primary school teachers' experiences of balancing work and leisure influence their decisions to remain or leave the profession?*

Initially, the research question was framed around the investigation of teachers' experiences balancing work and non-work activities. The term 'non-work activities' was used to align with the work-life balance definition proposed by Kalliath and Brough (2008). However, upon further reflection, the concept of balancing non-work activities was found to be too broad. The term 'non-work activities' encompasses a wide range of activities not related to one's professional life, including roles and obligations such as parenting and household tasks. Since research on teacher work-life balance in the New Zealand context has often focused on the balance between work and family, the term 'leisure' was adopted.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Epistemology

The philosophical assumption underpinning this research project was constructivism. Constructivism suggests that individuals create their perception of reality through active engagement and reflection on everyday experiences (Adom et al., 2016). Constructivism rejects the ontological belief that there is a single reality and that knowledge is discovered. Instead, it acknowledges the individual process of creating meaning, recognising that reality can be interpreted differently from one person to another (Croker, 2009).

This philosophical assumption influenced the research question that was posed to investigate teachers' work-life balance experiences. It also shaped the approach that was taken in researching this issue. As constructivism is centred on understanding the creation and interpretation of perceived reality through human experience, this project aimed to understand *how* teachers' lived experiences of balancing work and leisure influenced their career intentions. Furthermore, to remain consistent with the belief that reality is individually perceived and constructed, the project aimed to understand both the similarities and differences between participants' reported experiences. This enabled a comparison between participants' understandings of leisure, engagement in individual and social leisure activities, perceptions of work-life balance and the various work-related and non-work-related factors they deemed as either helpful or unhelpful in their pursuits for work-life balance.

Research Design

While philosophical assumptions offer a framework for research, Guest et al. (2012) argues that it is the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation that holds the greatest significance. Therefore, the following section aims to explain and justify the methodological options chosen.

An exploratory research design was chosen as the relationship between teachers' experiences of balancing work and leisure and their career intentions had been underexplored in New Zealand. Exploratory research is research conducted to investigate an issue not fully understood; seeking to identify a possible relationship between associated

variables (American Psychological Association, 2018). It is considered a "content-driven" approach involving the deriving of analytical categories and codes from a data set, rather than from predetermined ideas (Guest et al., 2012, p. 7). Exploratory research is also a methodological approach centred on the idea of exploring, with the researcher taking on the role of an explorer (Davies, 2006). As exploratory research is centred on investigating new and unexplored phenomena, no definitive conclusions can be drawn.

Due to its content-driven and exploratory approach, researchers must remain open-minded in their discoveries. Understanding the content-driven and exploratory nature of this research design was especially important to me as I had first-hand experience working as a primary school teacher within the New Zealand context. Davies' (2006) description of exploratory research reminded me to observe my own biases to ensure my interpretations of participants' responses portrayed a narrative that accurately reflected the experiences of my participants.

In conjunction with an exploratory research design, a mixed-method approach was used through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews, as defined by Karatsareas (2022), are an in-depth research method that facilitates the thorough exploration of participants' beliefs and experiences. While participants' responses guide the interviews, a pre-prepared agenda and active monitoring ensure that the discussions remain relevant to the topic of inquiry (Karatsareas, 2022).

In this project, semi-structured interviews facilitated open conversations, allowing participants' responses to shape the topics discussed while being guided by prearranged questions (Appendix C). The predetermined questions enabled the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. By asking closed-ended questions, key contextual information was obtained, such as participants' years of experience, class sizes and year levels. Open-ended questions facilitated an in-depth discussion of participants' work-life balance experiences, beliefs and opinions, enabling a deeper insight into both predetermined and new areas of interest. By asking closed-ended and open-ended questions, narratives emerged, along with the discovery of potential factors influencing their reported experiences.

Sample

To recruit participants, the study used convenience and snowball sampling methods. Convenience sampling involved posting a recruitment poster and Google sign-up link on the NZ Teachers (Primary) Facebook group (Appendix B). This Facebook group contains both primary and intermediate school teachers, collectively categorised under the umbrella of primary education. As the group contained 41,600 education members (at the time of investigation), it was an effective means of contacting the study's target audience. In addition to convenience sampling, snowball sampling was incorporated into the recruitment process. Respondents were encouraged via the Google sign-up link to share the study with other teachers, thereby expanding the study's reach and encouraging further participation.

A total of 16 participants were recruited for this study. This sample size was influenced by the project's exploratory research design. Since exploratory research cannot form conclusions or generalise findings across an entire population, a larger sample size was not needed. Despite the inability to generalise findings, the sample size was sufficient to capture a broad range of teachers' perspectives and experiences on teacher work-life balance.

Although the recruitment process allowed any teacher who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria to express interest in the study, no specific strategies were used to target teachers from diverse demographic locations or ethnic backgrounds. While participants' location and ethnicity were considered during the planning phase, the primary focus of the project was to explore teachers' experiences in balancing work and leisure. It was believed that introducing additional variables into the recruitment and analysis process could have shifted attention from the project's primary area of investigation.

Teachers who were interested in participating in the project were notified of the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1) via the recruitment poster and Google sign-up link. Potential participants were required to acknowledge their ability to meet the inclusion criteria before submitting their expression of interest. The first 16 respondents were contacted via a dedicated email address (teacherworklifebalance@gmail.com) to arrange an interview date and time.

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
• Teachers based in New Zealand • Full-time primary school teachers	• Part-time/relief teachers • Teachers not actively working in New Zealand • Teachers known to the researcher

Despite the project's goal of recruiting 16 participants, five more expressions of interest were collected via the Google sign-up link. By obtaining these extra responses, replacement participants were available in the event that any of the first 16 participants withdrew or failed to meet the inclusion criteria. All 21 respondents were contacted via a dedicated project email address, ensuring all correspondence remained confidential and separate from the researcher's personal email address. The first 16 respondents were contacted to arrange an interview date and time. Five respondents were informed that they had been waitlisted for an interview.

The project's final sample consisted of one male and 15 female participants, with a broad range of teaching experience (Table 2). At the time of the investigation, all participants worked as full-time classroom teachers in either primary or intermediate schools. In addition to their classroom roles, four participants held leadership roles in their schools. Two participants were beginning teachers and were completing the mandatory beginning teachers programme. Furthermore, one participant worked full-time while also studying full-time for her Master's in Education. These factors were taken into account during the analysis process and later found to have a potential impact on participants' work-life balance experiences and career intentions. See Table 2 for an in-depth sample description.

Table 2

Sample Summary: Work-Related and Non-Work Related Factors

Participant	Teaching experience	Work-related roles	Classroom year level	Number of students	Family and non-work-related roles
P1	1 year and 1 term	BT Classroom teacher	Year 8	31 students	Parent of school-aged child
P2	Nearly 9 years	Classroom teacher	Year 2	25 students	Childless
P3	23 years (includes part-time and full-time employment)	Classroom teacher	Years 1 and 2	29 students	Parent of adult children
P4	29 years	Classroom teacher	Years 5 and 6	28 students	Parent of adult children
P5	21 years	Classroom teacher, environmental leader and ITL	Years 5 and 6	26-27 students Works an ILE with a total class size of 80 students	Parent of school-aged children
P6	20 years	Classroom teacher	Year 3 and 4	25 students	Family role unspecified

P7	13 years	Classroom teacher	Years 4, 5 and 6	13 students	Parent of adult children
P8	7 years	Classroom teacher and team leader	Years 7 and 8	28 students Works in an ILE with a total class size of 45 students. Team leader of 85 students	Parent of school-aged children
P9	8 years	Classroom teacher	Years 3 to 6	17 full-time students 7 transitioning students (in-class or half a day)	Parent of school-aged children
P10	6 years (approximately)	Classroom teacher	Year 6	25 students	Family role unspecified
P11	5 years	Classroom teacher	Year 2	24 students	Parent of school-aged and adult children
P12	3.5 years	BT Classroom teacher	Years 5 and 6	23 students	Childless

	(includes part-time and full-time employment in New Zealand and overseas)			Works in an ILE with a total class size of 45 students	
P13	10 years	Classroom teacher	Years 5 and 6	23 students	Family role unspecified
P14	18 years	Classroom teacher, SLT, e-learning leader, WST, BT mentor and team leader	Years 5 and 6	31 students In charge of 131 students across 5 classrooms	Parent of school-aged children
P15	23 years	Classroom teacher and AP	Year 3	23 students	Parent of school-aged children
P16	15 years	Classroom teacher	Years 3 and 4	29 students	Childless

Note: AP refers to Assistant Principal; BT refers to beginning teacher; ILE refers to innovative learning environment; ITL refers to information technology leader; SLT refers to the senior leadership team; and WST refers to a within-school teacher.

Interview Questions

Participants were asked a variety of closed-ended questions, such as "How long have you worked as a teacher?" and open-ended questions, such as "What does work-life balance mean to you?" and "Can you recall a positive/not-so-positive experience where you were able to/found it difficult to balance your role as a teacher and your leisure life?" Questions were also asked about the strategies they used to balance work and leisure, which were informed by boundary theory and compensation theory. A full description of the interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Prior to commencing the project, a comprehensive application was submitted to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. After a full review, the project was approved in October 2023 (OM3 23/40). The following section outlines the procedures and ethical considerations implemented throughout the project.

An advert was posted on the NZ Teachers (Primary) Facebook group. The advert contained a brief description of the study, an information sheet and a Google Forms sign-up link (Appendix B). Permission to post this advert was obtained from the group's administrator prior to commencing the project. The advertisement contained a description of the project and its purpose, participants' role, information on consent, risks and benefits, the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1) and a Google Forms sign-up link (Appendix B). A copy of this information was included in the sign-up link along with three questions:

1. What are your initials?
2. What is your personal email address?
3. Do you meet the inclusion criteria?

Respondents were contacted in order of submission to arrange a Zoom interview. All communication with participants was conducted via a dedicated project email address (teacherworklifebalance@gmail.com). This ensured that correspondence remained confidential and separate from the researcher's personal email address. Participants were contacted a day prior to their scheduled interview to confirm their attendance and provide them with a Zoom link.

All 16 participants engaged in a one-on-one, semi-structured Zoom interview during October and November 2023. Each interview was recorded and took approximately one hour. A brief introduction occurred at the beginning of every interview, allowing the participants and researcher to become acquainted and to discuss the following: The project's purpose, approximate interview duration, what to expect, confidentiality, recording, consent, participants' rights, risks and benefits, helplines and the sharing of findings. The information discussed was available to participants prior to commencing the interview via the information sheet and sign-up link. Reiterating this information enhanced participants' understanding and facilitated informed consent. Informed consent was obtained verbally and recorded via Zoom Pro prior to starting the pre-arranged interview agenda.

According to Pritchard (2021), informed consent comprises three key elements: information, comprehension and voluntariness. To adhere to these elements, the following steps were taken:

1. Information was provided in the Facebook advert and sign-up link, ensuring participants were fully informed prior to engaging in the project.

2. Comprehension was facilitated by reiterating key information at the beginning of each interview.

3. Participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary via the information sheet, sign-up link, and verbal communication during the consent process.

As low psychological discomfort was anticipated, participants were provided with the contact details for the following agencies at the beginning of the interview via Zoom chat: Lifeline, Free Text/Call Counselling Services and Warmlines. They were also informed of their right to omit information, refrain from answering questions, or end the interview at any point. To ensure cultural inclusivity, participants were offered the option of engaging in a karakia (prayer) prior to commencing their recorded interview. Participants were able to participate in this process, which was facilitated by the researcher.

A prearranged agenda guided the interviews (Appendix C). Participants were asked a variety of questions, with the understanding that they could not amend their responses, as outlined in the information sheet. This was influenced by the decision to conduct semi-structured interviews as this method of data collection aims to capture spontaneous and honest answers. To prevent misinterpretation, probing questions were asked to aid

comprehension and participants' responses were repeated back to them for clarity and accuracy.

At the end of each interview, participants were informed that they would receive a written summary outlining the projects' findings once the final report had been completed and that a full report would be available to them upon request. Additionally, they were provided with a $40 koha (gift) for their contribution to the project.

All interview recordings and transcriptions were captured using a Massey University Zoom Pro account. These were then saved onto the Massey University OneDrive for safekeeping and were only accessible by the researcher to ensure confidentiality. According to Saunders et al. (2015), maintaining confidentiality and anonymity can be challenging, with some arguing that achieving full participant anonymity can be unachievable in qualitative research. Therefore, reasonable efforts were made to ensure participants could not be identified by the data obtained in this study. To ensure participant anonymity, the following strategies were employed:

- Teachers known to the researcher were excluded from the study
- Potential participants were asked to provide their initials when completing the sign-up link.
- To ensure workplace confidentiality, potential participants were asked to provide their personal email address.
- During the interviews, participants were asked to refrain from sharing identifiable information such as their name, workplace, location and colleagues' names.
- Any identifiable information shared during the interviews was removed during the transcription phase.
- Pseudonyms were used to identify participants.

All necessary steps were taken to ensure participant information remained anonymous and confidential, in adherence to the ethical obligations outlined by Massey University (2017).

Chapter 3

Analysis and Discussion

This chapter outlines how 16 New Zealand primary school teachers' work-leisure balance experiences were reported to influence their intentions to remain or leave their full-time teaching roles. Participants' responses were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2008) thematic analysis. In addition, the interpretation of these findings were guided by three work-life balance theories: boundary theory, spillover theory and segmentation theory, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Thematic Analysis

Attride-Stirling (2001) argues that without a clear understanding of how research is analysed or the assumptions which influenced its analysis, it is difficult to assess or compare the research to other relevant studies. Therefore, to avoid confusion and to maintain the credibility of this research, the following section provides a thorough account of the steps implemented during the process of analysis.

As thematic analysis often leads to new insights into a phenomenon through the identification and interpretation of patterns (Naeem et al., 2023), it was considered the most appropriate method, aligning well with the project's qualitative and exploratory approach. Thematic analysis involves the process of conceptualising and interpreting a data set through the discovery and creation of keywords, codes and themes. Although thematic analysis is widely used, there is no consensus about what it is or how to conduct it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As it is imperative to find a guide on how to conduct thematic analysis to ensure research credibility (Attride-Stirling, 2001), this thesis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six thematic analysis steps: 1) familiarisation, 2) coding, 3) generating themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report.

Step 1: Familiarisation

The first step of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was to develop a familiarity with the study's data set. Kiger and Varpio (2020) define familiarisation as the process of repeatedly reading a data set to become immersed in and familiar with its

content. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the importance of *active* reading, searching for meanings and patterns within the data. In this project, familiarisation was achieved through three steps: 1) transcribing participants' audio responses, 2) vigorously reading participants' written transcripts across the course of the study and 3) actively taking notes throughout the process. Although time-consuming, the process of transcribing participants' audio responses provided the first insight (post interviews) into participants' responses. Transcribing their responses helped to remind me of their experiences, which was supplemented by the notes that were taken during each interview.

Once transcribed, participants' written responses were read thoroughly and were referred to throughout the research process to ensure their responses were understood and interpreted in the correct context. Notes were also actively written throughout the research process. This ensured a sense of familiarity with the data set and continuous reflection on participants' responses. Familiarity with participants' transcripts was further supported through the generating and reviewing of keywords, codes and themes.

Step 2: Coding

After developing a familiarity with participants' responses, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest creating initial codes. This was achieved by highlighting Important keywords and ideas, before summarising them into codes. It was important to develop codes that accurately portrayed these ideas, as they were later used to generate themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), it is important that coded data is reviewed inclusively to ensure data context is not lost. To achieve this, the participants' responses were reviewed in their entirety. They were also reviewed across the entire sample to further understand the relationship between all participants' reported experiences.

In alignment with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, both inductive and deductive approaches were used to analyse participants' responses. Braun and Clarke define these approaches as data-driven (inductive) and theory-driven (deductive) approaches. An inductive approach allowed for the discovery of themes and ideas derived from participants' responses. A deductive approach, however, was used to analyse participants' responses in relation to the three work-life balance theories underpinning this research: boundary theory, spillover theory and compensation theory (Chapter 1).

Step 3: Generating Themes

The third step of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis is to generate themes. They suggest achieving this is by sorting codes into groups and reviewing them with their corresponding data extracts to form potential overarching themes. Once codes had been grouped, an audit trail was developed (Appendix D). According to Nowell et al. (2017), audit trails support research credibility as they provide insight into the reasons behind each decision. In this project, audit trails played a vital role throughout the process of analysis. The audit trails helped to amend codes and themes, ensuring that data extracts were relevant, interrelated and reflected the overarching theme.

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

After step three, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the generated themes are further reviewed and refined to reveal whether there is sufficient data evidence to support them. They also discuss the importance of ensuring that themes are supported by meaningful data and are distinct to demonstrate the differences between them. They suggest achieving this by reading both coded data extracts and the entire data set to ensure patterns are coherent and accurately reflect the overall meanings within the data set, and reworking data extracts if they do not fit the initial theme or discarding them from the analysis.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Following the previous step, Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 22) suggest that themes should be defined and refined to reveal the "essence" of each theme. They stress the importance of ensuring themes are not too diverse or complex and they are clearly defined by what they are and are not. Each theme must contribute to the overall narrative and be organised in a way that is clear and coherent. To achieve this, the data set was reread multiple times and written notes were created to capture important ideas, as well as participants' overall narrative. This further supported the defining of themes, which were renamed to accurately reflect the data within each theme.

Step 6: Producing the Report

Step six in Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis involves producing the final report. Although described as the final step, Braun and Clark (2012, p. 11) emphasise that writing the report should be conducted simultaneously with the analysis as "writing and

analysis are thoroughly interwoven in qualitative research." Braun and Clarke (2006) also state that the report should be written in narrative form, portraying an *argument* rather than merely providing extracts of data. They disagree with the notion that researchers "give voice" to their participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 7). They argue that it is important that researchers acknowledge their own theoretical positions and values, which relate to the research conducted. Based on these suggestions, the analysis and report discussion was combined. This ensured the report flowed like a narrative and enabled me to express how I interpreted participants' responses, providing an argument for my interpretations.

Considerations

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest avoiding the following practices while conducting thematic analysis:

- Analysing the data as separate extracts.
- Using the research questions as themes.
- Establishing themes that are weak, overlap and are inconsistent.
- Providing inadequate examples, such as offering only one or two extracts to support a theme.
- Producing a report that is a passive recount of data extracts.
- Drawing broad conclusions from a small sample.

In addition, they also suggest avoiding the words 'emerged' and 'discovered' when providing an account of themes, arguing that they "[deny] the *active* role of the researcher" in identifying ideas and themes deemed most important (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 7).

Using Braun and Clarke's (2008) thematic analysis, four central themes were developed: *Balance Defined*, *The Never-Ending Workload*, *The Balancing Act* and *What Next?* These key themes illustrate a compelling narrative on the challenges participants reported facing while balancing work and leisure and their relationship to their career intentions. An outline of each central theme and its underlying subthemes are illustrated in Table 3. While all participants expressed a commitment to staying in the education profession, their reported work-leisure balance experiences and career intentions indicated a desire for change. This included a better work-life balance and the possibility of transitioning to different roles within the teaching profession.

Table 3

Summary of Themes and Subthemes

Central Theme	Subthemes
Balance Defined	• Work-Life Separation • Maintaining Well-Being

The Never-Ending Workload	• The List at School Will Always Be Long
	• The Influence of Experience
	  - Beginning Teachers
	  - Experienced Teachers
	• The Influence of Workplace Support

The Balancing Act	• Juggling Dual Roles
	  - Professional Dual Roles
	  - The Family Role
	• When the Balance is Tipped

What Next?	• To Stay or Leave?
	  - Remaining as Full-Time Teachers
	  - Transitioning to Alternative Roles
	  - Undecided
	• Improving Work-Life Balance

Theme 1: Balance Defined

The theme, *Balance Defined*, captures participants' conceptualisations of work-life balance, drawing attention to the importance of personal priorities and experiences in shaping their perception. While their individual perceptions, priorities and strategies to achieve 'balance' varied, two reoccurring priorities were noted: work-life separation and maintaining well-being (Table 3). Despite distinct differences between separation and well-being, these were often described as interconnected, with both dependent on each other. Participants reported valuing their ability to separate themselves from their work and maintain their well-being, not only to achieve a work-life balance but also to meet various personal and professional priorities.

Work-Life Separation

Participants reported on the importance of separating themselves from their professional lives. Achieving this separation was described as both a priority and a strategy to meet their goals and needs. Separation was described in relation to mentally disconnecting from work, implementing time restrictions and boundaries on work tasks and leaving work at work. Participants' definitions of work-life balance emphasised their need for control over their professional lives, which they reported as difficult to achieve in their responses to subsequent interview questions.

One example of this was Participant 14, who defined work-life balance as, "the ability to switch off when you walk out of the school." This definition highlights her perception that achieving balance involves controlling when and where she thought about work. The ability to mentally disconnect after work indicates a desire for a clear separation between her work and personal life domains. Despite conceptualising work-life balance as the ability to mentally disconnect after work, she reported that achieving this separation was "not necessarily [a] reality" (P14).

A similar sentiment was shared by Participant 1. He defined work-life balance as the ability to control his professional life by mentally disconnecting from work and implementing time restrictions. Participant 1 recalled a positive past employment experience while working in accounts, which highlights the value of work-life separation. This experience was reported to lead to a "good" work-life balance, enabling him to engage in healthy lifestyle habits, such as cooking, sleeping and fitness, and to participate in enjoyable activities, like reading, music and learning foreign languages.

> [Work-life balance means] being able to shut off my professional life, leave it at work. I certainly have experience of having a work-life balance. … I would go to the office and then punch out at 5 o'clock and that was it. I'd go home and do what I wanted to do. Occasionally [I'd] have brilliant thoughts in the shower, 'Oh, what if I did that?' … But that was as much time as I gave to my professional life. … I used to go to the gym, eat a lot healthier, cook a lot more, read, play music, study language, which are things that I enjoy. (P1)

Following this response, Participant 1 used the metaphor of a tap to describe his ideal work-life balance: "turn [work] off life a tap. If I can turn it off to turn it on as required, that would be awesome." This metaphor suggests an inner desire for control. Despite previously indicating a need to "shut off" his professional life to achieve a work-life balance, the metaphor of a tap implies a deeper meaning, involving the ability to control and manage the flow between work and personal life. According to McFarland et al. (2009), metaphors support individuals to process their feelings and express complex inner emotions and experiences.

Maintaining Well-Being

In addition to prioritising work-life separation, participants also defined work-life balance as the ability to maintain their physical and mental well-being, such as managing stress, energy levels and finding satisfaction. The ability to maintain their well-being was cited as both a strategy to achieve a work-life balance and a result of achieving balance. For some, managing their mental and physical well-being was reported as essential to successfully engage in professional and family roles, participate socially with others and sustain themselves. Participant 16 is one example of this, describing the importance of prioritising her physical health to sustain her social energy:

> [Work-life balance] means things like I can [disconnect] when I leave work to maintain my physical health. When I get stressed, I get really sick. So, [work-life balance] means that … I actually have the energy to go out with family or friends. (P16)

Participant 10 offered a different perspective, defining work-life balance as the ability to prioritise her mental well-being by attending therapy after work:

> For me, I've had to come to terms with what work was and draw the line somewhere. … If I don't look after myself I'm not able to be present in the classroom. So for me, [work-life balance] looks like leaving school early around 3:15 one of the days to go to therapy because I think looking after yourself is super important. (P10)

While the previous two examples emphasised the importance of maintaining well-being through implementing boundaries to achieve work-life balance, Participant 8 described accepting imbalance as important to experience work-life satisfaction:

We had a PD [professional development] guy talk to us at my old school. He described work-life satisfaction as being more important — like you're never gonna get half and half. Don't try and balance it. … [Work-life balance means] that I'm happy with the amount of stresses [*sic*] that I have and still able to find some happiness outside of school, as well. … It's way more achievable to find satisfaction in it. (P8)

In the first two examples, 'balance' was conceptualised as the ability to maintain mental and physical well-being through implementing boundaries, such as leaving work at work. Boundaries were cited as essential for prioritising themselves and to enable them to be present in either the classroom or with friends and family. Participant 8 argued that work-life satisfaction is more achievable than striving for equal balance between work and personal life. Rather than striving for balance, she reported accepting stress in order to find happiness and satisfaction outside of school.

Participants' perception of 'balance' emphasised the importance of meeting personal life priorities. These priorities were influenced by their individual life circumstances, desires and past experiences and shaped their perception of work-life balance. To achieve their ideal balance, participants referenced their need to develop healthy lifestyle habits, participate in social relationships, manage and maintain personal well-being, all of which can be connected to personal growth. Participants' responses align with the work-life balance definition guiding this study, which posits that work-life balance is, "the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's life priorities" (Kalliath & Brough, 2008, p. 326).

While participants identified their ideal work-life balance, their responses to subsequent questions highlighted challenges, such as workload and job intensity, which impacted their ability to achieve it. The following themes draw attention to these challenges, which not only impacted their ability to balance work and personal life, but also their engagement in leisure. These experiences, both positive and not-so-positive, were foundational in shaping their perception of work-life balance and supporting my understanding of their career intentions.

Theme 2: The Never-Ending Workload

The following central theme, *The Never-Ending Workload,* explores participants' experiences of balancing workload with leisure engagement, such as hobbies, time with loved ones, fitness and downtime, and how these experiences were reported to influence their motivation to stay or leave the teaching profession. This central theme includes three subthemes (Table 3), which highlight how workload volume, teaching experience and workplace support were reported to shape their work-leisure balance experiences and career intention responses.

The List at School Will Always Be Long

This subtheme draws attention to how the impact of workload volume hindered participants' engagement in leisure. Participants cited their workload as the most influential factor impacting their ability to relax and disconnect from work, engage with family and friends, achieve a healthy lifestyle and participate in enjoyable activities. They described their workload as "big" (P2), "unnecessary" (P4, P8) and relentless, "the list at school will always be long" (P5). The impact of high workload volume was reported to demotivate them from the teaching profession and question their sustainability in a teaching role. The following participant's response draws attention to the imbalance between teacher workload volume and leisure engagement:

> Before coming to New Zealand, the Ministry sent out this video. … The whole video was about the work-life balance that you can experience in New Zealand. It talked about how, after work, you can go out into the ocean, go kayaking [and] go for hikes. … But my experience here has been that there is so much work that you can't possibly get through it in the hours that you're meant to be at school. … So, working evenings is very expected. … In every school I have worked at, it is normal practice for teachers to go into schools on weekends just to keep on top of things. So it's very tough. … I feel like there's always a blurred boundary. (P13)

Participant 13's response highlights the discrepancy between the Ministry of Education's portrayal of work-life balance in New Zealand, which involves participation in outdoor activities during non-work hours, and her *actual* teaching experience. She cited her workload as too large to "get through" in the hours she spends at school, which she reported led to the "normal practice" of teachers completing work tasks during their personal time. Participant 13 stated that she felt "there's always a blurred boundary", suggesting that work

tasks frequently interfered with her personal life. This blurring of boundaries was cited by all participants and was reported to hinder their achievement of their ideal work-life balance (Theme 1). Participant 8 is a further example of this:

> I have a really big to-do list. … sometimes you just have to park that for a while and go take some leisure, but sometimes that doesn't give you any leisure. You just feel anxious about said to-do list. The job is actually never done when you're a teacher. (P8)

Throughout participants' responses, workload volume was reported to negatively impact their personal lives through the time and energy they spent completing work-related tasks after school hours and on weekends, particularly report writing and planning. To complete work-related tasks, some participants cited working long hours. For example, Participant 14 stated that she worked "80 hours" per week and that her "boundaries [were] always very blurred." A similar sentiment was shared by Participant 12:

> The blurring is not my choice and I wish that the workload was more manageable and we could concentrate on our own time because I don't think anybody should be working a 56-to-60-hour week. … I just don't think that should be the normal expectation, but the reality is that it is. (P12)

Participant 12 also stated that she worked approximately 50 hours per week and managed her work by being flexible and clear about the time she could designate for herself. These examples illustrate the relationship between participants' experiences and boundary theory, which underpins this study. Boundary theory posits that individuals manage the relationship between work and personal life through implementing either strong boundaries to separate life domains or flexible and more permeable boundaries to integrate them (Pheng & Chua, 2018).

While participants' positive work-life balance experiences often involved their ability to set strong boundaries between work and personal life, they reported being unable to maintain them. Many participants reported having flexible and permeable boundaries to manage their teaching roles, stating that they had no control over the integration of their work into their personal life, "the blurring is not my choice" (P12). This was cited as a result of their workload volume, regular emails with colleagues, students and parents and the expectations imposed by their Senior Leadership Team (SLT). However, some participants shared that implementing blurred boundaries was necessary to feel prepared and organised

in order to meet their professional priorities. According to Austinson (2022), the strategy of implementing boundaries (strong or blurred) enables individuals to achieve their desired level of connection between their work and personal lives.

The Influence of Experience

While all participants cited workload volume as a significant factor influencing their personal time, priorities and leisure engagement, their level of teaching experience was noted to impact how they managed them. The following subtheme, *The Influence of Experience*, describes the work practices and strategies implemented by experienced and less experienced participants to manage their workload volume. This highlighted how teaching experience was reported to impact some participants' leisure engagement.

Beginning Teachers

Two participants in this study reported being in their beginning teacher (BT) years and managed their workload by taking work home, working long hours and prioritising work over family and friends. While the following discussion focuses solely on the experiences of the two BTs in this study, many experienced participants reflected back on the challenges they faced in their initial teaching years and the strategies they implemented during this time. Collectively, participants' responses draw attention to the challenges BTs face while managing workload and personal life priorities.

For example, Participant 1 reported managing his workload by remaining at school until late and taking his workload home to complete in his personal time, which he cited negatively impacted his relationships with his family. Participant 1 indicated that his inexperience hindered his ability to ask for help with his teaching role, sharing, "my mentor teacher has offered a lot of help and support. I don't know how to utilise that as well as I probably should. … I think due to my inexperience I don't know what to ask for."

According to Caspersen & Raaen (2014), less experienced teachers can struggle to articulate their needs to colleagues, impacting their ability to cope with work demands. This reflects Participant 1's response, who recognised the limitations of inexperience. When probed whether knowing what questions to ask would assist him in achieving a work-life balance, he replied, "100 percent" (P1). Collaboration through mentorship between inexperienced and experienced teachers has been reported to help newly qualified teachers

cope with their workload (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014). Participant 12, the second BT in this study, shared her experience of participating in collaborative planning meetings:

> There is always weekend work, especially in my current workplace. We do collaborative planning meetings on a Friday afternoon, which means that any personal planning has to happen over the weekend. There's no real other option. … I probably could set stronger boundaries too, but it's always a trade-off. … I'll trade the necessity of doing personal planning on the weekend for the convenience and support that comes with collaborative planning on a Friday. (P12)

While Participant 12 cited her engagement in collaborative planning meetings as helpful, they resulted in personal work tasks being completed during the weekends. She described this as a "trade-off", which suggests that as a BT, the advantages of participating in collaborative team meetings outweighed the cost to her personal time. Participant 12 made a conscious choice to prioritise work over her personal time due to the high level of workload required in full-time teaching and the level of learning she needed to achieve as a BT. This was reported to negatively impact her engagement in leisure and relationships with friends:

> My first year of teaching was really hard. … I lost a lot of friends in that time. I just had to do this and be here and they didn't understand that I didn't have the time for them like I had in the past. (P12)

Experienced Teachers

While only two participants were considered BTs in this study, many experienced participants recalled the challenges they faced in their initial years as a teacher and how they managed them. These experiences were reported to shape their future work practices, leading some to implement strategies they deemed as effective for meeting their professional and personal priorities. This can be illustrated by Participant 2, who reported:

> I've done the years of a beginning teacher where you stay at home watching TV and laminating. You're doing something every night. But now after years of experience, I think it is super important to just switch off when you get home, apart from report writing season. [It's] very important because when I want to have kids one day. I want to be able to manage my time. … I've taught year 2s for several years. It's so

easy to whip out similar lessons from past years, make things up on the spot, so I am very well planned. … I really do work smart and reduce my workload as much as I possibly can. (P2)

In this example, Participant 2 emphasised the value of experience in supporting her ability to manage her time and mentally disconnect after work. Her nine years of experience enabled her to draw upon past lessons, utilise the knowledge and skills she developed over time, along with the resources she accumulated throughout her teaching career. Participant 2's experience also enabled her to implement strong boundaries. While she frequently cited working smart as essential for achieving a work-life balance, her reported strategies came at a cost. In order to disconnect after work, she reported condensing her work practices into her designated school hours by not "[going] to the staffroom very often. … [using] my lunch time for planning."

Participant 3 also reported implementing strong boundaries by restricting work tasks to the workplace as a result of advice she was given at teachers' college. Despite reporting on the importance of setting strong boundaries, she indicated that she completed some work-related tasks at home, particularly report writing, leading to an occasional blurring of boundaries.

I manage work and leisure with strong boundaries, but sometimes they do get blurred, which is probably not very helpful. … I work full blast Monday to Friday and on a Sunday afternoon probably for an hour and a half. … I like to be very well planned. It makes me feel very secure. (P3)

The examples provided demonstrate the role of experience in shaping how participants managed their workload. While experienced teachers, such as Participants 2 and 3 appeared to be more efficient in balancing workload and leisure than less experienced teachers, their responses continued to emphasise the impact of workload on their personal time. This suggests that while experience may have assisted participants to balance their work and leisure, it did not necessarily come without a cost. Participant 2 reported working during her lunch breaks and Participant 3 stated that she worked "full blast" during the week and for a short period on Sundays.

Both experienced and inexperienced participants shared the difficulties in managing workload volume with leisure, family roles and personal priorities, resulting in strategies,

such as incorporating work-related tasks into date nights, isolating themselves from their loved ones to engage in work, arriving early to school, remaining at work until late and completing work-related tasks during school holidays. These strategies, while at times were deemed as necessary, were also reported to both positively and negatively impact participants' achievement of personal priorities, time with loved ones, lifestyle habits and leisure engagement. According to Basile & Beauregard (2020), individuals develop strategies that enable them to manage their work and non-work roles according to their personal preferences. This reflects the boundaries participants reported implementing, which could be changed and adapted to meet their needs and priorities.

The Influence of Workplace Support

The following subtheme, *The Influence of Workplace Support*, highlights the significant influence of workplace support, particularly support from school principals, in shaping participants' work-leisure balance experiences. Positive and negative workplace experiences were cited to affect workload volume, coping strategies, working hours, well-being, family role, personal life, and engagement in leisure. The type of support participants received played an influential role on their ability to manage work and personal life priorities and was also cited as a potential push or pull factor motivating their career intentions.

Many participants referenced negative experiences of insufficient and unhelpful workplace support, such as unrealistic expectations, and toxic workplace culture. Participants' negative experiences were reported to increase their workload, reduce their job satisfaction and perceived competence. It also negatively impacted their well-being, leisure engagement and time with loved ones. Participant 16 shared the following experience:

> [My previous] principal … was a workaholic. She was constantly adding to the list of everything that we needed to do. … We were literally told two days before our assessments were due, 'Oh, I want this on my desk in two days'. … It was certainly stressful and it was almost impossible to have a good work-home-life balance because of the level of stuff we were expected to do was insane. (P16)

Participant 16 reported that her experiences with poor workplace support resulted in a negative spillover, impacting her health, time with loved ones and career motivation. This matches the findings of Maas et al.'s (2021) study, which reported that teachers who experience work-related stress and time pressures impacting their workload completion,

may be at risk of negative health outcomes. The authors' findings cite the support from school principals as a resource, which could aid the experience of time pressures and emotional exhaustion.

While many participants recognised the value of increased workplace support in helping them to manage work-related demands and achieve a work-life balance, some participants emphasised that the type of support they received also had an impact. For instance, Participant 13 stated:

> [My previous school] had [a] strict policy about no emails [past 4:00 p.m. and] being off-site by 5:00, but it didn't reduce the workload. … I just felt like I had to hide it a lot more because I couldn't let on that I wasn't having work-life balance. … Nobody was allowed to really talk about the fact that they were overworked. … I felt very incompetent. … Why am I not able to finish my work at work? … There is just so much to do. (P13)

While the previous example highlights the impact of ineffective workplace support, the following example, provided by Participant 10, illustrates the impact of positive workplace support on her work-life balance and leisure engagement:

> At my old school, the principal was super supportive with us going home and looking after ourselves and she actually encouraged us to do that. … Because of that, it allowed staff to go home early and spend time on the activities we [enjoyed] doing [like] meeting up with friends [and] going to the gym. (P10)

When responding to a question about the impact of this experience on her life, Participant 10 replied:

> It was really positive. I found myself enjoying teaching a lot more. … It wasn't my whole entire life and I felt that I was a better teacher because I actually wanted to be at school because my work wasn't creeping into other areas of my life. (P10)

Although both participants reported being encouraged to leave work early, the way in which support was offered differed. Participant 10 stated that she was "encouraged" to leave work early, whereas Participant 13 indicated that she was required to be off-site by 4:00 p.m. due to a "strict" workplace policy. Participant 10 perceived her workplace support as helpful as she was able to engage in leisure. However, Participant 13 did not find her school

policies helpful as they did not address her workload volume. This resulted in Participant 13 needing to complete work tasks at home, which made her feel incompetent and unable to share her concerns. Disilio and Callo (2024) report that teachers who experience stress due to their workload can be positively impacted by caring school leaders. This was reflected in Participant 10's experiences.

Theme 3: The Balancing Act

While the previous central theme, *The Never-Ending Workload*, emphasised the impact of workload volume and teaching experience, the following theme, *The Balancing Act,* shares two additional factors influencing participants' work-leisure balance experiences: dual roles and job intensity. Their experiences are discussed in the following subthemes: *Juggling Dual Roles* and *When the Balance is Tipped* (Table 3).

Juggling Dual Roles

The following subtheme, *Juggling Dual Roles*, demonstrates the difficulties participants faced balancing professional and personal roles (Table 3). Dual roles were noted to add additional pressure to participants' work and personal life experiences, such as increased workload and responsibilities. Participants also reported that balancing their dual roles impacted their time, well-being and capacity to engage in leisure.

Professional Dual Roles

Participants who held multiple work-related roles reported on the challenges of managing their tasks, such as additional role workload, emails to colleagues, students and parents, and planning additional lessons for extracurricular activities. These were associated with increased working hours, reduced frequency of their lunch breaks, mental rumination and the completion of workload in their personal time.

One example was Participant 14, who shared that she often struggled to balance her various work and personal life roles and engagement in leisure. She reported working as a SLT, BT mentor, e-learning leader, WST and school leader in addition to her classroom role and was responsible for 131 students across five classrooms. Participant 14 also reported balancing her many work roles with motherhood and stated that during "term time, priority is

work." The following excerpt highlights the impact of her work practices on her "Hauora" (well-being), family and leisure engagement.

> I think as a teacher and in my position as a leader I would advocate for the kids to have a brain break, for my team to have release [but] at the cost of myself. And that's not a good leadership quality. … It's something that I know I need to address at work in order to improve my work-life balance, but I think as a leader you lead and you serve others. And somethings that comes at your own deficit. I do, during term breaks … switch off and put the out-of-office email response on, but [I'm] still drawn in. It's a 24-7 Job. (P14)

Participant 14 described the balance between work and leisure as a "constant juggle," which she reported was a direct result of her multiple work roles and the additional workload which followed: "Can I afford to switch off and go out … and see a show or do I address 31 reports that I need to read because I know I've got another 90 behind them waiting as well?" While this example is specific to Participant 14's experience of balancing multiple work-related roles, it highlights the negative impact of participants' dedication to students and how this affected their ability to disconnect from work and engage in leisure.

Participants with dual work roles reported experiencing tension between their roles and struggled to "switch off" (P14) from their work and engage fully in their personal lives. Professional dual roles were associated with conflicting priorities, increased workload and responsibilities and negative experiences with students, parents and other school staff, particularly principals. To manage their dual roles, participants reported implementing flexible and permeable boundaries by integrating work tasks into their home environment and completing them in their personal time. According to Wang et al. (2022), individuals who can separate themselves from their work during their leisure time are less likely to be psychologically disturbed by their work. Psychological detachment can aid individuals to spent greater time and energy on leisure activities and experience less work-leisure conflict (Wang et al., 2022).

The Family Role

Although leisure engagement was a central focus on this study, participants' responses highlighted the interconnectedness between leisure engagement with family roles and responsibilities. Participants with school-aged children often reported struggling to

engage in leisure and indicated that they integrated leisure activities with their family obligations. For instance, participants reported engaging in leisure by bike riding with their children, socialising with others at their child's sporting events and spending time alone in the kitchen while cooking for the family: "I love cooking. When I get home I like to have some time on my own and cook and just relax" (P5). For many of these participants, the ability to engage in personal leisure activities was reported as a secondary priority to their work and family roles.

While all participants indicated that they engaged in at least one leisure activity, their interview responses often focused more attention on their family responsibilities. Their responses highlight that the additional role of parenting added further complexity to their experiences, particularly participants who were parents of school-aged children. For these participants, a connection was noted between their ability to prioritise one role over another. Some participants reported prioritising work over their family role, while others prioritised family over work; however, this was cited as difficult to achieve. Participants' responses often indicated that their priorities, boundaries and work practices changed to meet their life circumstances. This is illustrated by Participant 5, who reported:

> I found Covid very hard because I had 3 children and [I was a] full-time teacher. I had all these expectations on me to do the job and it was the first time where I actually thought, 'No, I want to be a mum. I need to put my children first.' (P5)

While many participants reported struggling to balance their work and personal roles, some indicated that their experiences were made easier when they received effective support from their principal. For example, Participant 9 shared:

> Today we had a teacher only day and we got the afternoon to choose what we wanted to do. So I chose to come home and work [from] home, which is fantastic. And the kids got home after doing some activities and we had the best afternoon because I was able to do what I needed to do and [have my] own space and time. … So, when it's managed [I'm] really happy. (P9)

According to Su and Jiang (2023), organisational support can be a resource for individuals with families and can positively increase individuals' efforts and abilities at work and ability to cope with stress. In this study, effective support from principals was shown through flexible release arrangements and being able to leave work early to meet family responsibilities. Participants reported that support from their principals made them feel

valued, trusted, motivated to remain with their school and happier, which had a positive spillover into their personal life.

When the Balance is Tipped

The following subtheme describes the impact of participants' intense teaching roles on their engagement in leisure and the influence of negative work-to-life spillover on participants' work-leisure balance experiences. Participants' interview responses emphasised the influence of their intense teaching roles in shaping their ability to engage in leisure. Many participants reported feeling mentally, socially and physically tired from teaching and unable to engage in leisure activities or spend time with family and friends after work. For example, Participant 6 shared: "I think sometimes when you're teaching all day [you] can be quite drained. … [I] just don't have quite as much space for other people outside of work time" (P6). Participant 2 is a further example of this:

> I was just explaining to my partner … the term 'teacher tired.' Non-teachers don't understand that you are just exhausted when you get to the last week [of term]. Having exhaustion does come with you. … I'm just not getting to my workouts and things that I wanna do. I just wanna come home and collapse on the bed some days. … We've got 25 different needs coming at us all day. You do get exhausted. (P5)

To manage the negative work-to-life spillover, participants reported engaging in reactive compensation. Reactive compensation involves mitigating deprivations in one life domain, such as work fatigue through countering strategies in another life domain (Swarnalatha, 2017). To compensate for their intense teaching roles, participants either isolated themselves and relaxed at home after work or engaged in physical activity. While both were cited as necessary, many participants indicated compensating for work fatigue by relaxing at home. Participant 11 shared the following experience:

> [I'd] come home and just be so sleepy. … I'd just be too tired to do the things I used to do. So that's why I'm slowly getting back [into leisure activities] and I am enjoying that. … Now I can do yoga and it doesn't make me more tired. It's actually good for me because I'll sleep better. (P11)

Participant 11's response highlights the positive role of exercise in compensating for her work fatigue. Engaging in physical activities was reported to improve her physical

energy, sleep, social engagement and mental well-being. This experience reflects Nilsson et al.'s (2017) research, which state that leisure activities can be a resource for enhancing an individual's well-being and buffering life adversities. Participants who compensated work fatigue with physical leisure activities reported experiencing positive benefits, such as increased well-being and enjoyment.

While all participants cited their roles as demanding, requiring high levels of mental and physical energy, participants also described their work as emotionally consuming. Participants reported frequently thinking about their students' learning and welfare during their personal time, which was cited to impact their ability to mentally disconnect from work and maintain their mental well-being. Participant 5 is one example of this:

> I can't switch off from [teaching] even though I want to. … It's an emotional job. … I worry about things that have happened at school. I worry about the children. … I think about children who've [left school that] I haven't done what I wanted to do [with]. … I feel it quite deeply and I can't explain that to other people. … I just feel that when the job's taken a lot from me then I can't give what I need for my own children and … that's the sort of ongoing battle I have in my mind, you know? (P5)

Participant 5's response reflects the experiences reported by many other participants, stating that their motivation to help their students often came at a cost to themselves. Angelini et al. (2024) explains that as the teaching role is centred on the caring of students, teachers may feel enthusiastic and motivated about the work that they do. This can lead to teachers experiencing fatigue due to the emotional demands of teaching and the depletion of important resources, such as time and energy (Angelini et al., 2024). The authors cite these resources as necessary for meeting role demands and maintaining teacher well-being.

While participants reported on the influence of their intense teaching roles in shaping their ability to engage in leisure, mental rumination after school appeared indirectly related to their leisure engagement. Despite the significant impact of their mental rumination, participants' reported that their dedication to their students was the most frequently cited factor influencing their career intentions.

Theme 4: What Next?

In the previous central themes, participants' reported work-leisure balance experiences were explored. These experiences identified significant challenges that hindered their ability to engage in leisure, achieve their ideal work-life balance and meet their personal priorities. While the previous themes drew attention to participants' never-ending and consuming teaching role, the following theme, *What Next?,* highlights the influence of personal dedication to students in shaping their career intentions.

To Stay or Leave?

Participants were asked whether they were planning to remain or leave the teaching profession. Their responses are discussed in the following three subthemes: *Remaining as Full-Time Teachers*, *Transitioning to Alternative Roles* and *Undecided* (Table 3).

Remaining as Full-Time Teachers

Ten of the 16 participants reported intending to remain as full-time teachers, citing their desire to make a difference as a significant influential factor. Many indicated that their ability to make a positive impact to students gave them a sense of purpose and, for some, their identify: "I am a teacher. I've always been a teacher and I know that when I retire, I will struggle" (P4). While all participants in this group were dedicated to their teaching roles and their students, seven indicated their desire for change.

Two participants reported that they intended to change schools in the following year, citing their workplace environment as their primary reason. Five participants reported that they had occasionally looked for other options as they questioned the sustainability of teaching in New Zealand. Participant 5 shared, "I will stay, but I do look for other options [within the profession]. … [I] like to think there might be something my skills could be used for if I can't maintain this level of working" (P5). Participants 12 and 13 shared the following compelling responses: "I really feel like if I stay in full-time teaching, I have to trade most of the rest of my life for it and it's not going to be a trade I'm willing to make forever" (P12) and "It's not that I want to stop being a teacher, it's that I want to stop being a teacher in New Zealand" (P13).

It is important to note that only three of the 10 participants in this group reported being able to regularly engage in leisure activities. Furthermore, the majority of the

participants were either childless or a parent of older children, had only one work role (classroom teacher), implemented strong boundaries to separate work and personal life or had flexible boundaries, which were sometimes beneficial. For example, completing work tasks at home to remain organised.

Transitioning to Alternative Roles

Three out of 16 participants indicated that they were intending to leave their full-time teaching positions for alternative government and non-government roles. Each of the three participants cited different reasons and intentions. Participant 7 reported wanting a "bigger challenge" by transitioning into a school management position. Participant 1 intended to transition into a relief teaching position in order to achieve a better work-life balance, meet family needs and engage in enjoyable hobbies. This participant reported feeling more useful working as a relief teacher than in his current full-time role due to workload and classroom size. Participant 13 reported facing difficulties with insufficient support from her principal to manage work-life balance and difficult parents of students. This experience was reflected in her career intention response:

> I think I'd like to have a go [at] the Life Education Trust job going around schools delivering Harold programmes … just to get a break [but] still in education. Still spending time with kids, which I love but there isn't that element of being accountable [to] parents and report writing and all the extra stuff. (P15)

Although the three participants indicated wanting to transition into alternative teaching roles, they did not intend to leave the teaching profession. While their career intentions differed, they were all associated with their desire to make a difference to students. It was also noted that all three participants were parents of school-aged children and struggled to achieve their ideal work-life balance, engage in leisure and meet their family needs.

Undecided

Three of the 16 participants stated that they were feeling undecided about whether to remain in the teaching profession. While each participant reported that they enjoyed teaching and making a difference to students, they all encountered challenges in achieving their ideal work-life balance and meeting their personal priorities, such as maintaining their

well-being and fulfilling their role as a parent. This was associated with work-related challenges, such as heavy workload and a lack of workplace support. One participant shared, "I'm a bit undecided at the moment. … I love teaching and I love being in the classroom, but it's just everything else. It makes up a big percentage at the school that I'm at" (P10).

Although participants reported feeling motivated by their ability to make a difference, their never-ending role demands and workplace environment were influential factors in their career intentions. While the majority of participants indicated a dissatisfaction with their ability to balance work and personal life, leisure engagement was not a primary factor. These findings differed from Cho et al.'s (2023) study, which reported that work-to-leisure conflict was associated with teacher turnover among Singaporean primary school teachers.

Improving Work-Life Balance

Participants' interview responses highlight many challenges impacting their ability to balance their full-time teaching roles, personal priorities and leisure engagement. The themes, *The Never-Ending Workload* and *The Balancing Act*, draw attention to the influence of workload, teaching experience, workplace support, and dual roles in either supporting or hindering their ability to engage in leisure. Participants' responses demonstrate the complexity of teacher work-life balance and work-leisure balance, emphasising that aiding teachers to achieve a balance between various life domains may require support in not only their professional life but also their personal life. Participants recommended strategies to support teacher work-life balance. Their responses are listed below:

- Reduce unnecessary paperwork and meetings.
- Develop government resources to aid lesson planning.
- Employ teacher aids to work in every classroom.
- Develop clear government guidelines to outline teachers' working hours and role expectations.
- Implement limitations on curriculum reforms to maintain consistency.
- Implement helpful support within the workplace.
- Provide teachers with professional development opportunities.
- Set realistic expectations for teachers on what they can achieve, recognising the influence of student needs and learning gaps on student progress.
- Increase student funding to support students with learning needs.

- Increase pay to meet financial obligations and to afford leisure activities.
- Respect and trust teachers to do their work effectively without government interference.
- Retain quality teachers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand how New Zealand primary school teachers' experiences of balancing work and leisure influenced their career intentions. In the early stages of data analysis, participants' leisure responses were interpreted using Hurd and Anderson's (2010) definition of leisure. They conceptualise leisure in three ways: leisure as time, an activity and a state of mind. Hurd and Anderson emphasise that activities can only be considered leisure if they are free from work and non-work obligations and essential tasks, such as cooking and sleeping. For this reason, it was assumed that participants' reported experiences of balancing work and leisure would focus greater attention on leisure activities such as sporting activities and hobbies.

However, participants' interview responses demonstrated that leisure and role responsibilities were often connected, particularly those with school-aged children. Participant 7 reported that cooking for her family was not only a necessity, but also an enjoyable hobby, which enabled her to relax and express creativity. This response aligns with Kelly's (2019) definition of leisure. He argues that leisure is not merely the freedom to choose an activity, nor is it simply free time. Instead, he suggests that leisure is an existential reality, focusing on how it *feels* when choosing to engage in an activity and the outcomes of that decision.

The decision to engage in leisure was often associated with participants' need to feel good. This was achieved through reactive compensation. Reactive compensation occurs in response to deprivations in one life domain, such as work fatigue, prompting individuals to mitigate this experience by relaxing at home (Swarnalatha, 2017). Work-related fatigue was most noticeably associated with the intense nature of their teaching role, leading to a negative spillover into their personal lives. This reported spillover reduced the mental and physical energy that could be dedicated to personal needs and priorities. While this was cited to influence many participants to engage in non-physical leisure activities, other participants reported feeling motivated to participate in physical activities to counter their reduced energy, such as Participant 11. This participant shared that she felt "sleepy" (P11) after work due to her teaching role. To compensate for this, she reported attending regular

yoga and dance classes, which she indicated increased her energy levels, enabled her to sleep better and led her to experience enjoyment. Due to workload and job intensity, only a few participants were able to regularly participate in leisure. Participants who reported limited leisure engagement were more likely to report being unable to achieve their ideal work-life balance.

Although reduced mental and physical energy was often related to their job demands, participants also recognised the impact of their personal dedication to students and often placed the needs of their students before their own. Ruminating on student welfare and other work-related tasks hindered their ability to disconnect from work. Participant 14 captures the essence of all participants' responses by stating that the balance between work and leisure was a "constant juggle" (P14).

Workload was cited as a significant factor that negatively impacted participants' achievement of a work-life balance. Both experienced and beginning teachers cited challenges in managing their workload; however, more experienced teachers were able to draw on existing resources, knowledge and skills. The two beginning teachers in this study reported struggling to maintain a balance between work and personal life as they often managed their workload by taking work tasks home. While one participant reported utilising the available planning support offered by their school, the other participant indicated feeling unable to ask for help with work tasks due to inexperience. According to Jain (2021), positive strategies for managing workload and work-related stress include teaching experience, cognitive reframing and seeking support, which were cited as being learned over time and with experience. Completing work tasks at home reduced participants' leisure engagement, personal time, engagement with friends and family and satisfaction in both professional and personal life.

To manage workload, personal priorities and role demands, more experienced participants were noted as being more likely to develop strong boundaries, such as not taking work tasks home. However, these boundaries were at times blurred and became flexible and permeable in order to meet professional priorities and maintain personal organisation. While many participants recognised workplace support as a factor that could positively improve their management of workload and dual role demands, this was often dependent on the individual school and leadership. Although many reported on the benefits of their workplace support experiences to manage their role demands, personal life priorities and leisure, other participants emphasised that the type of support they received had a direct influence on their ability to cope. For example, Participant 13 reported that policies that encouraged teachers to leave work by a designated time did not reduce her workload,

but led her to feel incompetent and unable to express her struggles. This may suggest a need to address teacher workload and job intensity to improve participants' work-leisure balance and work-life balance experiences.

The difficulties participants reported while balancing work and leisure, emphasise the role of high workload volume, dual roles, job intensity and insufficient workplace support in shaping their experiences. However, due to the complexity of work-leisure balance as reported in participants' responses, it is difficult to identify specific and consistent factors influencing participants' career intentions. Each participants' experiences were unique to their individual life circumstances, personal characteristics, priorities, motivations and strategies. Although all participants cited engaging in at least one leisure activity, leisure was not the primary focus when considering their career intentions. Instead, participants' reported wanting to prioritise their well-being, family role and ability to disconnect from work. For many, leisure activities were considered secondary to meeting professional and personal responsibilities and priorities.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, future research on the work-life balance of New Zealand primary school teachers could consider investigating effective ways to reduce teachers' workload and the potential outcomes of workload reduction. Research could also explore ways to support teachers to manage their workload and intense roles, specifically how meaningful workplace support and effective training for beginning teachers can improve their work and life experiences. As many participants in this study reported struggling to achieve a work-life balance due to their dual roles, research could investigate policies and support programmes for teachers with multiple work-related roles and personal roles. Finally, as teacher attrition is a critical issue in New Zealand, research could investigate not only how to attract quality teachers, but also ways to retain them and how opportunities for upskilling can motivate retention.

Limitations

A potential limitation of this study was the lack of diversity within the recruited sample group. No specific strategies were used to target various teaching demographics, such as Māori or teachers working in rural or urban schools. During the initial planning stage, it was believed that by introducing additional variables into the recruitment process attention may have shifted away from the primary focus of this investigation. However, this limited the findings as additional influential factors were not considered.

A second limitation was that I approached this study with a preconceived idea of leisure (hobbies and sporting activities), which I later realised differed from my participants. Participants' responses demonstrated that leisure is subjective and differs between people. This, at times, resulted in a disconnect between my understanding and how my participants perceived leisure. This became apparent to me during my analysis and, by which, it was too late to explore the concept of leisure further with my participants.

Despite the limitations identified above, I hope that the findings of this study will pave the way for further research to investigate teacher work-life balance and career intentions. I believe it is important to continue to explore the work-life balance and career intentions of New Zealand primary school teachers to better understand how to support their needs and priorities, which may include leisure, in order to retain them.

Position of the Researcher

I would like to acknowledge my teaching experience in shaping my interpretation of participants' responses. I initially found it particularly difficult to remain objective as teacher work-life balance is very close to my heart and my primary decision for leaving the profession. I struggled to comprehend why many participants reported intending to stay as full-time teachers, despite sharing significant challenges that affected various aspects of their life. After months of reflection I have recognised one key factor that differed between my personal experiences and those reported by my participants and fellow colleagues. This factor being, participants' perception of being able to make a meaningful difference to their students' lives.

My intention for entering into the teaching profession was to change the world or at least the lives of the students I was teaching. However, from the very first day working as a full-time teacher, I struggled to see how I was making an impact due to difficulties with workload, inadequate workplace support and student needs and behaviours, which I was inadequately trained for. I often worked extreme hours to create engaging and exciting experiences for my students, but this led me to work from 7.00 am until 8.00 pm most weekdays and also to work at school on the weekends, which my workplace normalised. This led to burnout and ultimately, my decision to leave full-time teaching.

I hope that this research can shed light on some of the challenges my participants faced balancing work and personal life. I also hope that this study highlights their profound dedication to students and the education profession. I believe that it is important to retain teachers who are motivated to make a difference and that more should be done to assist

them in achieving this goal. Teachers are essential for the advancement of society and inspiring and guiding the next generation. We must trust and respect their meaningful and hard work and find ways to support them not only in the classroom, but also in their personal lives.

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Appendix A

Information Sheet

Project Description

Kia ora,

My name is Beth Hunt. I am a registered primary school teacher and a university student at Massey University, completing my Master's degree in psychology. I am conducting a qualitative research project on the topic of work-life balance for teachers. The study may eventually help to retain teachers in the profession, and thereby aid children's education. It will require no more than one hour of your time to complete and you will have the option of some feedback on the study's overall findings, and a koha (gift) of $40 for your time.

Participant Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria

The study will recruit sixteen New Zealand-based primary school teachers to engage in one online interview to discuss their work-life balance experiences, mental health and well-being. Eligible participants must be actively working as a full-time primary school teacher in New Zealand, with either a provisional or full registration. Teachers who work part-time, relief teachers, full-time teachers who do not reside in New Zealand and those who are not actively teaching in a primary school will be excluded from the study. Additionally, any teachers who are known to me will also be ineligible to participate in the study. Teachers who meet the criteria and are interested in this project must be available to participate in an online interview during November 2023.

Participant Recruitment

Teachers who would like to participate in the study will be required to complete the Google Forms sign-up link, where they will be asked to provide their initials and personal email address. In order to maintain confidentiality, potential participants must not disclose their work email address at any point during this project. Teachers who complete the sign-up form do so voluntarily. A recorded verbal consent will be required at the beginning of the online interview. This consent provides approval to participate in one video-recorded Zoom interview.

Potential Discomfort

During the interview, participants will be asked about their mental health and well-being. Participants may experience discomfort discussing their work-life balance experiences and career intentions. Should this occur, they will be provided with the following contact details:

Lifeline (0800 543 354)
Free text/ call counselling service (1737)
Warmlines (Canterbury and West Coast: 0800 899 276, Wellington: 0800 200 207, Auckland Central: 0508 927 654)

Project Procedures

Interviews will be conducted outside of working hours via Zoom in a quiet location and will run for a maximum of 60 minutes. Information disclosed 'off the record' will be omitted from the study.

Participants will not be able to view or edit interview transcripts to prevent the rewriting of responses.

Data Management

All information obtained in this project will remain anonymous and confidential and will be securely stored on the Massey University OneDrive. Transcriptions, recordings and notes will only be accessible to the researcher (Beth Hunt), project supervisor (Professor Stuart Carr) and cultural advisor (Ahnya Martin) and will be securely disposed of after 5 years.

Findings

All participants will be provided with a written summary on the project's findings once the final report has been made. This written summary will not contain any identifiable information. The final report will be available to participants upon request.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question
- Withdraw from the study up to 2 weeks after your interview
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation

- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher
- Be given a summary of the project findings when it is concluded
- Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview

Questions or Queries

If you have any questions about the project, please contact Beth Hunt via
teacherworklifebalance@gmail.com

Project Supervisor

Professor Stuart Carr
s.c.carr@massey.ac.nz

Committee Approval Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 3, Application OM3 23/40. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 3, email humanethics3@massey.ac.nz.

Appendix B

Google Forms Sign-up Link

Work-Life Balance Research Project

B *I* U̲ 🔗 X̶

Kia ora,

Thank you for showing interest in this research project!
I appreciate your contribution and time.

Please read the following **information sheet** before completing this sign-up form:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TSeEGJGzkC5tBbImHydrK4OZ7DXv1QlC9FtQQNiseXA/edit?usp=sharing

Please note the first **sixteen** respondents will be asked to participate in this study (provided that they meet the inclusion/ exclusion criteria). Any respondents who sign-up after this time will be notified that they are on the waiting list.

Potential participants must be available to participate in one online interview during November 2023. Interviews will take place outside of work hours and will run for approximately 60 minutes. A koha of $40 will be provided as an appreciation for your contribution and time.

Inclusion criteria:
- Teachers who are actively working in New Zealand
- Full-time primary school teachers

Exclusion criteria:
- Part-time teachers
- Relief teachers
- Teachers not actively working in New Zealand
- Teachers who are known to me

Recruitment:
I would greatly appreciate your help with recruiting teachers to participate in this study. Please share information about this study with any teachers you know who might be interested.

Note: No other teachers' contact information should be forwarded to me. Teachers who would like to participate in this study will be required to either contact me directly via the below email or complete this Google Form.

If you have any questions, please contact me via teacherworklifebalance@gmail.com

Thank you in advance for your contribution to this study.

Kind regards,

Beth Hunt

Please write your initials below (i.e. BH)   *
For confidentiality reasons, please do not write your full name

Short answer text

What is your personal email address? (to maintain confidentiality, please do not include your   *
work email address)

Short answer text

Do you meet the inclusion criteria? *

◯ Yes

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Introductory Questions

- How long have you worked as a teacher?

- How old are the students that you teach?

- How many students are in your class?

- Describe any leisure activities that you participate in outside of work. These could be hobbies, social, fitness, or cultural activities.

Work-Life Balance and Strategies

- How would you define work-life balance?

- Do you resonate with any of the following work-life balance strategies?

   - Do you set strong boundaries to separate work and leisure?

   - Do you manage work and leisure with blurred boundaries?

   - Do you compensate not-so-positive experiences at work with positive experiences outside of work or vice versa? Explain your answer.

Work-Life Balance Experiences

- How does your role as a teacher influence your ability to balance work and your leisure activities?

- Can you recall a positive experience where you were able to balance your role as a teacher and your leisure life? What impact did this have on your life?

- Can you recall a not-so-positive experience where you found it difficult to balance your role as a teacher and your leisure life? What impact did this have on your life?

- How does your workplace prepare and/or support you to maintain a positive work-life balance?

Career Intentions

- Are there any factors that motivate you to remain as a teacher? Why?

- Are there any factors that could influence you to leave the profession? If so, why?

- With all things considered, are you planning to stay or leave the profession? Or are you undecided?

- Based on what you have discussed about work-life balance, how likely would you be to recommend teaching to friends and family? Explain your answer.

Mental Well-Being

- How do your work-life balance experiences influence your mental well-being?

Recommendations

- What do you think could be done to improve teacher work-life balance?

- What do you think could be done to improve the quality of education for children?

Appendix D

Audit Trail

Research Problem

The topic of teacher work-life balance and career intentions was initially inspired by my own experience working as a primary school teacher in Auckland, New Zealand. To understand what had already been researched on this topic, I reviewed existing research from the Google Scholar database. During this review, I noticed two key research gaps. Firstly, existing research on the topics of teacher work-life balance and career intentions was limited and underexplored in the New Zealand context. Secondly, I noted that researchers have often focused on the balance between work and family, neglecting other aspects of personal life, such as leisure. These research gaps formed the rationale for the research question guiding this study: "How do New Zealand primary school teachers' experiences of balancing work and leisure influence their career intentions?"

Methodology and Sample

In my review of existing research, I noticed many studies examined the work-life balance and career intentions of primary school teachers using quotative research methods. To gain a deeper understanding of New Zealand primary school teachers' work-life balance experiences and career intentions, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews. This qualitative method was chosen as it offered me the flexibility to question participants using a prearranged interview guide (Appendix C) and probe participants' responses to understand their experiences in greater detail.

A sample of 16 participants was chosen as the study was conducted using an exploratory research design. As exploratory research cannot draw conclusions or generalise to a wider population, a larger sample size was not needed. Although the sample size was initially considered small, I later realised that this was not the case. Transcribing 16 interviews was a very time-consuming process. My participants shared many valuable ideas, which made it difficult to analyse and condense into a single report.

Theoretical Framework

In my initial planning stages, I decided to use the following three work-life balance theories: segmentation theory, spillover theory and compensation theory. However, after thoughtful consideration, I decided to replace segmentation theory with boundary theory. This decision was prompted by my review of literature, which brought to my attention that the work and personal life domains cannot be permanently separated, as the theory suggests. As segmentation theory fails to acknowledge the relationship between both life domains, boundary theory was applied. While boundary theory suggests that boundaries can separate work and personal life, it also posits that they can integrate both life areas, thus acknowledging their flexibility and permeability. It is for these reasons that the boundary theory was deemed the most appropriate.

Defining Work-Life Balance

In my review of existing work-life balance research, I noted that the construct of work-life balance had been interpreted and defined in various ways. This prompted me to question my own perception of 'balance' and reflect on my own experience of work-life balance. I decided not to include definitions that focused on how an individual devotes equal time and attention to both life domains as I did not believe that this was achievable. I also decided not to include definitions that focused on role conflict as this approach appeared too narrow and limited. After reviewing a number of definitions, I decided to apply Kalliath and Brough's (2008, p. 326) definition, "the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities." This definition was chosen for two primary reasons: Firstly, it offered a broad perspective, focusing on the balance between work and non-work activities. Secondly, it recognises work-life balance as an individual construct, whereby a person determines their own ideal work-life balance.

Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2008) thematic analysis approach was chosen to analyse my participants' responses. This approach was selected as it enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of my participants' experiences through the process of creating codes and generating themes. While this approach was helpful in understanding their experiences, it was a time-consuming process. My analysis changed many times to ensure that I accurately interpreted my participants' responses and that my results and discussion remained aligned

with my chosen research question. The following images offer insight into how I conducted my analysis and the reasons behind my chosen themes (Chapter 3).

In my initial stages of analysis, I attempted to code my participants' responses using Microsoft Word. Due to the large volume of work and frequent amendments, I decided to print, cut and label each excerpt individually. Participants' responses were grouped into six categories: workload, personal strategies and characteristics, family role, workplace, personal time and students and parents (see below images). A mind map was created for each theme, which represented the various ideas underpinning each category.

 After developing each category, I analysed them in relation to factors cited by
participants while stating their career intentions.

After careful consideration, I condensed the six categories into two key themes: sustaining personal priorities and sustaining professional priorities. These themes were created as they not only reflected the six categories portrayed above, but they also aligned with Kalliath and Brough's work-life balance definition. However, after careful consideration, I decided to amend both themes as they were too interconnected. This made it difficult to clearly distinguish between 'sustaining personal priorities' and 'sustaining professional priorities.' I reviewed my themes multiple times to understand the connection between each category. While my participants identified many factors hindering their ability to balance work and leisure, I soon realised that I could only focus on the key ideas. I decided to draw attention to the way participants' defined work-life balance, their experiences with workload and the challenges they faced balancing dual roles and their intense teaching roles.

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