

Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Investigating Teacher Attrition in Malta

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Abstract: A phenomenon in the Maltese educational scene is the rise in the number of educators who voluntarily resign from the profession. This phenomenon is under-researched as most studies focus on in-service teachers rather than on those who resign to seek alternative employment in non-educational sectors. This fact prompted the researcher to conduct a study aimed at revealing the underlying motives for teacher resignations in Malta. The methodology followed an interpretivist research philosophy that utilises an inductive, qualitative research instrument based on a narrative inquiry strategy. The data set comprised fifteen narratives gathered through independent semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with teacher graduates and were segregated into four groups based on their years of teaching experience. A thematic analysis yielded sixteen individual determinants for local teacher attrition.

Keywords: teacher exit attrition; teacher turnover; teacher retention; teacher working conditions.

The Local Context

The shortage of qualified teachers is an international issue affecting both the current and future workforce (OECD, 2005). Malta is no exception to the rule of teacher attrition. From 2008 to 2018 the number of teachers who resigned from their teaching post spiked by 119% (from 26 in 2008 to 57 in 2018) (Parlament Ta' Malta, 2019a). This issue is further encumbered as the number of students registered for the teacher education courses at the University of Malta declined by 20%, from 334 (academic year 2016/2017) to 268 (academic year 2018/2019) (Parlament Ta' Malta, 2017a; Parlament Ta' Malta, 2019b).

To possibly mitigate the potential crisis, the Ministry of Education and Employment (MEDE), issued a call for application to University of Malta students interested to work as part-time teachers (Times of Malta, 2017). This move was considered as insulting to the profession by a myriad of educators and by the century-old Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) (TVM, 2017). To ease the year-on-year recruitment problems, MEDE also resorted to another temporary solution – the employment of retired teachers (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2017a).

In scholastic years 2017-18 and 2018-19, state schools employed 21% (Parlament Ta' Malta, 2017b) and 29% (Parlament Ta' Malta, 2019c) of the new intake of educators in the grade of supply teachers. This staggering eight percentage points increase is a concern, as supply teachers are either in possession of a first degree classified as Level 6 according to the Malta Qualification Framework (MQF) without a pedagogical course required for obtaining a teacher's permanent warrant or of two advanced levels classified at MQF Level 4 (Parlament Ta' Malta, 2017b). In terms of educator quality, when considering the latest collective agreement between the Government of Malta and the MUT, this context is alarming, as an applicant eligible for recruitment into the grade of teacher is required to have a Master in Teaching and Learning classified at MQF Level 7 (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2017b).

The Researcher's Concern

As the researcher started reading for an Executive Master of Business Administration, he identified a research gap, as local literature (Bezzina and Portelli, 2005; Borg and Giordmaina, 2012; Pace, 2017; Attard Tonna and Calleja, 2018) focused on currently employed teachers rather than on the ones who switched careers within other non-educational sectors of the labour market. The research question set out to address this research gap and was articulated as follows: *'What are the determinants of teacher exit attrition?'*.

Teacher Attrition

In the field of human resource management, the permanent separation between an employee and an organisation is referred to as *employee turnover* (Torrington et al., 2017), an act which is viewed as the ultimate form of physical withdrawal from the workplace.

The type of employee turnover studied in this paper is known as *teacher exit attrition* (Figure 1), which refers to the voluntary resignation of teachers from the teaching profession (Struyven and Vanthournout, 2014). The action of teacher attrition is attributed to varying reasons, ranging from health, family, education, retirement and alternative employment. While the first four motives are self-explanatory, the last one that deals with a change in one's employment lacks a solid definition. It encompasses two distinct paths: *transfer* (Imazeki, 2002) / *migration attrition* (Mäkelä et al., 2014) and *exit attrition* (Struyven and Vanthournout, 2014). Those opting for the former are labelled as *movers*, as they remain in the profession (Hahs-Vaughn and Scherff, 2008). This occurs when a teacher switches sectors from state schools to non-state schools (Dupriez, Delvaux and Lothaire, 2016); from primary to secondary teaching (Mäkelä et al., 2014) and when a teacher moves to teaching in another locality (Brill and McCartney, 2008). In contrast, teachers who select the exit attrition route are labelled as *leavers* (Smith and Ulvik, 2017). This happens when teachers decide to resign in order to seek alternative employment other than teaching (Struyven and Vanthournout, 2014).

Teacher exit attrition is critical to research on the teaching profession since the cost of teachers exiting the profession must be burdened by various stakeholders, notably students. In fact, in the absence of an all-qualified profession, this relatively voiceless group may end up with the least experienced or unqualified teachers that disturb the continuity and success of their educational programmes (OECD, 2005).

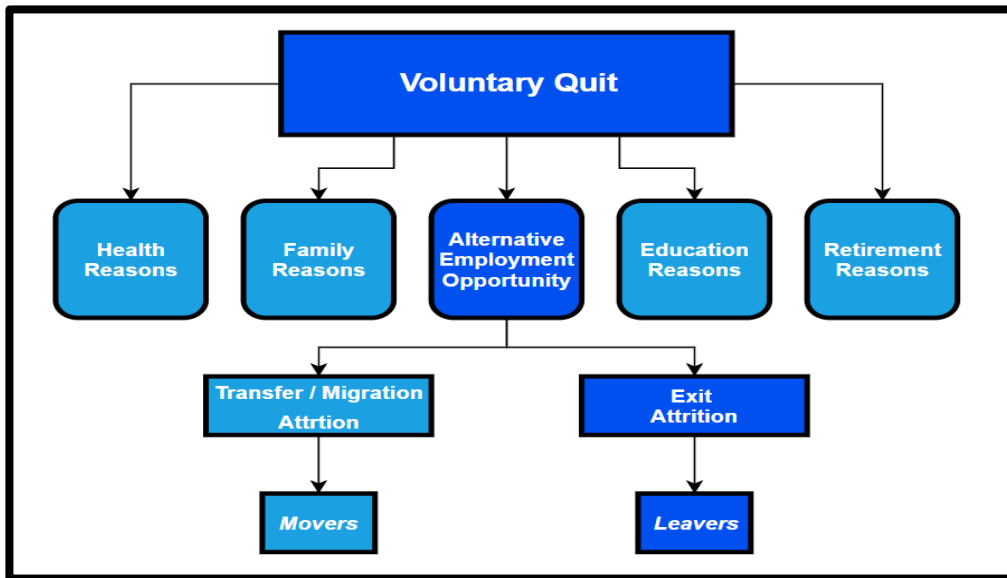


Figure 1: From a Voluntary Quitter to a *Leaver*

Determinants of Teacher Exit Attrition

By conducting an in-depth analysis of four recent meta-analyses by Guarino, Santibanez and Daley (2006); Borman and Dowling (2008); Schaefer, Long and Clandinin (2012) and Nguyen (2018), who critically reviewed 46, 34, 65 and 152 independent studies related to teacher attrition respectively, the researcher amassed five main categories that encompass the most common determinants for voluntary teacher turnover (Table I):

Category Name	Determinant	
<i>Individual Characteristics</i>	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
	Age	Family
	Psychological Factors	
<i>Qualifications</i>	Pre-Service Education	Academic Ability
	Speciality Area	Teaching Experience
<i>School Quality</i>	Administrative Support	Induction/Mentoring Programs
	Teacher Collaboration	Salary
<i>Student Population</i>	Poverty Level	Achievement Level
	Minority Level	
<i>Catchment Area</i>	Urbanicity	School Sector

Table I: The Most Cited Teacher Attrition Determinants from the four Meta-Analyses

Individual Characteristics

This category links teacher attrition to the educator's *gender* (Dupriez, Delvaux and Lothaire, 2016), *age* (Ingersoll, Merrill and Stuckey, 2014), *race/ethnicity* (Sun, 2018), *family related factors* (Dainty et al., 2011), and *psychological factors* (Yinon and Orland-Barak, 2017).

Qualifications

Studies indicate that *teacher education* (pre-service courses) (Darling-Hammond, 2010), *teacher academic ability* (Nguyen, 2018), *teacher specialty area*, which includes both subject area and teaching level (Weldon, 2018), and *teacher experience* (Glazer, 2018) play a crucial role in determining teacher attrition rates.

School Quality

The third category changes its foci, from an internal one that deals with the individual educator to an external one that revolves around the educator's teaching scenario. Here, various studies show that *administrative support* (Clandinin et al., 2015), *teacher collaboration* (Newberry and Allsop, 2017), *salary* (Buchanan, 2009) *induction and mentoring programmes* (Bullough and Draper, 2004) are variables that can lead to decreased teacher retention.

Student Population

The meta-analyses identified the student population as a major factor in relation to teacher retention. In fact, the research consistently highlighted that the students': *poverty level* (Ingersoll, 2004); *achievement level* (Falch and Rønning, 2007); and *minority level* (Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin, 2004) are factors that may influence teachers in deciding for an early exit from the classroom.

Catchment Area

The last category comprises two independent variables. The first variable - *urbanicity* - indicates that schools within cities have a distinct profile that lead to higher rates of teacher turnover (Schaefer, Long and Clandinin, 2012). The second variable - *school sector* - shows that non-state schools (Nguyen, 2018) have a higher overall percentage of teachers who resign.

In general, the academic literature delineates that on the one hand teacher attrition is never attributed to a sole determinant while on the other hand no variable is universally applicable across cultures and education systems.

Methodology

The researcher adopted the *Research Onion Model* (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) as a methodological approach (Figure 2).

An *interpretivist research philosophy* was chosen since it was regarded as the most appropriate framework for an exploratory-descriptive study. This was amalgamated with an *inductive approach* as both try to extrapolate meaning from the individuals' responses.

To further strengthen the preceding choices a *mono method qualitative methodological choice* was selected as this made it possible for the researcher to gain an emphatic understanding of what is perceived by the social actors. The *raison d'être* for these methodologic trade-offs rested on the fact that qualitative methodology, as opposed to the quantitative approach is better suited to reveal the human viewpoint from the eventual findings.

Next, a *narrative inquiry strategy* was preferred as the author is interested in understanding the full narrative of each participant. This enables social agents to be given a voice, so that their collective narratives may deliver social justice and potentially instigate social change.

The *target population* consisted of individuals who attained a Bachelor of Education (Honours) or a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (P.G.C.E) that made them eligible to become warranted teachers in Malta. Besides, those interested to partake in the study had to be employed in any role other than teaching. This excluded careers that are either teaching variants (example University Lecturer) or promotions that emanate from the career trajectory of the teaching profession (example Assistant Head of School). Furthermore, the actual size of the target population was not established since universalistic generalisation was never on the researcher's agenda due to the study's interpretivist and qualitative nature.

The researcher used a *non-probability volunteer sampling technique* consisting of *snowball sampling* and *self-selection sampling*. In the former, the researcher started with one participant and then, based on information emerging from that relationship, he was in a position to get in contact with other individuals sharing the same exit decision. While for the latter, a social media post aimed at attracting potential interviewees was posted online via Facebook®.

Initially, the *sample size* was set to 12 individuals which was later extended to 15 interviewees (Table II), segregated into four groups: no teaching experience following graduation; up to 5 years; up to 10 years; and 10 or more years of teaching experience.

Following their recruitment, the 15 individuals participated in semi-structured audio recorded interviews. This type of interviews was preferred from structured or unstructured interviews as they have the advantage of gathering information which cannot be obtained from questionnaires and because they permit a flexible conversation whereby the interviewee can take the lead.

Transcription of interviews was followed by thematic analysis, that enabled the researcher in shedding light on the subjective view of each participant's social world.

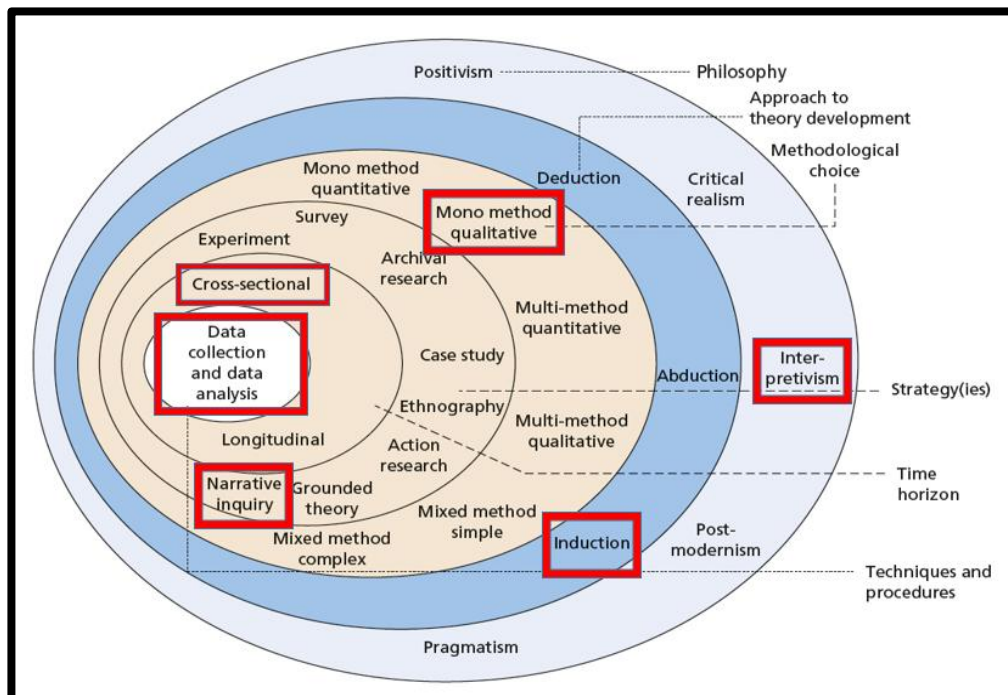


Figure 2: The adopted Research Onion Model (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016)

	Interview #	Pseudonym	Industry of New Career	Teacher Qualification	School Sector	Years as a Teacher
Group 1 <u>No Teaching Experience</u>	1	Alice	Media	B.Ed. (Hons)	State and Church*	0
	2	Barry	Aviation	B.Ed. (Hons)	State and Church*	0
	3	Clayton	Real Estate	B.Ed. (Hons)	State , Church and Private*	0
	4	Donna	Higher Education**	B.Ed. (Hons)	State*	0
Group 2 <u>Up to 5 Years Teaching Experience</u>	5	Eva	Civil Service	B.Ed. (Hons)	Private	0.5
	6	Fiona	Environment Protection	B.Ed. (Hons)	Church	1
	7	George	Aviation	B.Ed. (Hons)	State	2
	8	Harvey	Public Service	B.Ed. (Hons)	State	1
Group 3 <u>From 5 to 10 Years Teaching Experience</u>	9	Isaac	Information Technology	B.Ed. (Hons)	State	10
	10	Jessica	Aviation	B.Ed. (Hons)	State	10
	11	Kyle	Statistics	B.Ed. (Hons)	State	10
	12	Lara	Public Service	P.G.C.E.	Church	7
Group 4 <u>Over 10 Years Teaching Experience</u>	13	Matthew	Finance	P.G.C.E.	State and Independent	13
	14	Nicholas	Public Service	B.Ed. (Hons)	State	15
	15	Odessa	Nutrition	B.Ed. (Hons)	Church	13

Table II: List of Interviewees [1A-1D]

Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis yielded sixteen individual determinants which provided the data to answer the research question (Figure 3). These will be the foci of this section.

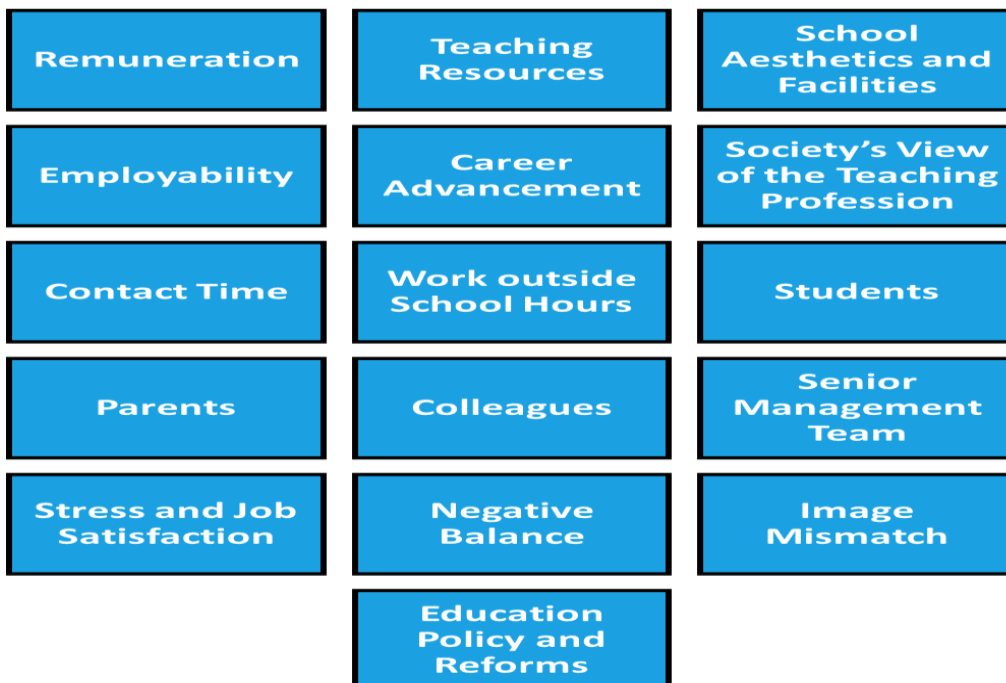


Figure 3: The Determinants of Teacher Exit Attrition

Remuneration

When compared to other graduate professionals, Lara described the teacher's salary as "rubbish" and Fiona perceived it to be "miserable". In another interview, George expressed his irritation by noting that:

... a professional teacher, I mean who studied for 5 years at university, [when not in a relationship], now has no opportunity to actually own a property. I'm not saying a villa or something, just a decent place where to live, where to stay.

Most of the interviewees perceived their salary as unsubstantial and discouraging. This substantiates previous findings by other researchers within the local context, as Pace (2017) showed that 83.7% of in-service teachers are unsatisfied with their remuneration. This fact is further supported by Attard Tonna and Calleja (2018) who showed that only 6% of in-service teachers and 13% of school administrators felt that their respective remuneration reflects their workload and their level of competence. With these findings, the inverse relationship found between remuneration and teacher attrition is given more credence.

Teaching Resources

According to Alice:

Funding for the teaching equipment is also not important" [This was very] Annoying! Annoying! [As] I cannot work without my stuff.

Kyle stated that the lack of teaching resources also affected him personally, since it made the issue of remuneration more complex:

We had to provide our own resources, as [the school administration] provided us with nothing not even a photocopier ... Eh so we had to provide [the students with] everything. I used to spend a lot of money ... from my own pay!

A study by Loeb, Darling-Hammond and Luczak (2005) concluded that a lack of tangible supports for teaching are a strong predictor of teacher attrition. When teaching resources are not adequately provided, then educators need to facilitate the achievement of a learning objective without the right resources. In the process, discouraged educators start to contemplate why they should face this issue in the first place. This leads educators to either transfer/migrate to another school or else exit the profession altogether (Johnson and Birkeland, 2003).

School Aesthetics and Facilities

Barry perceived the school environment as being “quite old in a way that [schools are] not attractive enough for students”, whereas the school where Jessica taught lacked an indoor gym. This meant that:

... if it rained, I was expected to do the lesson just the same ... For the kids it would be like [a] 45-minute lesson they get a little drizzle but for me it was 6 hours being in the rain. And even to do a lesson in the rain for 45 minutes it's not on! Then they offered me a solution, to do the physical education lesson in the school corridor!

Geiger and Pivovarova (2018) showed that when a school invests in facilities, the working environment improves, leading to a decrease in teacher attrition. Likewise, Buckley, Schneider and Shang (2005) argued that improving school facilities increased teacher retention as much as, or even more, than an increase in salary.

Employability

When George was probed about his chance of obtaining alternative employment in other sectors or industries, his reply was that:

... if you're looking for a profession kind of job, [then the probability of being employed is] ... highly unlikely.

Alice was also rather frustrated in her response, as she described the B.Ed. (Hons) as: “... a piece of paper that does not mean anything in other sectors”. Such a view was sustained by Harvey as he argued that when employers from the private sector see a résumé based on a B.Ed. (Hons) or similar, then one is “mostly sidelined”.

The root of this problem stems from previous collective agreements. To obtain a warrant an individual was required to have attained a B.Ed (Hons) or a P.G.C.E. Unfortunate for this study's interviewees but luckily for new students, this requirement has since been tweaked as nowadays those interested in joining the teaching profession must attain both an undergraduate degree in the subject they wish to teach and a Master's in Teaching and Learning (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2017b). This is purported to increase teacher's employability in the long run, as teachers wanting to resign would be able to find employment outside of teaching by using their first degree rather than having to stay in education due to the mentioned limited opportunities.

Career Advancement

With regard to in-class promotions, Isaac contended that:

... as a teacher that's it. You have nowhere else to go ... I never really wanted to become an assistant head ... I didn't want a desk job. I never wanted that ... It would have been nice to be acknowledged for your [classroom] experience. Even if it's just, a designation for example ... Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Senior Teacher.

When considering out-of-class promotions, Eva stated that

... being a teacher if you continue studying you remain a teacher ... Because I [graduated with a] Master's [degree] ... I would only get the qualification allowance and just that ... [while for the following] 10 years you can only remain a teacher.

In agreement, Kelchtermans (2009) argued that career advancement is a precursor for teacher attrition because this profession offers minimal possibilities for substantial advancement when compared to other careers. This argument is sustained by Struyven and Vanthournout (2014) as they found that lack of future prospects as the most salient reason for teacher attrition among 235 graduates.

Society's View of the Teaching Profession

Eva says that society views “*the teaching profession [as a] great job for a mum, [or] for a parent*”. According to Donna this is attributed to the general public's limited and potentially envious reasoning as they:

... just look at the job as from 8am to 2pm and ... [that] you [as a teacher] get the summer holidays, you get the Christmas holidays, Easter holidays ... They actually look at [the holidays only] and say you're only a teacher, you know you don't do much!

To make matters worse, according to Jessica, it was not just the general public who had such a demeaning perception. In fact, “*other professionals see you as a babysitter rather than a professional. This had a negative effect on me!*”.

These statements reflect the idiom ‘*those who can, do; those who can't, teach*’, which highlights society's negative perception towards the teaching profession. This starts a ripple effect which demotivates teachers and in many cases the low status attributed to the profession facilitates teacher's exit more than for other reasons related to administration, student or parent issues (Tye and O'Brien, 2002)

Contact Time

Jessica elaborated how the current teaching load in the primary sector:

... was exploiting even my personal health ... because when I went back home after a day's work, I was totally exhausted that I couldn't do anything. I was too tired. Too tired to perform in my hobby ... too tired ... too tired to do anything.

Isaac was not enthusiastic of cover (free) lessons because for him they were:

... not a time where you do any sort of work, you cannot just tell students 'ok be quiet you have 45 minutes of doing nothing. I have essays, and exams, and lessons and things to do', you actually have to ... at least interact with the students.

Struyven and Vanthournout (2014) also reported this determinant in their study as workload ranked as the second most influential variable with regards to teachers' exit decision.

Work Outside School Hours

As a newly qualified teacher, Fiona had twenty-four lessons per week:

I was [given] a lot of lessons ... so the stress was intense [during the school day] and after at home I had to continue planning ... until 8pm every day.

Isaac's anecdote showed that as a teacher "you don't actually have a lot of personal time. There's a lot of work that has to be done". Similarly, Odessa concluded that: "a lot of people think that being a teacher is family friendly. Well it's not!".

In a study by Buchanan (2009) participants stated that in non-teaching jobs "time outside work is your own" whereas with teaching "you go home worrying about it and you never seem to cut off" (p. 5). This determinant became more common when the interviewees were married or co-habiting, as teaching diminished their family time. This is in agreement with Borman and Dowling (2008) who found that there is an increased 0.40 probability that married teachers exit the profession.

Students

Clayton recalled that: "from a social and cultural point of view, I was shocked [as] the students have swear words in every sentence they're using!" Even worse, Isaac recounted an episode where his colleagues: "... had scalding water thrown at

them [and other instances when] teachers were touched inappropriately [by the students]". Alice blamed the resultant student behaviour on society at large as she stated: "I don't think there is enough discipline. We gave [the students] so much freedom" which according to Eva ultimately: "doesn't give you the motivation to teach".

This finding is corroborated by other studies namely that by Gonzalez, Brown and Slate (2008) and Fantilli and McDougall's (2009) as they identified students as one of the main reasons why teachers leave the profession. The fact is that nowadays, students have so many issues that it starts to make the educator's job overwhelming.

Parents

After gaining first-hand experience during the teaching practicum, Barry, perceived that some of the parents: "... do not respect teachers ... their child is always right, and the teacher is always wrong".

This determinant is more pronounced in Nicholas's anecdote as:

I used to receive notes from [a particular] parent almost every 2 days ... where she used to pick on anything, I would say [and] used to find defects in anything I did.

The effects of this determinant peak when a bullying culture is reinforced with teachers ending up being bullied by parents leaving educators with no choice except to feel as if they are fighting a losing battle (Fetherston and Lummis, 2012).

Colleagues

Alice recounted how during her pre-service course:

I had this fire but then when I ... saw what was in schools and how the teachers ... used to feel about PE, I was like why even bother? It's not like I'm going to save the world by myself you know, I needed, I needed help [from my colleagues].

According to Jessica this is made worse in the primary sector, as subject stigma is common for all peripatetic teachers, which at the end of the day:

It makes you feel disappointed, angry and like not bothered because why should you give your 100% when you know that nobody [not even your colleagues] will appreciate [your work].

The presence of this determinant reaffirms the findings by Lindqvist and Nordanger (2016) and Newberry and Allsop (2017) who considered the lack of collegiality in the profession as a factor that disconnects individuals from the profession, inciting them to seek connection by switching to an alternative career.

Senior Management Team

When Jessica refused to carry out an illegal request that goes against national health and safety policies vis-à-vis children supervision, the Senior Management Team (SMT) started discriminating against her and she was informally labelled as a rebel. Every time she required their decisive power:

[Every situation] incurs a fight! If I need to buy 4 new balls, I can't. Everything is met by resistance. Do you understand?

In Nicholas's anecdote, the SMT member involved teamed up with the parents and as a teacher Nicholas *"was never given the opportunity to defend [myself] and to have [my] say"*.

Likewise, in the United Kingdom, bad leadership practices administered by the SMT contributed towards the participants' decision to quit teaching (United Kingdom Department of Education, 2018). Inversely, research by Smith (2007) shows that teacher attrition rates decrease considerably when the principal together with the SMT: shares their vision of the school; inform staff of what is expected; provide performance feedback; are regularly present during meetings; promote good work practices; walk the talk with regards to rules and are available to provide any support and encouragement needed.

Stress and Job Satisfaction

Fiona concisely stated that she *"quit because when I used to teach, I was so stressed by how the system worked"*. This was substantiated by Matthew who told the researcher that:

I felt [a] lack of job satisfaction [and] too much stress especially with student's behaviour and with their lack of co-operation; not doing their HW and so on.

A worse scenario occurs when stress exceeded the interviewees' threshold, as is the case of Isaac:

where I was every single month at the doctor. I was getting sick. I couldn't sleep. I had no free time. It affected me on a personal level because I was very stressed...

Such phenomena were also present in teaching as Sass, Seal and Martin (2011) showed that stress induced from the workload and from student issues was also found to correlate with the intention to quit since they resulted in a quasi-moderate correlation ($r = .49$). Eventually, in this context, teachers' health suffers leading to increased teacher attrition rates (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011).

Negative Balance

When probed about organisational equilibrium, Fiona stated that teaching is: *"more about giving rather than receiving"*. This feeling was sustained by Matthew who replied that teaching at secondary level: *"was not as we say 'vala pena' it wasn't worth it"*.

Interestingly, Odessa's anecdote somewhat contrasted with the preceding two as:

If it is just you and the students, I would say you gain more. You give a lot, but you gain more.

However, she then emphasised that:

when you include everything holistically, you give much more than you get, and ...the person might feel overworked.

Evidently, the interviewees understood that their 'contribution-inducement balance' was not in their favour because they are getting a return which is lower than what they initially invested.

Image Mismatch

Clayton's image was distorted when he encountered a student population with a low socio-economic status leading to an *"absolute culture shock"*.

Unlike Clayton, Isaac's image mismatch stemmed from adults:

I was not expecting that sort of antagonism from society... Parents, adults, authority figures not being on your side that was, that was too much!

In Alice's case, her teacher colleagues provided her with an image mismatch as:

the teachers were, I felt they were demotivated ... people sitting in a staffroom complaining about what is happening in the school and how nothing can be done [about the system]

While Odessa's image was distorted by the SMT's military leadership style which:

Unfortunately, wasn't just with the students but also with teachers... I was told 'No! Listen, show them a video. They need to be quiet!' For me that doesn't make sense, that's not education!

The above anecdotes led participants to experience 'cognitive dissonance'. According to Raffo and Hall (2006), this is present for teachers when one's self-perception does not match with how s/he is perceived by others and when in their role as educators, the teaching context is perceived different from how they used to see it themselves as students. This distortion contributes to a higher probability of teacher attrition (Yinon and Orland-Barak, 2017).

Education Policy and Reforms

With regards to education policy and reforms (EPR) Alice perceived the: "... school system as being too archaic". Donna too agrees and she demands immediate transformative change as:

The [current] system ... at the end of the day it was like a production line, you produce the students[and] make them pass their exam.

Nonetheless, for Matthew, the potential advantages of EPR are being watered down, as they have become a mere political tool:

One minister wanted the college system, the other wanted co-ed and so on. Everybody wants to leave their mark; everybody wants to be known in [the] future as someone who brought a change in education...

A negative effect of EPR is when the voice from above sends mixed messages that may be against the ideologies and values of the respective professionals. Locally, Borg and Giordmaina (2012), with regards to EPR contended that their participants (n = 1366) disagree/strongly disagree that teaching personnel: are being properly prepared (78.4%); are being adequately consulted (82.2%) and are being adequately informed (73.2%). With the current modus operandi in relation to EPR, teacher exit attrition rates will not

abate as teachers feel voiceless, threatened and “treated as technical skilled workers instead of autonomous, emancipated and qualified professionals” (Attard Tonna and Calleja, 2018, p. 35).

Conclusion

By adopting an interpretivist research philosophy that utilised an inductive, qualitative research instrument based on a narrative inquiry strategy, the researcher was able to present findings with an enhanced level of information. In turn, this made it possible for the generation of initial data that reflect the multiple reasons for the teacher attrition rates in the local context.

While producing rich data, the research is not without limitations. The interviewees are either graduate teachers who never entered teaching or who resigned from the profession to seek alternative employment. Consequently, their narrative held a negative disposition towards the experienced teaching context that was present when they decided to not enter or resign from teaching. This is evident in both the direct quotations used to illustrate the findings and the ensuing analysis.

It is also pertinent to note that the findings emanate from a thematic analysis of the dataset, therefore the sixteen determinants were identified through the active role of the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as by stating otherwise, one would be labelling the research as being carried out through an epistemological vacuum. Lastly, the qualitative findings originated from fifteen individual narratives thus lacking statistical representation and generalisability.

In view of the above limitations, three areas are suggested for further research:

1. It would be interesting to identify what attracts *invested leavers* who leave the teaching profession to work in non-educational sectors and industries of the labour market;
2. A study should focus on how to attract invested leavers back to the profession to alleviate the current recruitment issues;

3. A replication of this research pursuing a quantitative methodology would be necessary to generalise the findings to the whole population under study.

In conclusion, in Malta, teacher retention is currently encumbered with: an exponential rise in educators who voluntarily resign from the profession; a decline of teacher graduates from the University of Malta; a recurring problem of unfilled teacher vacancies throughout the scholastic year; an increase in the recruitment of supply teachers who do not have the appropriate qualifications and a school's climate of disengagement and pessimism that current in-service teachers have to deal with. Within this context, this study aimed to shed further light on the current challenges in teacher retention, foregrounding the voices of qualified educators who are no longer exercising their profession.

End Notes

- ^{1A} The interviewees will be referred to via their pseudonym, selected alphabetically according to the interview number and group position. Example *Eva* is the 5th interview hence the 5th letter from the alphabet was chosen for the participant's pseudonym.
- ^{1B} Additional details, including: Name; Surname; Gender; Marital Status; Children; Subject Area; Teaching Area; Year Graduated; Age When Started to Work as a Teacher and Age When Resigning from Teaching, are not disclosed to protect the individual's identity as per the General Data Protection Regulation.
- ^{1C} *The data in the column "School Sector" for "Group 1 No Teaching Experience" relate to the sector the interviewees were deployed to during their teaching experience, since they did not work as teachers following graduation.
- ^{1D} ** The data in the column "Industry of New Career" for Interviewee #4 Donna "Higher Education" are *not* related to teaching, lecturing or one that requires prior teaching experience.

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