

2025

Pathways to teacher retention:
comparing career choice satisfaction &
commitment to teaching of career
change teachers and traditionally
certified teachers in independent schools

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/50497>

"Downloaded from OpenBU. Boston University's institutional repository."

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
WHEELOCK COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Dissertation

**PATHWAYS TO TEACHER RETENTION:
COMPARING CAREER CHOICE SATISFACTION & COMMITMENT TO
TEACHING OF CAREER CHANGE TEACHERS AND TRADITIONALLY
CERTIFIED TEACHERS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**

by

JOANNE R. CHARLES LAFORTUNE

B.A., University of Rhode Island, 2015
M.A., Boston University, 2022

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

2025

© 2025 by
JOANNE R. CHARLES LAFORTUNE
All rights reserved

Approved by

First Reader

Pipier Smith-Mumford, Ed.D.
Field Director of the EdD Program
Master Lecturer in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Second Reader

Ramón González, Ed.D.
Professor of the Practice of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Third Reader

Robert J. Weintraub, Ed.D.
Senior Lecturer (retired) of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

**PATHWAYS TO TEACHER RETENTION:
COMPARING CAREER CHOICE SATISFACTION & COMMITMENT TO
TEACHING OF CAREER CHANGE TEACHERS AND TRADITIONALLY
CERTIFIED TEACHERS IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS**

JOANNE R. CHARLES LAFORTUNE

Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development, 2025

Major Professor: Pipier Smith-Mumford, Ed.D., Field Director of the EdD Program,
Master Lecturer in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored how career choice satisfaction and long-term commitment to the teaching profession differ between Career Change Teachers (CCTs) and Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs) working in independent high schools. Although independent schools face unique challenges with teacher retention and recruitment, little research has investigated how differing pathways into teaching shape satisfaction and sustained commitment in this setting. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994), this study examined the lived experiences of twelve high school teachers across four independent schools in Rhode Island.

Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and one focus group, this study revealed nuanced differences in motivation, satisfaction, and retention trajectories. CCTs, many of whom transitioned into teaching after disillusionment with prior careers, often reported high levels of intrinsic satisfaction, resilience, and enduring commitment. Despite lacking formal pedagogical training, CCTs actively sought mentorship, engaged

in self-guided learning, and cited autonomy and purpose as key motivators. In contrast, TCTs—those who entered teaching directly after college through traditional certification programs—expressed strong professional identity and a passion for student engagement, but several noted waning commitment due to work-life imbalance, limited financial advancement, and institutional fatigue.

Findings indicated that while both groups experienced intrinsic rewards, TCTs faced greater vulnerability to burnout and attrition, with Participants 1 and 12 planning to exit the profession in the following year. Meanwhile, Participant 3, a CCT in his first year of teaching, reported strong affirmation in his career shift and high commitment to the profession. This study highlights how professional background, institutional context, and motivational drivers intersect to influence teachers' career choice satisfaction and retention. The study concludes with practical recommendations for independent school leaders to tailor recruitment, support, and retention strategies to the distinct needs of CCTs and TCTs, fostering a more sustainable and satisfied teaching workforce.

Keywords: *Career Change Teachers (CCTs), career choice satisfaction, independent schools, qualitative phenomenology, Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory, teacher commitment, teacher retention, Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	xvii
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
Section One.....	1
Problem Statement	1
Background of the Study.....	2
Public Schools	2
Charter Schools	4
Independent Schools.....	6
Rationale for the Study.....	9
Research Objective.....	9
Significance of the Study	10
Theoretical Framework	10
Research Methodology.....	11
Primary Research Question.....	11
Sub-Questions.....	12
Research Goals	12
Manual Coding for Qualitative Data Analysis	13
Definitions of Key Terms	14
Assumption of the Researcher.....	16
Biases & Study Limitations.....	16

CHAPTER TWO	18
Literature Review.....	18
Introduction	18
Theoretical Framework	20
Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	20
Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)	21
Integrating Theoretical Frameworks	21
Structure and Key Topics	23
Defining the Pathways: Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCT) vs. Career Changers.	23
Traditional Certification Overview & Context.....	25
Defining Career Changers, Career Change Teachers (CCT), Alternative Certification Pathway	28
Alternative Certification Pathways Overview & Context.....	30
Emergency Certification.....	32
Independent Schools & Licensure Requirements	34
Deciphering Teachers’ Career Satisfaction and Commitment.....	35
Bridging Gaps in Teacher Satisfaction Research	36
Overview	37
The Motivations and Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction	39
Teacher Turnover and Retention Rates	44
Initial Certification Pathways and Teacher Retention: School Environment and Organizational Support.....	46

Challenges and Opportunities in Career Transitions: Teacher Retention in Independent Schools	49
Intrinsic Motivations and Professional Development	51
Conclusion.....	53
CHAPTER THREE	54
Methodology	54
Overview of Research Study.....	54
Research Design.....	55
Contrast with Other Methodologies	57
Ethical Considerations.....	58
Positionality.....	60
Epoché (Bracketing).....	61
Site Selection & Study Sample	62
Recruitment Process	65
Focus Group Interviews	66
Research Questions	66
Primary Research Question	67
Sub-Questions.....	67
Coding Process & Data Analysis Methodology	68
Methodological Details	71
Probe Questions for Exploring and Comparing Commitment Levels.....	72
For Identifying Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction.....	72

For Understanding Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction Among TCTs..	72
For Uncovering Factors Contributing to Differences in Satisfaction and Commitment	
.....	73
For Informing Recruitment, Retention, and Support Strategies.....	73
Probe Questions for Focus Group	73
Biases & Study Limitations.....	74
CHAPTER FOUR.....	76
Findings and Analysis.....	76
Demographic Profile of Participants	76
Summary of Demographic Trends	79
Manual Coding Process.....	80
Transcript Preparation	80
Initial Open Coding and Development of Parent and Child Codes.....	82
Final Coding Framework	83
Parent Code 1: Career Choice Satisfaction	83
Parent Code 2: Commitment to Teaching	84
Parent Code 3: Differences Between CCTs and TCTs	84
Identifying Thematic Patterns	85
Synthesizing Findings and Structuring the Analysis.....	86
Chapter Roadmap: Organization of Findings.....	87
Findings for Career Choice Satisfaction---Intrinsic Motivations Among CCTs.....	88
Greater Appreciation for Teaching as a Career.....	89

From Chasing External Success to Finding Immediate Fulfillment	89
A Desire for Meaning and Existential Reflection	91
Passion Over Financial Gain	92
Summary of Intrinsic Motivations Among CCTs	92
Intrinsic Motivation Among Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs).....	94
Teaching as a Lifelong Calling: Identity, Family Influence, and Representation.....	94
Longstanding Commitment and Unwavering Professional Identity	96
Joy in Student Engagement: Emotional and Professional Fulfillment in the Classroom	97
Passion for Subject Matter: Love for Teaching Extends Beyond the Classroom	98
Extrinsic Motivations for Career Change Teachers (CCTs).....	100
Job Stability and Security	100
Salary and Financial Considerations	101
Work-Life Balance and Time Off	103
Professional Autonomy and Curriculum Flexibility	105
Institutional Culture and Collegiality	106
Extrinsic Motivation Among Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)	108
Salary and Financial Considerations	108
Security and Stability	111
Workload and Professional Expectations	113
Work-Life Balance	115
Salary and Financial Considerations	118

Job Security and Stability	121
Workload and Professional Expectations	123
Work-Life Balance	126
Focus Group Insights on Career Choice Satisfaction.....	130
Shared Validation of Career Choice Satisfaction	130
Salary and Financial Considerations: Stability vs. Stagnation	131
Workload and Work-Life Balance: Assumptions and Adaptations	132
Institutional Culture and Professional Growth	133
Focus Group Overview.....	133
Commitment to Teaching: Long-Term Career Intentions of Career Change	134
Teachers (CCTs)	134
Reasons for Staying in Teaching: Alignment, Passion, and Growth	135
Considerations for the Future: Openness to Career Changes	137
Teaching as the Best Alternative	137
Overview of Findings	138
Commitment to Teaching: Long-Term Career Intentions (TCTs).....	139
Reasons for Staying in Teaching: Intrinsic Passion and Identity as an Educator ...	139
Stability, Familiarity, and Risk Aversion	140
Institutional and Community Connections	141
Considerations for Leaving Teaching	142
Financial Barriers to Long-Term Sustainability	143
Overview of Findings.....	143

What This Means.....	144
Comparative Commitment: Focus Group Insights on CCTs vs. TCTs	145
The Role of Experience in Career Commitment	145
Stability vs. Informed Conviction: The Marriage Analogy.....	146
Security vs. Reinvention: What Drives Long-Term Commitment?	148
Thematic Summary and Implications.....	149
Retention Challenges: Burnout, Job Dissatisfaction, & External Career Opportunities Among (CCTs)	151
Burnout: Does Passion Have Limits?	151
Administrative Frustration and Job Dissatisfaction—the Institutional Reality.....	153
External Career Opportunities: Teaching as a Long-Term Commitment	154
Overview of the Enduring Commitment of Career Changer Teachers	155
Retention Challenges Among TCTs: Burnout, Job Dissatisfaction, and External Career Opportunities.....	156
Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion: The Invisible Weight of Teaching	156
Job Dissatisfaction: Disillusionment with Administration and Institutional Culture	157
External Career Opportunities: The Temptation of Alternative Paths	158
Summary.....	159
Training and Preparation Challenges Among Career Changer Teachers	160
(CCTs)	160
Lack of Formal Training and Its Consequences.....	161

The Critical Role of Informal Mentorship.....	162
Inadequate Professional Development and the Need for Self-Guided Learning	162
The Hidden Benefit: Open-Mindedness and Experimental Teaching.....	163
Training and Professional Readiness Among Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)	
.....	165
Professional Development: Redundant for TCTs, Yet Essential for CCTs	166
Burnout and Exhaustion: Expected, Yet Manageable.....	167
Overview of Structured Advantage of Certification	168
Focus Group Discussion: Contrasting Training and Preparation Between Career	169
Changer Teachers (CCTs) and Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)	169
Training as a Head Start—But Not an Exemption from the Struggles of Teaching	171
CCTs: Learning in Real-Time, Taking Risks, and Filling in the Gaps	172
Overview of Findings: Two Different Paths, One Common Challenge	173
School Culture Adjustment: CCTs and the Transition into Independent Schools.....	174
Autonomy: A Defining Feature of Independent Schools	174
The Challenge of Adjusting to Unwritten Norms	175
A Double-Edged Sword: Freedom Without Guidance.....	176
Student-Teacher Relationships May Be a New Adjustment	177
Overview: The Intersection of Freedom, Adaptation, and Growth.....	178
School Culture Adjustment: TCTs and the Transition into Independent Schools.....	179
A Welcome Shift: Autonomy and Professional Trust.....	179
The Power of Community and Colleague Competence	180

Hidden Challenges—Adjusting to the Independent School Culture.....	181
Conclusion: Final Synthesis of Research Findings.....	183
Comparative Commitment Levels: CCTs vs. TCTs.....	184
Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction Among CCTs.....	185
Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction Among TCTs.....	186
Differences and Similarities in Satisfaction and Commitment	187
CHAPTER FIVE	189
Discussion, Implications, And Recommendations	189
Theoretical Framework Revisited	189
Implications & Recommendations for Recruitment, Retention, and Teacher Training	190
Targeting Career Change Teachers (CCTs) through Values-Based Messaging	191
Reframing Recruitment for TCTs: Identity and Representation	192
Narrative-Driven Recruitment Strategies	192
Addressing Burnout and Career Sustainability Across All Entry Paths.....	192
Fostering Autonomy and Professional Growth	193
Mentorship as a Structured Institutional Norm	194
Teacher Training and Professional Development---Tailoring Preparation Pathways for CCTs	194
Reframing Teacher Preparation Around Identity and Purpose	195
Embedding Motivation Science into Faculty Development.....	195
Limitations of the Study	196

Sample Size and Generalizability.....	196
Demographic Representation	197
Pathway and Role Diversity Within Groups	198
Focus on Independent Schools	199
Temporal Limitations and Lack of Longitudinal Perspective.....	200
Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity	200
Recommendations for Independent School Leaders and Hiring Committees	202
Proactively Recruit Mid-Career Professionals into Teaching.....	203
Recruit Based on Values Alignment and Life Experience.....	203
Maintain a Focus on Representation and Identity in Hiring TCTs	204
Establish Sustained Mentorship for New and Mid-Career Teachers	204
Create Growth-Oriented Pathways to Avoid Professional Stagnation.....	205
Strengthen Early-Career Support to Prevent Burnout in the First 1–3 Years	205
Reexamine and Reframe Compensation Structures	206
Differentiate Professional Development for CCTs and TCTs	207
Build in Reflective Practice and Identity Work	207
Train School Leaders in Motivation-Centered Leadership	208
Future Research.....	208
Explore Gender and Racial Representation Among Career Change Teachers	209
Examine the Impact of Formal Training and Certification Pathways on Teacher Efficacy and Satisfaction.....	209
Investigate the Evolution of Career Satisfaction Across the Teaching Lifecycle ...	210

Conduct Comparative Studies Between Independent and Public-School Contexts	211
Explore the Role of Institutional Culture and Leadership in Sustaining Teacher	
Motivation	212
Analyze the Influence of Faculty Parent Roles in School Communities	212
Investigate Institutional Responses to Career Change Teachers' Needs.....	213
Final Reflection	214
APPENDIX 1	216
Recruitment Email	216
APPENDIX 2.....	218
Participation Information Sheet	218
APPENDIX 3.....	221
Interview Protocol Career Change Teachers (CCTs)	221
APPENDIX 4.....	227
Interview Protocol –.....	227
Traditionally Certified Teachers (Tcts)	227
APPENDIX 5.....	233
Focus Group Questions.....	233
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	240
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	246

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Public and Private School Teacher Retention and Attrition Rates (2022–2023) ..4	4
Table 2. Teacher Turnover in Charter vs. Traditional Public Schools6	6
Table 3. Teacher Attrition in Independent vs. Public Schools (2020-2021 to 2021-2022 ..8	8
Table 4. Comparison of Theoretical Frameworks Used in This Study.....22	22
Table 5. Coding Structure Developed Through Manual Analysis.....70	70
Table 6. Demographic Characteristics of Career Change Teachers (CCTs)77	77
Table 7. Demographic Characteristics of Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)78	78
Table 8. Overview of Parent & Child Codes.85	85
Table 9. Intrinsic Motivation CCTs & TCTs.....99–100	99–100
Table 10. Extrinsic Motivations CCTs & TCTs129	129

CHAPTER ONE

Section One

Problem Statement

Teacher attrition and retention are pressing issues affecting the entire education sector, including public schools, charter schools, and independent schools. According to the Learning Policy Institute, teacher turnover costs the United States up to \$8 billion annually (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The RAND Corporation found that teacher turnover increased by 4 percentage points above pre-pandemic levels at the end of the 2021–2022 school year, reaching 10 percent nationally at the end of the 2021–2022 school year, with urban and high-poverty districts experiencing the highest rates of turnover (RAND Corporation, 2016). Podolsky et al. (2017) stated that “overall, more than half of teachers voluntarily leave the profession for reasons other than retirement” (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 20).

However, there is limited research specifically focusing on the retention and career choice satisfaction of teachers in independent schools, particularly comparing those who transitioned from other professions (Career Change Teachers, CCTs) with those who followed a traditional teaching career path (Traditional Career Teachers, TCTs). Understanding the differences in career choice satisfaction and commitment to the teaching profession between these two groups in the context of independent schools could be crucial for developing effective retention strategies.

This dissertation aims to explore the career choice satisfaction of high school teachers in independent schools by comparing CCTs with TCTs to understand their

commitment to remaining in the field of education. By addressing this gap in the literature, the study seeks to provide insights into factors contributing to teacher retention and attrition in independent schools and offer strategies to improve teacher retention.

Background of the Study

Public Schools

High teacher attrition in public schools is a significant challenge that affects educational quality, student achievement, and school stability. Stress has been identified as a primary factor driving teachers to leave the profession. According to a report by the RAND Corporation, stress was the most frequently cited reason for quitting among public school teachers, surpassing even insufficient pay (Diliberti et al., 2021). Diliberti et al. (2021) conducted a survey of nearly 1,000 former public-school teachers, further highlighting the key factors contributing to teacher attrition. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these stress levels, with teachers facing increased workloads and the technical challenges of remote teaching (Diliberti et al., 2021).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023), teacher turnover rates differed between public and private schools in the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years. Among public school teachers, 84% remained in their current schools ("stayers"), while 8% transferred to another school ("movers"), and another 8% left the teaching profession entirely ("leavers") (NCES, 2023). In private schools, retention rates were slightly lower, with 82% of teachers staying at the same school, while 6% moved to a different school, and 12% exited the profession (NCES, 2023). The data suggests that private schools experienced a higher percentage of teacher attrition than public schools,

as a greater proportion of teachers left the profession altogether (NCES, 2023).

However, even within public schools, teacher attrition rates are not uniform, with some schools experiencing significantly higher turnover than others. Recent data from Education Resource Strategies (ERS) indicates that, on average, 23% of teachers left their schools during the 2022–2023 academic year (ERS, 2024). Notably, schools serving the highest concentrations of students experiencing poverty reported even higher attrition rates, with 29% of teachers departing, compared to 19% in schools with lower poverty levels (ERS, 2024). Additionally, approximately 30% of novice teachers—those in their first few years of teaching—left their schools within the same period, exacerbating staffing shortages and instability in high-need schools (ERS, 2024). Moreover, among teachers who transferred to other schools within the same district, 40% moved to schools with fewer students living in poverty, highlighting systemic inequities in school staffing patterns (ERS, 2024).

Economic factors also contribute significantly to teacher turnover. Schools in high-poverty areas struggle more with retaining teachers due to lower salaries and less favorable working conditions. The Economic Policy Institute highlights that high turnover rates result in an influx of inexperienced teachers, further degrading the quality of education and perpetuating the turnover cycle (Economic Policy Institute, 2021). The shrinking pool of potential new teachers compounds these challenges. There has been a notable decline in the number of individuals enrolling in and completing teacher preparation programs, reducing the availability of qualified candidates to fill teaching positions (Economic Policy Institute, 2021).

Category	Percentage	Source
Public School Teacher Retention Rate (2022-2023)	77%	NCES, 2023
Public School Teacher Transfer Rate (2022-2023)	8%	NCES, 2023
Public School Teacher Attrition Rate (2022-2023)	8%	NCES, 2023
Attrition Rate in High-Poverty Public Schools (2022-2023)	29%	ERS, 2024
Attrition Rate in Low-Poverty Public Schools (2022-2023)	19%	ERS, 2024
Novice Teacher Attrition Rate (2022-2023)	30%	ERS, 2024
Public School Teachers Moving to Lower-Poverty Schools	40%	ERS, 2024
Private School Teacher Retention Rate (2021-2022)	82%	NCES, 2023
Private School Teacher Transfer Rate (2021-2022)	6%	NCES, 2023
Private School Teacher Attrition Rate (2021-2022)	12%	NCES, 2023

Table 1. Public and Private School Teacher Retention and Attrition Rates (2022–2023).

Note. Data sourced from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023) and Education Resource Strategies (ERS, 2024). The percentages reflect teacher retention, transfer, and attrition trends in U.S. public and private schools.

Charter Schools

Charter schools often face higher rates of teacher turnover compared to traditional public schools. Research by Pivovarova and Powers (2022) provided empirical evidence demonstrating the significant disparity in turnover rates between charter and traditional public schools. Their study, which analyzed teacher employment data from Arizona between 2009 and 2015, found that teacher attrition in charter schools was 54% higher than in traditional public schools. Additionally, the proportion of novice teachers—those with less than three years of experience—was substantially higher in charter schools, increasing from 37% in 2010 to 51% in 2014, whereas in traditional public schools, this percentage remained relatively stable at 27% to 30%. These findings highlight a critical

factor contributing to higher turnover rates in charter schools: they employ a significantly larger share of inexperienced teachers who are more likely to leave the profession. Furthermore, the study found that charter schools have a higher concentration of teachers with alternative certifications, a group that also exhibited higher attrition rates (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022). This suggests that the staffing instability in charter schools is not just a product of working conditions but is also influenced by the employment patterns and teacher qualification structures within the sector.

For instance, a study published in the *American Journal of Education* found that newly hired teachers in charter schools are more likely to exit the teaching profession and less likely to transfer to another school compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools. This study highlights the higher mobility rates and the unique challenges faced by charter school teachers (Gulosino et al., 2019). Additionally, data from the National Center on School Choice reveals that charter schools have significantly higher rates of teacher turnover than traditional public schools. This research points out that dissatisfaction with working conditions is a major factor contributing to higher turnover rates in charter schools (Stuit & Smith, 2010). Furthermore, an analysis by *PublicSource* found that nearly one in four teachers in Allegheny County's charter schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, were in their first year, compared to just 4% in the county's traditional public schools, which ultimately contributes to teacher turnover. This high turnover rate among charter school teachers is linked to lower job security and fewer benefits, contributing to the instability and challenges in maintaining consistent teaching staff (PublicSource, 2017).

Category	Percentage	Source
1 Charter School Teacher Attrition Rate (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022)	54% higher than public schools	Pivovarova & Powers, 2022
2 Traditional Public School Teacher Attrition Rate (Pivovarova & Powers, 2022)	The public-school attrition rates other schools are being compared to	Pivovarova & Powers, 2022
3 Increase in Charter School Attrition Compared to Traditional Public Schools	54% increase	Pivovarova & Powers, 2022
4 Proportion of Novice Teachers in Charter Schools (2010)	37%	Pivovarova & Powers, 2022
5 Proportion of Novice Teachers in Charter Schools (2014)	51%	Pivovarova & Powers, 2022
6 Proportion of Novice Teachers in Traditional Public Schools	27–30%	Pivovarova & Powers, 2022
7 Charter School Teacher Turnover Rate (Stuit & Smith, 2010)	Higher than traditional public schools	Stuit & Smith, 2010
8 Traditional Public School Teacher Turnover Rate (Stuit & Smith, 2010)	Lower than charter schools	Stuit & Smith, 2010
9 Percentage of First-Year Teachers in Allegheny County Charter Schools (PublicSource, 2017)	25%	PublicSource, 2017
10 Percentage of First-Year Teachers in Allegheny County Traditional Public Schools (PublicSource, 2017)	4%	PublicSource, 2017

Table 2. Teacher Turnover in Charter vs. Traditional Public Schools.

Note. Data sourced from Pivovarova and Powers (2022), Stuit and Smith (2010), and PublicSource (2017).

Independent Schools

Independent private schools in the United States enroll more than 700,000 students from pre-K through high school and operate across over 2,000 institutions (National Association of Independent Schools [NAIS], n.d.). Independent schools, like many other educational institutions, are grappling with significant teacher turnover as

well. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges, leading to heightened stress and burnout among educators. This stress has been particularly pronounced in independent schools, where teachers have faced increased workloads and emotional labor due to hybrid teaching models and concerns for student well-being (National Association of Independent Schools [NAIS], 2023; Independent School Management [ISM], 2022). A survey by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) revealed that 92% of independent school teachers reported their jobs as stressful, with many considering leaving due to burnout, low salaries, and lack of administrative support (NAIS, 2023). The higher teacher attrition rate in private schools, where 12% of teachers left the profession between the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years compared to 8% in public schools, can be attributed to multiple factors (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023).

Compensation played a significant role, with 36% of private school teachers who voluntarily moved to another school citing salary and benefits as the primary reason for their decision (NCES, 2023). Additionally, 25% of private school teachers who changed schools voluntarily reported personal life circumstances, such as health concerns, family needs, or relocations, as their most influential factor in leaving (NCES, 2023). Another 20% of private school teachers identified school-related factors, including administrative support, school policies, and overall working conditions, as their main reason for transferring (NCES, 2023).

These findings indicate that while salary disparities contribute significantly to private school teacher turnover, personal and workplace-related factors also play crucial

roles in shaping their decisions. In addition, the economic challenges of recent years have resulted in stagnant or declining teacher salaries when adjusted for inflation, further contributing to turnover rates (NAIS, 2023). Teacher compensation in independent schools often lags behind that of public schools, leading to dissatisfaction. While independent schools are known for positive working environments and greater teacher autonomy, the pay gap remains a critical issue. Teachers in independent schools frequently express concerns about the fairness of their salaries, especially when compared to their public-school counterparts (NAIS, 2023).

Category	Percentage	Source
1 Independent School Teacher Retention Rate (2020-21 to 2021-22)	82%	NCES, 2023
2 Public School Teacher Retention Rate (2020-21 to 2021-22)	84%	NCES, 2023
3 Independent School Teacher Transfer Rate	6%	NCES, 2023
4 Public School Teacher Transfer Rate	8%	NCES, 2023
5 Independent School Teacher Attrition Rate	12%	NCES, 2023
6 Public School Teacher Attrition Rate	8%	NCES, 2023
7 Teachers Citing Salary as Primary Reason for Leaving	36%	NCES, 2023
8 Teachers Citing Personal Life Factors as Primary Reason for Leaving	25%	NCES, 2023
9 Teachers Citing School Factors (Admin Support, Policies, etc.)	20%	NCES, 2023
10 Teachers Reporting Job as Stressful (Independent Schools)	92%	NCES, 2023

Table 3. Teacher Attrition in Independent vs. Public Schools (2020-2021 to 2021-2022).

Rationale for the Study

Research on teacher retention has predominantly focused on factors influencing job satisfaction, such as administrative support, professional development, and work-life balance (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Research has also primarily focused on working conditions and compensation as factors contributing to teacher retention (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023; National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2015). However, independent schools present unique challenges and characteristics that necessitate a distinct research approach. Unlike public and charter schools, which generally require teachers to be licensed, independent schools often do not have this requirement (NAIS, 2023). This difference highlights the need for a more precise examination of teacher turnover in independent schools, as the factors influencing retention in these environments may differ significantly from those in public and charter schools despite some commonalities.

Research Objective

This research study aimed to fill the gap in research concerning teacher Career Choice Satisfaction according to their pathways into education by focusing specifically on independent schools. Addressing this gap requires exploring the career choice satisfaction of high school teachers in independent schools by comparing CCTs who transitioned from other professions into teaching with those who followed a traditional teaching career path to teaching education (TCT) to understand their commitment to remaining in the field of education. This research aims to provide insights into potential

alternative factors contributing to high attrition and turnover rates in independent schools, ultimately offering strategies to improve teacher retention and recruitment efforts.

Significance of the Study

Career choice satisfaction is a crucial indicator of a teacher's commitment to remain in the education field. Teachers who are dissatisfied with their career choices are less likely to experience job satisfaction, ultimately contributing to higher turnover rates (Learning Policy Institute, 2022; NAIS, 2023). Understanding these differences may be crucial for developing strategies to enhance teacher retention in independent schools.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation is guided by two key theories that provide a foundation for understanding the factors influencing career choice satisfaction and commitment among high school teachers in independent schools.

1. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

- Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation and well-being. This theory is essential for exploring the motivational dynamics affecting CCTs and TCTs.

2. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

- Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994) examines how career interests and choices are influenced by self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. This framework is used to analyze how these factors impact the career satisfaction and commitment of teachers.

These theoretical frameworks will be elaborated upon in Chapter 2, providing a detailed analysis of how they apply to the research problem.

Research Methodology

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research involves gathering data through in-depth interviews and analyzing it to identify common themes and essences of the phenomenon under study. This study will employ a qualitative phenomenological research approach. The qualitative phenomenological approach will allow us to deeply explore the individual lived experiences of high school teachers in independent schools. Phenomenology aims to understand and describe how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method will enable us to gain rich, detailed insights into the experiences of teachers in independent schools, which are often overlooked in broader quantitative studies.

Phenomenology is particularly suited for this study as it seeks to capture the essence of teachers' experiences and the meanings they attach to their career choices and professional commitments. By focusing on the lived experiences of both CCTs and TCTs, this approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing their career satisfaction and commitment (van Manen, 2016).

Primary Research Question

The primary research question guiding this inquiry was as follows: How do the career choice satisfaction and level of commitment to remain in the field of education compare and differ between high school teachers who transitioned from other professions into teaching (CCTs) and those who followed a traditional teaching path directly after

college (TCTs), specifically within the context of an independent school setting, and what factors contribute to these differences?

Sub-Questions

1. How do the levels of commitment to remain in the field of education compare between CCTs and TCTs within independent schools?
2. What factors influence career choice satisfaction among CCTs in independent schools?
3. What factors influence career choice satisfaction among TCTs in independent schools?
4. What are the factors contributing to the similarities and differences in career choice satisfaction and commitment between CCTs and TCTs within independent schools?
5. What are the factors contributing to the similarities in career choice satisfaction and commitment between CCTs and TCTs within independent schools?
6. Based on the findings, what insights and recommendations can be provided to inform teacher recruitment, retention, and support strategies specifically tailored for independent schools in the field of education?

Research Goals

Addressing the aforementioned research question and sub-questions, this study seeks to achieve the following research goals:

1. To explore and compare the levels of commitment to remain in the field of education exhibited by two distinct groups of high school teachers within the

context of independent schools: those who transitioned from other professions into teaching and teachers who followed a traditional teaching path after college.

2. To identify and understand the factors that influence career choice satisfaction among high school teachers in independent schools who transitioned from other professions into teaching.
3. To identify and understand the factors that influence career choice satisfaction among high school teachers in independent schools who followed a traditional teaching path after college.
4. To uncover the factors contributing to differences in career choice satisfaction and commitment between the two groups of high school teachers within the context of independent schools.
5. To provide insights and recommendations based on the findings that can inform teacher recruitment, retention, and support strategies specifically tailored for independent schools in the field of education.

Manual Coding for Qualitative Data Analysis

This study employed a manual coding process to analyze the qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews with CCTs and TCTs. Rather than using a software platform such as NVivo, the researcher engaged in a hands-on, iterative approach that allowed for deeper interaction with the data and a closer connection to participants' lived experiences.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim and initially reviewed in digital format, with early codes and emerging ideas identified through highlights and margin notes.

Transcripts were then printed and reviewed in hard copy, allowing for line-by-line coding using handwritten notes, color-coded highlights, and thematic annotations. This tactile process supported the recognition of recurring patterns, emotional nuances, and subtle narrative threads.

The coding structure developed through this process was both inductive and deductive in nature. Initial codes were grounded in participants' language and reflections, while overarching categories were informed by the study's research questions and theoretical frameworks—namely, SDT and SCCT. Codes were organized into broader parent categories and more refined sub-codes that captured specific insights across participant groups.

This manual coding approach allowed for a flexible, reflective process that remained attuned to the phenomenological orientation of the study. By staying close to the data and allowing themes to emerge organically, the researcher ensured that the final analysis was both rigorous and deeply grounded in participant experience.

Definitions of Key Terms

For this study, the definition of each term was employed:

- A. *Career choice satisfaction*:** The degree of contentment or fulfillment experienced by individuals regarding their decision to pursue a career in teaching. It encompasses factors such as enjoyment, fulfillment, and alignment with personal and professional goals within the teaching profession.
- B. *Level of commitment*:** The extent to which individuals are dedicated and engaged in their role as educators, particularly in terms of their willingness to remain in the

field of education over the long term. This may include factors such as dedication, perseverance, and investment in professional growth and development.

- C.** *Transition into teaching:* The process by which individuals enter the teaching profession, which can occur through various pathways, such as transitioning from other professions or pursuing a traditional route directly after completing a college education.
- D.** *Career-changing teachers (CCTs)* are individuals who entered the K-12 teaching profession at independent schools after working in a non-K-12 formal teaching career for at least two years or more immediately after graduating college. These individuals did not complete a formal teacher preparation program, obtain state certification, or receive structured pedagogical training before entering the classroom. They may have earned a degree in a core subject area such as mathematics, science, English, or history, but they did not previously teach in a K-12 school setting.
- E.** *Traditionally certified teachers (TCTs):* Educators who have followed a conventional path into teaching, involving the completion of a teacher education program and certification process following their college education. These teachers pursued teaching as their initial career choice after completing their academic studies and did not hold any jobs in other career fields after graduation before teaching.

Assumption of the Researcher

The researcher operated under several assumptions in conducting this study. Firstly, it was assumed that career choice satisfaction and commitment to education among high school teachers are multifaceted constructs influenced by various factors, including personal backgrounds and professional experiences. Secondly, it was assumed that differences exist between high school teachers who transitioned from other professions into teaching and those who followed a traditional teaching path after college, particularly within the context of independent schools. These differences are hypothesized to impact their levels of career choice satisfaction and commitment to the teaching profession. Additionally, the researcher assumed that insights gained from exploring these differences can inform effective recruitment, retention, and support strategies tailored for independent schools. Furthermore, it was assumed that the chosen theoretical frameworks, including SDT and SCCT, provide suitable lenses through which to examine the dynamics of career satisfaction and commitment among high school teachers. Finally, the researcher assumes that the qualitative, phenomenological approach employed in this study will yield rich insights into the lived experiences and perspectives of both CCTs and TCTs in independent schools.

Biases & Study Limitations

This study, focusing on four independent schools in Rhode Island, presented certain biases and limitations. The unique characteristics of these schools, such as distinct cultures, resources, and student demographics, may not reflect the broader spectrum of educational environments. Additionally, the specific demographic and socioeconomic

context of Rhode Island might influence the findings, making them less applicable to different geographic locations or independent school types. These factors should be considered when interpreting the results, as they highlight the need for cautious generalization beyond this particular setting. A more detailed discussion of biases and limitations will be provided in Chapter 3, the methodology section of this dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

The transition into the teaching profession, particularly within independent school settings, stands at the intersection of significant scholarly and practical interests. This study delves into the individual experiences of high school teachers who have entered the field through different paths: those transitioning from other professions and those initiating their teaching careers directly after completing their college education. Existing literature, such as the works of Ford et al. (2019), Redding and Smith (2016), and McElroy (2019), provides foundational insights into factors affecting teacher satisfaction and commitment. However, a targeted comparison of career choice satisfaction and commitment between career-changing teachers and those following a traditional educational trajectory, specifically within independent schools, still needs to be explored.

This study aimed to uncover how career choice satisfaction and commitment levels compare and differ between these two groups of educators within the independent school milieu and what factors contribute to these differences. By drawing on the theoretical frameworks previously mentioned in Chapter One, such as SDT and Social SCCT, this research seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Lent et al., 1994).

The contributions of this research are twofold: it will hopefully enrich academic discourse by addressing a noted gap in the literature regarding the impact of entry pathways on teacher career choice satisfaction and commitment within independent

schools; it also aims to offer actionable insights for school administrators to enhance support structures and professional development opportunities for retention and recruitment purposes.

To tackle this issue, a phenomenological qualitative analysis approach was employed, aiming to synthesize the academic discourse. This literature review specifically emphasizes studies conducted within the last 5-10 years to anchor its findings in the context of the most current educational discussions taking place, especially since there has been a significant gap in the literature in the past 3-5 years concerning the career choice satisfaction of teachers. For this reason, the analysis remains inclusive of seminal works, recognizing their enduring contributions to understanding the dynamics of career satisfaction and commitment in teaching. A systematic search was conducted using key terms like “teacher career satisfaction,” “commitment in teaching,” “alternative certification teachers,” and “traditional path teachers” across academic databases such as ERIC, JSTOR, the BU library database, and Google Scholar. This methodological approach to literature review processes is aligned with best practices in academic research, ensuring a comprehensive and rigorous examination of the subject matter (Booth et al., 2016).

The literature selection was strategically oriented to directly engage with the problem, favoring studies that illuminate the impact of different career entry pathways on teacher satisfaction and commitment to the field of education. This included empirical research on the effects of transitioning careers into teaching, comparative analyses of retention rates, and theoretical explorations into the realms of motivation and

commitment within the profession. Key studies, such as those by Ford et al. (2019), who explored the impact of leadership support on teacher outcomes, and Redding and Smith (2016), who examined turnover rates among alternatively certified teachers, provide critical insights into the factors influencing teacher satisfaction and commitment (Ford et al., 2019; Redding & Smith, 2016). By adopting this focused approach, the literature review aspires to offer a detailed examination of the pertinent topics, thereby aligning with the overarching goals of this dissertation and contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teacher career satisfaction and commitment.

Theoretical Framework

The following is a more in-depth look at the two theoretical frameworks that were utilized for this study. Chapter 1 sets the stage by introducing the key theoretical concepts; however, this chapter will now provide a thorough exploration of the literature and the application of these theories to this research topic. The two theories are as follows:

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT posits that human motivation is driven by the need to satisfy three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Deci and Ryan (2000), when these needs are met, individuals experience enhanced self-motivation and mental well-being. This framework is particularly relevant in understanding the motivation and job satisfaction of teachers, as it emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation in fostering a commitment to teaching (Roth et al., 2007). In the context of CCTs and TCTs, SDT can help explain the

motivational differences that might influence their commitment and satisfaction in their teaching roles.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

SCCT explores how individuals form career interests, make career choices, and achieve career success through the interplay of personal attributes, external environmental factors, and learning experiences (Lent et al., 1994). Lent et al. (2000) further elaborated on how contextual supports and barriers impact career decisions. SCCT's focus on self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals provides a framework for examining the career trajectories of CCTs and TCTs. By understanding how these factors influence career satisfaction and commitment, educators and policymakers can develop strategies to enhance teacher retention (Lent & Brown, 2006)

Integrating Theoretical Frameworks

By integrating SDT and SCCT, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing career choice satisfaction and commitment among CCTs and TCTs. The combined insights from these theories offer a multidimensional perspective on teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and retention, guiding the development of effective strategies to enhance teacher recruitment efforts and retention in independent schools.

Table 4 outlines the two theoretical frameworks guiding this study. SDT focuses on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation behind career commitment, while SCCT highlights the role of self-efficacy and career expectations in job satisfaction and

retention. Both frameworks provide insight into the differences in career satisfaction and commitment levels between CCTs and TCTs.

Theoretical Framework	Key Components	Application to This Study	Relevance to Career Change Teachers (CCTs) & Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)
Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Autonomy: The ability to make independent career decisions - Competence: Feeling capable and effective in one's job - Relatedness: The need for social connection and belonging 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examines the motivational factors influencing teachers' decisions to remain in or leave the teaching profession 2. Distinguishes between intrinsic motivation (passion for teaching) and extrinsic motivation (salary, job security) 3. Identifies whether autonomy, competence, and relatedness affect job satisfaction and retention 	<p>CCTs: Did they switch to teaching to fulfill autonomy, passion, or work-life balance? Do they feel competent in a new field?</p> <p>TCTs: Are they intrinsically motivated to teach, or do they stay due to external pressures (job security, benefits)?</p>
Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-efficacy: One's belief in their ability to succeed in a career 2. Outcome expectations: Anticipated benefits or consequences of career choice 3. Personal goals: Aspirations and long-term career objectives 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explores how past professional experiences influence career satisfaction 2. Examines whether expectations align with actual experiences in teaching 3. Investigate how self-efficacy impacts teachers' confidence and commitment to the field 	<p>1.CCTs: How did their experiences in prior careers shape their teaching expectations and commitment? Were their expectations met?</p> <p>2.TCTs: How do their teaching goals compare to their actual classroom experiences? Does self-efficacy play a role in retention?</p>

Table 4. Comparison of Theoretical Frameworks Used in This Study.

Structure and Key Topics

This next section of Chapter 2 will delve into several key areas essential to the study. The first section of this literature review will lay the groundwork by providing critical foundational knowledge that will enable a greater scope of understanding of the literature that will be reviewed.

Defining the pathways:

Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCT) vs. Career Changers.

There will be a brief overview and context of traditional certification.

Definition of Career Changers and CCT will be provided.

Exploration of alternative certification pathways, including:

Alternative Certification Pathways Overview & Context.

- Emergency Certification.
2. Examination of independent schools and licensure requirements.
 3. Deciphering teachers' career satisfaction and commitment.
 4. Bridging gaps in teacher satisfaction research.

Defining the Pathways: Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCT) vs. Career Changers

For the purpose of this study and the literature review that supports it, it is crucial to establish precise definitions to ensure a shared understanding among readers regarding the terms and categories that will be discussed. Before diving into the extensive body of literature, it's essential to clarify and differentiate the two distinct groups of teacher educators under investigation. The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) (n.d.), a

research and policy organization in the United States (which aims to improve the quality of teacher education and promote reform in teacher policies to ensure effective teaching in schools), has indicated that “NCTQ’s Teacher Prep Review has divided programs into two program types, traditional and non-traditional” (p. 1). The first group of teachers this study aims to examine comprises individuals who have pursued the traditional route into teaching, obtaining a teaching certification or teaching licensure through college education programs “who also have not worked full-time in any other profession before becoming teachers” (Hogg et al., 2023, p. 3).

The NCTQ (n.d.) says, “They’re the programs one typically thinks of when someone says she’s going to college or grad school to become a teacher” (p. 1). These are the education programs “...that are housed in colleges and universities and lead to a BA or an MA degree (and are thus sometimes referred to as “college recommending”) (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2010, p. 35). These are also the programs that lead to certification or licensure. According to NCTQ, “the program lays out a path that includes liberal arts courses to build broad content knowledge as well as specialized content knowledge for secondary candidates, Ed School professional courses, and a culminating student teaching experience” (p. 1). The NCTQ also states that “For graduate teacher candidates, the path typically includes only professional coursework and a student teaching experience” (p. 1). Graduate and undergraduate teacher preparation programs are designed to equip candidates with the necessary skills for teaching. Upon completing these programs, graduates are certified (licensed) to teach (NCTQ, n.d., p. 1).

This first group of teachers will be referred to as “Traditionally Certified Teachers” (TCT). For further specification and reiteration, the specific kind of Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCT) that this study is targeting and referring to also doubles as the individual who not only followed the traditional pathway into education but entered the teaching field directly after completing their higher education without having worked full-time in any other profession (Hogg et al., 2023, p. 3).

Traditional Certification Overview & Context

To effectively frame the discussion on traditional certification pathways and their impact on teacher career satisfaction and commitment, it is essential to delve into the historical and educational context that has shaped the development and evolution of these pathways. The concept of traditional teacher certification is deeply rooted in the history of education reform and teacher professionalization efforts that have unfolded over centuries. According to Angus (2001), historically, the establishment of normal schools in the 19th century marked the beginning of formalized teacher education, providing a structured approach to preparing teachers with the foundational pedagogical skills and subject knowledge deemed necessary for effective teaching. Angus (2001) also stated that, despite the move to a more formalized teacher education, in the epochs prior, “The idea of licensing teachers was not new in the late nineteenth century” (p.12). It was well known that “Parents have always had an interest in assuring that the people to whom they give up their children for tutelage were of good moral character and qualified for their tasks” (Angus, 2001, p. 12). However, in the later portion of that time period, “as the authority for licensing teachers passed from ecclesiastical to civil authorities, the criteria

for licensing expanded to include, first, knowledge of subject matter and later, knowledge of pedagogy, usually determined by means of an examination” (Angus, 2001, p. 12).

As education systems expanded and the demand for qualified teachers rose, the traditional certification pathway evolved to include a comprehensive curriculum housed within colleges and universities (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2010, p. 35). These curriculums were designed to ensure that prospective teachers not only acquire a broad and specialized content knowledge but also develop a deep understanding of educational theories, classroom management strategies, and instructional methodologies. According to Kerri Tobin (2012) in "Control of Teacher Certification in the United States," a highly qualified educator, as defined by the law, is "fully certified," holds at least a bachelor's degree in the subject to be taught, and has "demonstrated competence in the subject matter and pedagogy."

Moreover, the accreditation of teacher education programs by bodies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) highlights the rigorous standards these programs must meet to produce well-prepared educators ready to face the complexities of modern classrooms. According to CAEP (2023), "Simply put, accreditation is quality assurance through external peer review. When an institution or specialized program is accredited, it has demonstrated that it meets standards set by organizations representing the academic community, professionals, and other stakeholders." In essence, teachers who graduate and obtain certification or licensure from such accredited institutions have followed the standard pathway to teaching and inadvertently demonstrate foundational preparedness and readiness to partake in

classroom instruction on some level. This study will more or less, at various intervals, utilize terminology such as “...the terms licensure, certification, and credentialing interchangeably because states are not consistent in their usage” (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2010, p. 33). Furthermore, this study will refer to this group of educators as “Traditionally Certified Teachers” (TCT).

The culminating experience of student teaching in these certification programs offers candidates a practical, hands-on opportunity to apply their learning in real-world classroom settings under the mentorship of experienced educators. This critical component of traditional certification programs bridges theoretical knowledge with practical application, somewhat reinforcing a level of readiness for the candidate to enter the teaching profession. According to the NCTQ (2011),

student teaching candidates must synthesize everything they have learned about planning instruction: collecting or developing instructional materials, teaching lessons, guiding small group activities, and establishing and maintaining order—not to mention meetings with faculty and parents and, in some districts still, taking on lunchroom and playground duties. Passing (or failing) student teaching determines whether an individual will be recommended for certification as a licensed teacher. (p. 1)

Despite the common assumption equating fully licensed teachers with high-quality educators, there remains no assurance of their teaching effectiveness; however, this misconception is prevalent among policymakers and the media (Sharkey & Goldhaber, 2008).

The evolution of traditional certification pathways reflects broader societal and educational shifts, including changes in educational policy, advancements in pedagogical research, and increasing expectations for teacher accountability and student achievement. As such, understanding the historical and educational context of traditional certification will provide a crucial backdrop for exploring how these pathways will ultimately influence teacher career satisfaction and commitment. This context sets the stage for a distinct examination of the factors contributing to the disparities in career outcomes between Traditionally Certified Teachers and Career Changers, offering insights into potential areas for policy development and support mechanisms that can enhance teacher retention and the focus of teacher recruitment efforts.

Defining Career Changers, Career Change Teachers (CCT), Alternative Certification Pathway

The second group of teachers in this study will be referred to interchangeably as “Career Changers” or “Career Change Teachers” (CCT). In this study, Career changers or CCT are defined as those who have made the transition into teaching from various other professional backgrounds. They are “Teachers who have worked full-time in at least one other profession before switching to teaching” (Hogg et al., p. 3). For the most part, within the specific context of this study, these individuals can also be unlicensed or may have followed a nontraditional or alternative pathway to obtaining their teaching certification or licensure.

Alternative certification pathways are designed for individuals who hold a bachelor’s degree in fields other than education and wish to transition into teaching.

These programs often offer a faster route to certification, which may include intensive, on-the-job training, mentorship, and coursework focused on teaching methods and classroom management (National Council on Teacher Quality, n.d., p. 1). According to the NCTQ (n.d.),

This category encompasses any program that deviates in any respect from the ‘traditional’ model of university-based graduate teacher prep: the program may be offered by a non-profit or for-profit rather than a university. Or it may be offered by a university as a non-degree program operating side-by-side with the university’s traditional degree-granting program. (p. 1)

Furthermore, it states that the coursework related to their profession might commence either before or after the teaching candidate starts their teaching role. However, the quantity of courses completed prior to teaching typically remains minimal.

During the clinical practice phase, which serves as an alternative to student teaching, the candidate might work without pay under the supervision of the designated "teacher of record" and is then referred to as a "resident." Alternatively, the candidate might receive payment and act as the teacher of record, in which scenario they are labeled an "intern" (NCTQ, n.d., p. 1). Certain alternative programs provide master's degrees through partnerships with universities or by obtaining enough accreditation from state bodies to award the degrees directly, while others only furnish certification upon completion (NCTQ, n.d., p. 1). Needless to say, the NCTQ states that “the test for whether a program is non-traditional is very simple: If the program deviates sufficiently

from the traditional model of preparation to require an explanation of at least a few sentences to convey its structure, it is “non-traditional” (NCTQ, n.d., p. 1).

Alternative Certification Pathways Overview & Context

The evolution of nontraditional certification pathways and emergency certification in the United States serves as a pivotal element in the broader narrative of addressing teacher shortages and diversifying the teaching workforce. Beginning with World War II and extending into the subsequent decades, the demand for teachers significantly outpaced the supply. Following the war, the United States experienced an unprecedented shortage of educators as numerous teachers departed for better-paying opportunities associated with the wartime economy, according to Angus (2001). The issuance of emergency teaching certificates saw a dramatic increase, climbing from 2,305 in 1940 to 69,423 within two years, eventually reaching 108,932 by the war's end (Angus, 2001). This surge in the need for educators compelled states to relax their standards for teacher education and certification, as noted by Darling-Hammond (1999) (Tobin, 2012, p. 486).

Fast forward to the 1980s, the famous report entitled “A Nation At Risk” (1983) made a huge impact on the climate of emergency licensure and non-traditional certification pathways. "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" is a seminal report on the history of American education. It was published in April 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), a group established by the Secretary of Education under President Ronald Reagan. The commission was tasked with evaluating the quality of education in the United States and ended up sounding a national

alarm about the state of American schools (Tobin, 2012, p. 488). After the publication of "A Nation At Risk" in 1983 and the creation of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in 1987, the role of the federal government in education became more pronounced, leading to further centralization of educational decision-making in the United States. The turning point came after the National Governors' Association summit in 1989, which resulted in Congress adopting President George H.W. Bush's America 2000: An Education Strategy. This strategy marked the first federal initiative to promote accountability in schools by evaluating student achievement through standardized test scores. Additionally, it set the stage for the surge in alternative teacher certification programs in the following years by advocating for funding to support new pathways into teaching for prospective educators with high potential (Tobin, 2012, p. 489).

Over the years, these efforts have paid their dividends. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, it was reported that "On average, 18 percent of all public school teachers in 2015–16 reported that they had entered the teaching profession through an alternative route to certification program" (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2018). Moreover, Carver-Thomas highlighted that educators from diverse backgrounds often pursue teaching through alternative certification routes, fulfilling licensure requirements while teaching rather than beforehand (p. 3) (Richards, 2022). According to data analyzed by TNTP, roughly 30% of teachers in traditional programs are teachers of color compared with 53% of teachers of color in alternative certification programs (Education Commission of the States, 2021). This information is crucial to this study as it offers valuable insight into how the

pathways into teaching may influence career satisfaction and commitment levels among educators of color, especially those transitioning from other professions into education. Redding and Smith (2011) referenced data from the 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), indicating that approximately a quarter of new educators initiated their careers in the field of education through avenues other than traditional teacher preparation programs (p. 1086), (Richards, 2022).

Emergency Certification

Another example of the nontraditional route to obtain teaching certification is that of an Emergency certification. An emergency teaching certificate is a provisional authorization enabling non-licensed individuals to instruct in public schools, typically granted in states facing teacher shortages. Each state addresses such shortages uniquely, with some instituting temporary or emergency certification statuses while others explore alternative teacher certification pathways (Teachers of Tomorrow, 2023). Emergency certification, a subset of nontraditional pathways, was developed as an immediate response to acute teacher shortages, allowing schools to temporarily employ individuals who have not yet completed the full certification process. According to García and Weiss (2019),

The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought. When indicators of teacher quality (certification, relevant training, experience, etc.) are taken into account, the shortage is even more acute than currently estimated, with high-poverty schools suffering the most from the shortage of credentialed teachers.

This approach has been particularly prevalent in districts facing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining educators since “Emergency certification is growing more popular as schools struggle to find certified candidates” (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). (Richards, 2022). There are various types of pathways to nontraditional and alternative certification. For example, “In Alabama, there are three non-traditional certification pathway choices: a conditional certificate, a provisional certificate, or an alternative master’s program” (Richards, 2022). It can be asserted that “Emergency certification provides students with an on-ramp to the non-traditional pathways” (Richards, 2022). While emergency certification may offer a temporary solution to recruitment issues in public schools, it is not directly relevant to this study, which focuses on teachers from an independent school setting that does not require certification.

Moreover, although these pathways have been critical in mitigating teacher shortages and enhancing workforce diversity, they also raise questions regarding the preparedness and effectiveness of teachers who enter the profession through these routes. Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) determined that students from the traditional pathway were more prepared than those from non-traditional certification pathways and stated, “Those who trained longer and harder to do that work do it better” (p. 40). It has also been noted that “Teachers who enter the profession through alternative certification pathways—who have had less coursework and student teaching, on average, than teachers who are prepared through traditional programs—are 25% more likely to leave their schools and the profession” (García & Weiss, 2019). This is critical information

because it may significantly influence the predictability of teacher career choice satisfaction outcomes at independent schools among the two distinct groups of teachers that this study aims to explore. What distinguishes this study is that, under the umbrella of Career Changers or Career Changing Teachers (CCT), it will also examine those teachers who are not licensed to teach.

Independent Schools & Licensure Requirements

Since the research sample for this study was taken from independent schools, it is imperative to acknowledge and note the following. Independent schools have the advantage of autonomy in both governance and finances, granting them distinct freedoms, such as the ability to employ teachers based on their own criteria without being bound by state certification requirements (Bassett, 2011). Additionally, they have the liberty to empower teachers with the autonomy to develop their own curriculum based on their beliefs and perspectives (Bassett, 2011). Hence, this is why the issue of licensure is expected to be less problematic when considering licensure within the context of private schools, as private schools are typically not required to employ teachers who are fully licensed (Sharkey & Goldhaber, 2008).

NAIS is the National Association of Independent Schools; it is a nonprofit organization that provides support and resources to over 1,800 independent schools in the United States. Despite the push for certification in the public school sphere, it should be noted that “in NAIS private schools, by contrast, less than half of the teachers held a standard certificate” (Sharkey & Goldhaber, 2008). This characteristic of independent schools makes the transitional hurdles of potential career changers seeking entry into the

teaching profession less complicated. It also provides a great selection pool for this research study of teachers who are “Career Changers” or “Career Change Teachers” (CCT) and “Traditionally Certified Teachers” (TCT).

Building on the distinct licensing requirements and freedoms of independent schools in hiring practices, this study turns its focus to the potential impacts of such freedoms on teachers' career choice satisfaction and commitment. The flexibility in certification at independent schools not only allows for a broader pool of teaching candidates but also raises questions about the effects of varied professional backgrounds on the teaching experience.

Deciphering Teachers' Career Satisfaction and Commitment

Understanding the subtle distinctions between "career choice satisfaction" and "commitment" is pivotal in examining teacher retention and motivation, particularly within the independent school sector. According to Nelsen and Giebink (1968), "career choice" is conceptualized as the process by which individuals select a profession influenced by their values, motives, and perceptions of the profession, along with the potential impact from a reference group such as future colleagues. This conceptualization is crucial for investigating the personal and societal perceptions that underpin career choice motives, emphasizing the exploration of the values associated with these motives and the extent to which assessments about others diverge from self-assessments. This delineation forms the foundation for this study's exploration of "career choice satisfaction."

According to Galambos (2006), a teacher's determination to persist in their career is often assessed through their expressed intent to stay within the teaching profession over time. This concept, crucial for understanding teacher retention dynamics, is typically evaluated through direct inquiries regarding teachers' future career plans. Insights from such evaluations contribute significantly to identifying the determinants of teacher commitment and the propensity for long-term retention in the field.

These operational definitions serve as the analytical lens through which this study examines the correlation between the career path into teaching and the ensuing levels of career satisfaction and commitment, especially within the independent school context. By adopting these well-established conceptual frameworks, the investigation aims to contribute meaningful insights to the discourse on teacher retention and motivation, highlighting the specificity of independent school settings.

Bridging Gaps in Teacher Satisfaction Research

Transitioning from the foundation laid out in the previous section, the focus narrows to the pivotal aspect of this study: examining career choice satisfaction and commitment levels among high school teachers within the independent school context. Acknowledging the scarcity of contemporary research specifically addressing career choice satisfaction, this literature review strategically incorporates foundational studies on this topic, offering a crucial perspective on its evolution and relevance over time. Simultaneously, the integration of pertinent research on related constructs, such as teacher job satisfaction and professional commitment, is made to enrich deeper understanding. This approach not only aims to bridge the gap left by the shortage of

direct studies but also ensures a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing teachers' career choices and their subsequent commitment to the education field.

In the constantly changing realm of educational research, the shift toward scrutinizing job satisfaction and retention has overshadowed the exploration of career choice satisfaction among teachers. This pivotal aspect, crucial for understanding teachers' long-term commitment and fulfillment, remains underexplored in recent literature. This section aims to revisit foundational studies on career choice satisfaction among teachers, acknowledging the gap in contemporary research while also providing the most relevant literature on the topic at hand. Understanding the factors influencing teachers' satisfaction with their career choices is vital, as it directly affects their motivation, efficacy, and the quality of education delivered. By examining historical contributions and the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that have shaped career choice satisfaction and commitment, this section of the review seeks to shed light on the complexities of this essential aspect within the educational context.

Overview

Before delving into the exploration of the literature, it is essential to provide an outline that delineates the thematic breadth and depth of this chapter within the broader study. This outline serves as a guide to understanding how each section contributes to investigating career choice satisfaction among high school teachers in independent schools, emphasizing both the variety of factors at play and their collective impact on educators' professional fulfillment and retention. The sections are divided into the following themes:

1. Introduction/The Motivations and Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction
2. Teacher Turnover and Retention Rates
3. Initial Certification Pathways and Teacher Retention: School Environment and Organizational Support
4. Challenges and Opportunities in Career Transitions: Teacher Retention in Independent Schools
5. Intrinsic Motivations and Professional Development
6. Conclusion
 - Introduction/The Motivations and Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction: This section explores historical perspectives and contemporary research on the motivations behind career choice satisfaction. It examines how intrinsic values like creativity, autonomy, and supportive environments influence teachers' decisions to enter and remain in the teaching profession.
 - Teacher Turnover and Retention Rates: This particular section focuses on comparing retention rates between CCTs and TCTs. It investigates factors such as burnout, job satisfaction, and the impact of different preparation pathways on teacher commitment and longevity in independent school settings.
 - Initial Certification Pathways and Teacher Retention: School Environment and Organizational Support: This part examines how initial certification types and school contexts shape career choice satisfaction and retention.

This section analyzes studies highlighting the role of supportive leadership, teamwork, and institutional support in fostering sustainable career satisfaction among educators.

- Challenges and Opportunities in Career Transitions: Teacher Retention in Independent Schools: Addresses the unique challenges faced by CCTs transitioning into teaching from other professions. It explores identity conflicts, leadership dynamics, and the impact of institutional support on career choice satisfaction and retention within independent school environments.
- Intrinsic Motivations and Professional Development: Explores the personal and professional factors that sustain teachers' commitment over time. It delves into themes such as a passion for teaching, subject matter expertise, and the importance of ongoing development opportunities in fostering long-term career choice satisfaction among educators.
- Conclusion: Synthesizes key findings from the literature review to highlight insights into career choice satisfaction among high school teachers in independent schools. It identifies gaps in current knowledge and emphasizes the need for further research to enhance strategies aimed at supporting teacher well-being and retention in educational settings.

The Motivations and Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction

The motivations and factors influencing career satisfaction among teachers have evolved significantly over the past decades, reflecting changes in educational practices

and societal expectations (Brunetti, 2001; Nelsen & Giebink, 1968; Smith et al., 2004; Weiss, 1999). This literature review synthesizes a range of studies that explore these dynamics, with a particular focus on understanding how intrinsic motivations, organizational support, and external factors shape career satisfaction within independent school settings. By examining historical perspectives alongside contemporary research, this review aims to highlight critical insights and gaps in current knowledge, informing the methodology and focus of the present study.

The journey to uncover the motivations for choosing and remaining satisfied with a teaching career has evolved significantly from the 1980s to 2004. Early studies, such as those by Nelsen and Giebink (1968), emphasized the appeal of creative expression, the opportunity to positively impact young lives, and the autonomy afforded by the teaching profession. Subsequent research highlighted the importance of relationships with students, colleagues, and the broader educational community in fostering career satisfaction (Smith et al., 2004). In the 1990s, Weiss (1999) broadened this perspective by investigating the impact of workplace conditions on first-year teachers' morale, underscoring the importance of supportive administrative practices and conducive learning environments. Brunetti (2001) explored the enduring factors that maintain teachers' engagement and satisfaction, identifying a profound commitment to impacting student lives and a love for the educational process as central to sustaining career satisfaction over time.

As mentioned previously, Nelsen and Giebink (1968) explored the foundational motives behind choosing a teaching career, emphasizing values like creative expression,

helping others, and autonomy. Their work offers a historical perspective on career choice motivations, indicating that many of the factors that attract individuals to teaching have remained consistent over time. This historical context enriches this literature review by providing a baseline for understanding how and why career choice satisfaction may have evolved. It suggests areas for future research in examining how contemporary challenges and changes in the education field impact these longstanding motivations.

Weiss (1999) examined the crucial relationship between workplace conditions and the morale, commitment, and retention of first-year teachers, highlighting the significant impact of administrative support, student motivation, and discipline problems. By linking workplace conditions to career commitment and satisfaction, this study adds a critical dimension to understanding the environmental and external factors that influence teachers' career experiences. Weiss's findings highlight the complexity of career choice satisfaction, suggesting that addressing workplace challenges is essential for enhancing teacher morale and retention. This perspective is particularly relevant to the aims of this research study because it points toward the necessity of investigating the specific conditions within independent schools that affect career satisfaction and commitment.

Moreover, Smith et al. (2004) delved into the perspectives of African-American male honor students on teaching as a career choice, revealing concerns about salaries, job satisfaction, and perceived professional value. This study sheds light on systemic barriers and suggests a need for policies and recruitment strategies that elevate the profession's perceived value, especially for underrepresented groups. These insights are critical for understanding the unique challenges faced by minority groups in pursuing teaching

careers and for addressing these challenges to foster greater diversity and inclusion within the profession. This perspective enriches the research study by highlighting the importance of cultural and demographic factors in career choice satisfaction and the need for targeted strategies to address these barriers.

Brunetti (2001) investigated job satisfaction among long-term high school teachers, identifying intrinsic motivations such as a passion for the subject and a commitment to impacting students' lives. Despite the challenges of overwhelming workloads, the majority of teachers expressed strong satisfaction with their work. This study highlights the enduring nature of intrinsic motivations in fostering long-term career satisfaction and commitment, providing valuable insights into the factors that sustain educators' engagement over time. Brunetti's findings are particularly relevant to this research study, as they highlight the importance of intrinsic motivations and supportive relationships in sustaining career satisfaction among teachers, aligning with the broader aim of exploring career choice satisfaction within independent schools.

These studies collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing career choice satisfaction among teachers. They revealed several key relationships. All studies agree on the importance of intrinsic motivations, such as the desire to impact students' lives and a love for the subject matter, in sustaining career satisfaction among teachers. They also highlighted the significance of supportive environments and relationships within the educational community.

While Nelsen and Giebink (1968) focused on early career motivations, Weiss (1999) emphasized the impact of workplace conditions on first-year teachers. Smith et al.

(2004) brought attention to systemic barriers specific to African-American male students, a perspective not covered in the other studies. Brunetti (2001), meanwhile, delved into the long-term commitment and satisfaction of veteran teachers, adding another layer to the understanding of career satisfaction.

These studies collectively inform the current research by providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing career choice satisfaction among teachers. The insights from these articles emphasize the need to explore the unique motivations and challenges faced by teachers in independent schools. By integrating historical and contemporary perspectives, this research aims to bridge the gap in understanding how modern developments in education influence career choice satisfaction and commitment among today's teachers.

Building on the insights provided by these historical and contemporary perspectives, this research will adopt a qualitative and phenomenological approach to delve into the motivations behind choosing a teaching career within the modern educational landscape. Emphasizing in-depth interviews, this study will seek to capture the essence of educators' lived experiences and personal narratives. This methodological choice allows for a nuanced exploration of teachers' motivations, aspirations, and the challenges they face, offering an understanding of career choice satisfaction in teaching. By focusing on the qualitative dimensions of educators' experiences more so than the quantitative, this study aims to honor the complexities of their motivations and the impact of the educational environment on their career choices, in turn providing a deepened comprehension of the factors influencing career choice satisfaction and commitment.

Teacher Turnover and Retention Rates

Teacher turnover and retention rates, particularly among alternatively certified teachers, are critical concerns impacting educational stability and effectiveness. The stability of the teaching workforce is essential for educational institutions to maintain consistent academic quality and student outcomes. Understanding the factors influencing teacher turnover and retention is pivotal in devising effective strategies to support educators, especially those entering the profession through alternative certification pathways.

Redding and Smith (2016) investigated the turnover rates among alternatively certified teachers compared to their traditionally certified counterparts in their study, "Easy In, Easy Out: Are Alternatively Certified Teachers Turning Over at Increased Rates?" They utilized longitudinal data spanning from 1999 to 2008, analyzing factors such as school leadership, resource availability, and mentorship programs. Their findings indicated that alternatively, certified teachers were 2½ times more likely to leave the profession by 2008, suggesting a significant challenge in retaining teachers from non-traditional pathways.

Zhang and Zeller (2016) explored how different teacher preparation pathways, including alternative certification routes like lateral entry, impact teacher retention over 2, 3, and 7 years in their study, "A Longitudinal Investigation of the Relationship Between Teacher Preparation and Teacher Retention." Their research highlights that teachers from specific programs, such as NC Teach, show higher retention rates compared to those from general alternative certification programs. This underscores the

importance of tailored support and preparation in sustaining teachers in the profession.

Madigan and Kim (2021) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the role of burnout and job satisfaction in predicting teachers' intentions to quit in their study, "Towards an Understanding of Teacher Attrition: A Meta-Analysis of Burnout, Job Satisfaction, and Teachers' Intentions to Quit." Their synthesis of existing research reveals that burnout significantly correlates with higher intentions to leave the profession, while job satisfaction acts as a protective factor. These findings emphasize the psychological factors influencing teacher retention, which are crucial for addressing turnover challenges.

Redding and Smith (2016) indicated a stark disparity in turnover rates between alternatively and traditionally certified teachers. Their longitudinal analysis emphasized the need for comprehensive support structures within alternative certification programs to improve teacher retention. On the other hand, Zhang and Zeller (2016) highlighted the differential impact of teacher preparation pathways on retention rates. They suggested that programs offering structured support and mentorship, such as NC Teach, contribute significantly to teacher longevity, contrasting with the challenges faced by general alternative certification routes. Madigan and Kim (2021) identified burnout as a critical predictor of teachers' intentions to quit. Their findings underscore the imperative of enhancing job satisfaction through supportive work environments and effective leadership to mitigate turnover among educators.

Researchers across these studies converge on the detrimental effects of inadequate support structures, such as limited mentorship and preparation, on teacher retention. They

collectively emphasize the importance of job satisfaction and the management of burnout as pivotal factors influencing teachers' decisions to stay in the profession. This literature review provides a foundational understanding of the challenges faced by alternatively certified teachers in terms of retention. By exploring the effectiveness of mentorship programs, the influence of certification pathways on job satisfaction, and the impact of burnout on turnover, this study aims to contribute insights into improving teacher retention strategies within independent school settings.

Initial Certification Pathways and Teacher Retention: School Environment and Organizational Support

Teacher attrition rates and job satisfaction are critical issues affecting educational stability, with factors such as initial certification pathways and school types playing pivotal roles in shaping teacher retention. Understanding the dynamics of teacher attrition is essential for developing effective strategies to enhance teacher retention and job satisfaction within the educational sector. This literature review examines recent studies that explore the impact of initial certification pathways and school settings on teacher persistence and satisfaction.

Guthery and Bailes (2022) investigated the retention rates of new teachers in Texas, focusing on the influence of initial certification type and school setting in their study, "Patterns of Teacher Attrition by Preparation Pathway and Initial School Type." Their longitudinal study spanning 2000 to 2015 reveals that traditionally certified teachers in public schools exhibit higher 5-year retention rates compared to those with alternative certifications or in charter districts. This underscores the significant role of

initial conditions in predicting teacher persistence (Guthery & Bailes, 2022).

Fütterer et al. (2023) explored job satisfaction among teachers based on their career pathways, distinguishing between first-career and second-career teachers across 13 countries in their study, "I Can't Get No (job) Satisfaction? Differences in Teachers' Job Satisfaction From A Career Pathways Perspective." Their findings suggest that initial education significantly influences job satisfaction among first-career teachers, highlighting the complex interplay between career paths and satisfaction levels in the teaching profession (Fütterer et al., 2023).

Amorim Neto et al. (2018) examined the impact of teamwork within schools on teachers' motivation to leave the profession in their study, "Teamwork and Motivation to Leave the Teaching Profession." Their study identifies effective leadership and collaborative environments as crucial factors in mitigating teacher turnover, particularly among K-8 educators (Amorim Neto et al., 2018).

McElroy (2019) investigated job satisfaction and self-efficacy among alternatively certified teachers in a public school district in Florida in her study, "Alternate Route - An Examination of Alternatively Certified Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Self-Efficacy." Her findings indicate higher levels of job satisfaction and self-efficacy among alternatively certified teachers compared to traditional pathways, suggesting potential benefits of alternative certification programs in addressing teacher shortages (McElroy, 2019)

Guthery and Bailes' (2022) research underscores the predictive significance of initial certification and school type on teacher retention rates. Their findings advocate for

tailored support systems and mentorship to improve retention across diverse educational settings. On the other hand, Fütterer et al.'s (2023) study highlights the differential impacts of career pathways on job satisfaction among teachers. Their research emphasizes the need for educational policies that cater to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of educators.

Amorim Neto et al. (2018) demonstrated the critical role of teamwork and leadership in fostering a supportive school culture that reduces teacher turnover in their study, "Teamwork and Motivation to Leave the Teaching Profession." Their findings suggest practical implications for enhancing collaborative environments in educational settings (Amorim Neto et al., 2018).

McElroy (2019) revealed insights into the positive outcomes associated with alternative certification pathways, such as increased job satisfaction and self-efficacy, in her study on alternatively certified teachers, "Alternate Route - An Examination of Alternatively Certified Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Self-Efficacy." Her findings advocate for expanding support for educators entering the profession through non-traditional routes (McElroy, 2019).

Collectively, these studies highlight the multifaceted nature of teacher attrition and job satisfaction, highlighting the interconnected roles of initial certification pathways, school environments, and supportive leadership in shaping teachers' experiences and retention rates. While each study provides unique insights, they collectively emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies that address the diverse needs and backgrounds of educators.

These findings are particularly relevant to investigating career satisfaction and commitment among high school teachers in independent school settings. By exploring the impacts of initial certification and school types on teacher retention, this study aims to contribute insights that could inform strategies to enhance job satisfaction and retention among educators.

The reviewed literature contributes valuable insights into the factors influencing teacher attrition and job satisfaction, advocating for targeted support and development opportunities tailored to diverse teacher pathways and school contexts. By addressing the complexities of teacher retention through evidence-based practices, educational policymakers, and school administrators can foster environments that support long-term educator commitment and effectiveness.

The transition of professionals into teaching roles presents unique challenges and opportunities, influencing career satisfaction and commitment. Transitioning from a professional career, such as in science, into teaching involves navigating significant identity shifts and acquiring pedagogical skills. This transition impacts job satisfaction and retention, highlighting the importance of support systems and professional development.

Challenges and Opportunities in Career Transitions: Teacher Retention in Independent Schools

Watters and Diezmann (2015) explored the challenges faced by professional scientists transitioning into science teaching roles in their study, "Challenges Confronting Career-Changing Beginning Teachers: A Qualitative Study of Professional Scientists

Becoming Science Teachers." They emphasized identity conflicts and the need for tailored support and mentorship. Maddox (2024) examined factors influencing teacher retention in independent schools, focusing on leadership and institutional support in his study, "Teacher Retention in Independent Schools." This study underscores the role of supportive environments in enhancing job satisfaction and commitment. Turner (2021) explored how different leadership styles affect teacher job satisfaction and retention in her study, "Perceptions of Administration Leadership Styles, Teacher Job Satisfaction and Teacher Retention: A Qualitative Case Study in the United States." She emphasized the impact of supportive leadership on teacher commitment and professional well-being.

Watters and Diezmann (2015) found that career-changing teachers struggle with reconciling their identities as experts in their fields with their new roles as educators. They highlighted the lack of tailored support as a barrier to successful transitions. Maddox (2024) discussed how supportive school leadership and autonomy in independent schools contribute to higher teacher satisfaction and retention rates. This supports the idea that institutional support is crucial for career satisfaction. Turner (2021) identified that teachers perceive participative leadership styles positively, leading to higher job satisfaction and retention. This aligns with the need for supportive environments discussed in the other studies. Researchers across all studies agree on the critical role of supportive environments and tailored support in facilitating successful career transitions and enhancing teacher satisfaction. However, while Watters and Diezmann focused on identity conflicts, Maddox and Turner highlighted leadership and institutional support as pivotal factors.

These findings show the importance of understanding how support systems and leadership styles influence career satisfaction and commitment among career-changing teachers, particularly those transitioning into educational roles from other professions. By addressing these factors in this study, this study can hopefully enhance the understanding of how these dynamics impact high school teachers who have moved from scientific careers into teaching roles, contributing to strategies for improving job satisfaction and retention.

Intrinsic Motivations and Professional Development

Understanding teacher satisfaction and commitment within independent schools requires examining factors such as intrinsic motivations, professional development opportunities, and organizational support. Teacher satisfaction and commitment are crucial for educational effectiveness, especially in independent school settings where autonomy and supportive environments play significant roles in shaping teachers' experiences and longevity in the profession.

Brunetti (2001) explored intrinsic factors like passion for teaching and subject matter in his study, "Why Do They Teach? A Study of Job Satisfaction Among Long-Term High School Teachers," highlighting their role in sustaining job satisfaction among long-term high school teachers. This aligns with the importance of intrinsic motivations discussed in the context of teacher retention and commitment.

He et al. (2015) delved into the experiences of a teacher in an urban setting in their case study, "Why Do I Stay?: A Case Study of a Secondary English Teacher in an Urban High School," emphasizing the impact of supportive networks and personal

growth on teacher commitment. They underscored the role of professional development and mentorship in enhancing teacher satisfaction, particularly in challenging environments.

Galambos (2006) examined factors specific to independent schools, such as leadership support and professional autonomy, in influencing teacher satisfaction and retention in her dissertation, "Independent School Teacher Satisfaction: A Study of Commitment and Intent to Stay in the Profession." This study provides insights into how organizational factors contribute to teacher commitment, which is crucial for understanding independent school contexts.

Brunetti (2001) highlighted that intrinsic factors like passion for teaching contribute significantly to job satisfaction among long-term teachers, suggesting that personal fulfillment plays a pivotal role in career longevity. He et al. (2015) demonstrated through a case study that supportive networks and opportunities for personal and professional growth are essential for sustaining teacher commitment, particularly in challenging urban settings. Galambos (2006) found that factors such as leadership support and professional autonomy significantly impact teacher satisfaction in independent schools, emphasizing the importance of organizational culture in fostering teacher commitment. Researchers across these studies agree on the importance of intrinsic motivations, supportive environments, and professional development in enhancing teacher satisfaction and commitment. However, while Brunetti focused broadly on long-term teacher satisfaction, He et al. and Galambos delved into specific contextual factors like urban settings and independent schools, respectively.

These findings iterate the multifaceted nature of teacher satisfaction and commitment within independent schools. By identifying how intrinsic motivations, professional support systems, and organizational culture influence teacher experiences, as these themes may emerge in individual interviews, this study ultimately hopes to provide insights into enhancing teacher retention and satisfaction in the unique context of independent school settings.

Conclusion

In synthesizing the findings of this literature review, it becomes evident that intrinsic motivations, such as passion for teaching and subject matter, play a fundamental role in shaping career choice satisfaction among high school teachers in independent schools. The studies reviewed reiterate the significance of supportive environments, professional development opportunities, and organizational culture in fostering teacher commitment and retention. However, gaps in understanding persist, particularly concerning CCTs who transition into teaching from other professions compared to TCTs.

Future research may aim to explicitly address these gaps by exploring how CCTs' unique backgrounds and motivations influence their career choice satisfaction and retention within independent school settings. By focusing on these alternative pathways to teaching and comparing them with traditional routes, further insights may be gained into the factors contributing to attrition and turnover rates. This approach may not only enhance our understanding of career choice satisfaction among educators but may also offer practical strategies to support and retain teachers in independent schools, thereby contributing to improved educational outcomes.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Overview of Research Study

This chapter outlines a rationale for embracing a qualitative phenomenological study by laying out the blueprint to explore the career choice satisfaction of those who have pivoted to teaching from diverse professions, known as Career Changers or CCT, and those who've followed the traditional path into teaching straight after college, known as TCT, all within the independent school setting.

Choosing a qualitative research path, specifically a phenomenological approach, was a methodological decision grounded in a commitment to understanding the rich, lived experiences of these teachers. It's through this lens that this research aims to uncover the personal and professional factors that shape their career choice satisfaction and commitment. This decision is anchored in the pioneering work of Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994), whose contributions to phenomenological research shed light on the power of understanding human experiences in their full complexity.

The setting of this study is a key factor, chosen for its unique ability to shape the teaching experience, as detailed by insights from Marshall and Rossman (2016). The participant selection process, rooted in Patton's (2015) qualitative research strategies, was designed not just to meet criteria but to find voices that truly represent the diversity and depth of the teaching profession in independent schools. To collect data, this study employs semi-structured interviews as a methodological tool to forge a connection with participants, ensuring their stories are heard and respected. Additionally, focus group

interviews will be conducted to gather collective insights.

The data analysis for this study is guided by Braun and Clarke (2006), allowing individual stories to be woven into a cohesive combination of themes and patterns that speak to both the universal and unique aspects of the teaching profession. This approach, along with rigorous ethical considerations, aims to lay the groundwork for an honest, insightful, and meaningful exploration of the participants' experiences.

Research Design

As previously noted, this dissertation adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate the career choice satisfaction and level of commitment among Career Changers or CCT and those who've followed the traditional path into teaching straight after college, known as TCT. This section provides the rationale behind selecting a phenomenological study over other research methodologies. It supports the decision with theoretical and methodological justifications highlighting and emphasizing its appropriateness for this inquiry.

The core objective of this research is to explore and understand the lived experiences, motivations, and perceptions that influence career choice satisfaction and commitment among high school teachers within an independent school setting. Given the study's emphasis on subjective experiences and the depth of individual narratives, a phenomenological approach was deemed most suitable. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research tradition, focuses on the study of individuals' lived experiences within the world (Moustakas, 1994). It provides a structured framework for uncovering the essence of these experiences, offering insights into how individuals make meaning of their career

paths and professional commitments.

The phenomenological method is particularly adept at capturing the complexity of human experiences, making it an ideal choice for studies that seek to delve into the variations of career satisfaction and commitment. Creswell (2013) advocated for the use of phenomenology when the research question aims to uncover the meaning of experiences for a number of individuals about a concept or phenomenon. In the context of this study, the phenomenon of interest is the career choice satisfaction and commitment of high school teachers who have either transitioned from other careers or entered teaching directly from their collegiate studies into an independent school. The phenomenological approach allows for an in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions and experiences, therefore directly aligning with the study's objectives to understand the factors that contribute to their career choices and levels of commitment.

Further justifying the choice of a phenomenological approach, Moustakas (1994) highlighted its capacity to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of individuals' lived experiences, allowing researchers to derive meanings and essences through a process of reflection and analysis. This methodological stance is crucial for the present study as it seeks to examine the deeply personal motivations behind individuals' career trajectories in education. By employing phenomenology, the research aims to offer a detailed account of the experiences of teachers, thereby providing keen insight into the dynamics of career choice satisfaction and commitment in the educational sector, specifically within the realm of independent schools.

Contrast with Other Methodologies

The rationale for selecting phenomenology over other methodologies is grounded in a thorough evaluation of the research objectives, which aim to capture the diverse and often complex essence of teachers' lived experiences. While quantitative methodologies and alternative qualitative approaches offer valuable insights, they fall short of providing the depth and contextual understanding required for this investigation. Quantitative research methodologies are renowned for their ability to uncover statistical correlations, offering a bird's eye view of the factors influencing career satisfaction and commitment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, this strength also denotes a significant limitation; quantitative analyses cannot penetrate the surface to reveal the complex emotional and psychological realms that support these phenomena. The inherent nature of quantitative research, with its emphasis on numerical data, precludes a deep exploration into the subjective experiences and personal meanings that shape teachers' professional journeys. As Creswell and Poth (2018) clarified, quantitative methods cannot effectively delve into the personal and contextual factors that significantly influence career satisfaction and commitment levels.

Phenomenology distinguishes itself by its singular commitment to exploring the lived experiences of individuals, aiming to capture the essence of these experiences from the participants' own perspectives (van Manen, 1990). This methodological choice is particularly apt for this study's focus, as it facilitates a profound exploration into the motivations, perceptions, and feelings that underlie teachers' decisions and feelings about their careers. Phenomenology allows for a holistic examination of the factors contributing

to career choice satisfaction and commitment, encompassing both the challenges and rewards inherent in the teaching profession. By employing a phenomenological lens, this research is positioned to increase the likelihood of insightful, in-depth understandings of the complex interplay of personal and professional elements that shape teachers' career choice satisfaction and commitment. As such, this study embraces phenomenology not only as a methodology but as a pathway to uncovering the detailed complexities of teachers' professional lives and identities.

Ethical Considerations

This section considers the ethical part of this study, which carries the responsibility to handle participants' stories with care, respect, and confidentiality. The ethical factors for this qualitative, phenomenological study are critically important because they demonstrate a deep commitment to uphold the integrity and confidentiality of the participants and the research process. The study involves interviewing a total of 12 teachers, three teachers from four independent schools in Rhode Island, hereafter referred to as “Rhode Island Independent School A,” “Rhode Island Independent School B,” “Rhode Island Independent School C,” and “Rhode Island Independent School D” to maintain anonymity and protect the institutions' identities.

Before the research, the investigator completed the Human Subjects Research CITI Program. This training provided a thorough overview of the ethical standards required in conducting research with human subjects, ensuring adherence to principles of respect, beneficence, and justice as outlined in the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral

Research [NCPHSBBR], 1979). To further safeguard the interests and confidentiality of the participants, via phone call and email, permission will be sought from the Head Masters and Head of Upper Schools of Rhode Island Independent School A, Rhode Island Independent School B, Rhode Island Independent School C, and Rhode Island Independent School D. This step proactively demonstrates respect for the autonomy of the institutions involved; it also serves as a foundational ethical practice, ensuring that the research activities do not disrupt or disadvantage the educational environments.

Participation in this study will be advertised as strictly voluntary, with all interviewees fully informed of their rights to withdraw from the research at any point without any penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. This assurance of voluntary participation upholds the ethical principle of respect for persons, recognizing the autonomy of each participant and allowing them to make an informed decision about their involvement in the study.

To ensure confidentiality, all data collected will be anonymized, with participants and their respective schools assigned pseudonyms (e.g., Rhode Island Independent School A, Rhode Island Independent School B, Rhode Island Independent School C, and Rhode Island Independent School D). This measure prevents the identification of the participants; it protects their privacy and aligns with ethical guidelines for qualitative research. Finally, the study will be submitted for approval by the IRB at Boston University. The IRB review process is a critical step in ensuring that the study meets all ethical standards and regulations for the protection of human subjects in research. This external review serves as an additional layer of oversight by ensuring that the study's

ethical considerations are thoroughly vetted and approved before any data collection begins.

All digital recordings and transcripts will be anonymized immediately upon collection, replacing names with pseudonyms and removing any identifiable details. Data will be stored on encrypted, password-protected servers, accessible only to the researcher. A detailed protocol will be provided for the retention period of the data, which will not exceed 2 years post-study, after which all data will be securely destroyed. These steps will comply with the latest data protection regulations and ethical guidelines, ensuring participant privacy is safeguarded throughout the research process.

Positionality

As a researcher investigating career choice satisfaction and commitment among high school teachers, I acknowledge my perspective on the potential differences between CCTs and TCTs. Based on my understanding, I hold the position that teachers who are career changers may experience higher levels of career choice satisfaction due to the fulfillment derived from transitioning into education from diverse professional backgrounds. Conversely, this researcher hypothesizes that traditionally certified teachers may exhibit a higher commitment to remain in the field of education, stemming from their formal training and perhaps a more structured career pathway within the educational system.

My perspective is shaped by both personal observations and existing literature that suggests career changers bring unique perspectives and skills to the classroom, potentially enhancing their job satisfaction (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Strunk & Robinson,

2006). Meanwhile, traditionally certified teachers often benefit from a foundational understanding of educational theory and pedagogy, which could contribute to their commitment to long-term careers in education (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goe, 2007)

Throughout this study, this researcher will remain attentive to the unique details and complexities of individual experiences through bracketing so that my position does not overshadow the diverse narratives and factors influencing career satisfaction and commitment among both groups of teachers.

Epoché (Bracketing)

Engaging in epoché, or bracketing, is crucial for this phenomenological study to ensure the integrity and authenticity of the findings. Epoché involves setting aside personal biases and preconceived notions to fully understand and accurately represent the experiences of study participants (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Given my background and experiences, a rigorous approach to bracketing is essential.

As a 39-year-old Black woman who has lived in Rhode Island since the age of four, with two children who attend independent schools in Rhode Island (although not the schools selected for this study), there is a personal perspective. My professional role as an English and History teacher at an independent high school in Rhode Island provides me with an insider perspective on the educational environment of this study. This perspective is valuable but necessitates careful bracketing to minimize bias.

My seven years of teaching experience also present potential biases. My established beliefs and practices regarding effective teaching and teacher satisfaction might shape my interpretation of the data. This professional bias could lead to

overlooking or undervaluing perspectives that do not align with my own. Additionally, my personal experience as a CCT with deep familiarity with the culture, resources, and expectations of independent schools in Rhode Island could lead to assumptions that may not apply to teachers who have worked in other settings.

Furthermore, having children who attend independent schools, even though they are not the schools selected for this study, might introduce biases related to parental expectations and involvement. My dual role as a teacher and a parent in the independent school system could influence my understanding of educational policies, teacher responsibilities, and student outcomes.

Existing professional relationships with colleagues in independent schools might also influence the openness and candor of participants during interviews. Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality is critical to mitigate any potential bias arising from these relationships.

By engaging in Epoché, to minimize the influence of my background and experiences on the study and help to ensure that the voices of the participants are heard and accurately represented. This process, along with rigorous ethical considerations and adherence to methodological rigor, aims to lay the groundwork for an honest, insightful, and meaningful exploration of the experiences of CCTs and TCTs in independent schools.

Site Selection & Study Sample

To ensure a comprehensive and varied perspective, this study utilizes purposive sampling from four independent schools in Rhode Island. Each school was chosen based

on specific criteria to encompass a wide range of teacher experiences within the distinctive context of Rhode Island's independent school environment.

Rhode Island Independent School A is recognized for its progressive educational approach and strong community involvement. The school offers a rigorous academic program from nursery through grade 12, emphasizing experiential learning and individualized instruction in a diverse and inclusive environment.

Rhode Island Independent School B is a college preparatory school for girls from Kindergarten through Grade 12. The school is known for its small class sizes and personalized education, aiming to empower young women through academic excellence and leadership development.

Rhode Island Independent School C is a Catholic college-preparatory school that offers a comprehensive educational experience for students in grades 8 through 12. The school is known for its strong academic curriculum, vibrant arts programs, and competitive athletics. This school emphasizes the development of moral character and leadership skills, preparing students for success in college and beyond.

Lastly, Rhode Island Independent School D is a Quaker school serving students from nursery through grade 12. The school is renowned for its tradition of academic excellence and community values, emphasizing intellectual growth, ethical leadership, and social responsibility.

By including both CCTs and TCTs, the research aims to provide findings and insights into how different career backgrounds and paths influence career choice

satisfaction and commitment among teachers in these diverse independent school settings.

The participant selection process is strategically designed to encompass various demographic and professional characteristics:

- It aims to include a diverse age range to explore generational influences on career satisfaction and commitment.
- It aims to encompass teachers with varying lengths of service, from novice to veteran, to investigate the impact of tenure on their perspectives.
- It aims to involve teachers with different levels of educational attainment and fields of study, assessing how formal training influences career trajectories and professional fulfillment.

Interviews will follow a semi-structured format, recognized for its capacity to elicit detailed and flexible responses in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This approach facilitates an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions, particularly relevant in studies focusing on career dynamics within education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Purposive sampling guides participant selection, ensuring the inclusion of individuals with specific experiences pertinent to the study's research questions (Palinkas et al., 2015). This methodological choice is well-suited for identifying and selecting high school teachers who have entered teaching through distinct career paths, thereby enriching the study's comparative analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Recruitment Process

In accordance with ethical guidelines, potential participants will be contacted via email following the provision of an initial list by the school administrations, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2011). Each participant will be required to electronically sign an informed consent form detailing the study's objectives, voluntary nature of participation, and measures to safeguard anonymity and confidentiality (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020).

The recruitment process for this study employs a systematic approach to ensure representation from a diverse cohort of teachers across four prestigious independent schools in Rhode Island: Rhode Island Independent School A, Rhode Island Independent School B, Rhode Island Independent School C, and Rhode Island Independent School D. As previously noted, contact will be established with each school's headmasters through phone calls and emails to obtain permission to conduct the study and to seek assistance in contacting the head of Upper Schools.

Subsequently, the head of Upper Schools will be asked to compile a comprehensive list of 20 Upper School teachers encompassing varied tenures and subject areas, potentially meeting the study's criteria as CCTs and TCTs. Candidates will receive a detailed follow-up email outlining the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and confidentiality assurances. A total of 3 participants will be selected from each school to garner an outcome of 6 CCTs and 6 TCTs. As previously mentioned, candidates must provide informed consent by electronically signing and returning a consent form,

affirming their voluntary participation and right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

The study is scheduled to span three weeks, during which each of the 12 selected participants will engage in a private, 30–60-minute one-on-one interview conducted in person at their respective school.

Focus Group Interviews

Additionally, one 30–60-minute focus group interview will be conducted via Zoom and recorded. The focus group will comprise of both CCT and TCT teachers. This approach allows for group dynamics and interactions to be observed, providing additional insights into the factors influencing career satisfaction and commitment among different teacher groups.

This structured recruitment and interview process aims to uphold ethical standards, ensure participant confidentiality, and facilitate a comprehensive exploration of factors influencing teacher experiences across diverse educational settings.

Research Questions

The research questions and sub-questions for this study were carefully crafted following an extensive review of the literature on teacher career paths, satisfaction, and commitment, particularly within the unique context of independent schools. This literature revealed a significant gap in our understanding of how career trajectories—specifically, transitioning from another profession versus following a traditional teaching path directly after college—affect teachers' career choice satisfaction and their commitment to remain in the field of education.

The goals derived from this research question aim to delve deeper into the complexities of these experiences, exploring and comparing the commitment levels, understanding the influences on career choice satisfaction, uncovering the differential factors affecting these two groups, and possibly providing actionable insights for teacher recruitment and retention at independent schools. Please note, at the end of Chapter 3 a detailed list of probing questions for all interview and focus group samples will be provided.

Primary Research Question

How do the career choice satisfaction and level of commitment to remain in the field of education compare and differ between high school teachers who transitioned from other professions into teaching and those who followed a traditional teaching path directly after college, specifically within the context of an independent school setting, and what factors contribute to these differences?

Sub-Questions

1. How do the levels of commitment to remain in the field of education compare between CCTs and TCTs within independent schools?
2. What factors influence career choice satisfaction among CCTs in independent schools?
3. What factors influence career choice satisfaction among TCTs in independent schools?
4. What are the factors contributing to the differences in career choice satisfaction and commitment between CCTs and TCTs within independent schools?

Based on the findings, what insights and recommendations can be provided to inform teacher recruitment, retention, and support strategies specifically tailored for independent schools in the field of education?

Coding Process & Data Analysis Methodology

This study employed a manual, iterative coding process consistent with phenomenological research methodology. Following data collection through semi-structured interviews and a focus group, all transcripts were transcribed verbatim and reviewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with the content and context of each participant's narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than utilizing qualitative analysis software such as NVivo, the researcher engaged in a hands-on coding approach using printed transcripts, color-coded highlights, margin notes, and digital memos to identify emergent patterns and recurring concepts.

Data analysis proceeded through a multi-stage thematic coding process grounded in both inductive and deductive strategies. Initial open coding involved a line-by-line review of the transcripts, allowing for the identification of descriptive codes based on the participants' language and meaning-making (Saldaña, 2016). These early codes were then grouped into thematic clusters, which were refined into parent codes and subcategories (child codes) to organize participant responses by conceptual domain and research relevance. Coding remained open to revision throughout the analysis, as new insights were integrated and previously coded excerpts were reconsidered in light of evolving themes.

The structure and evolution of the coding framework were informed by the study's guiding theoretical frameworks: SDT and SCCT. SDT emphasizes psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential for motivation and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000), while SCCT identifies self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental supports or barriers as key factors influencing career choice and persistence (Lent et al., 1994). These frameworks helped to interpret the themes that emerged from the data and provided a conceptual lens through which to analyze differences and similarities between CCTs and TCTs.

Themes were developed inductively from participants' lived experiences while also being interpreted deductively through the lens of SDT and SCCT. The analysis remained focused on meaning-making, with attention to nuance, context, and participant voice (van Manen, 2016). Throughout the process, reflective memoing supported analytic rigor by documenting interpretive decisions, researcher reflexivity, and the evolution of key themes.

Table 5 below provides an overview of the analytical coding structure that emerged through this iterative process.

Parent Code	Child Code (s)	Description	Example Quote
Career Choice Satisfaction	Intrinsic Motivations	Passion for teaching, subject interest, and fulfillment from student interactions.	“Teaching gives me a sense of purpose, knowing that I’m shaping the future in a way no other job could.” (Participant 7, TCT)
Career Choice Satisfaction	Extrinsic Factors	Salary, job security, workload, work-life balance.	“The stability of consistent pay that’s not constantly fluctuating depending on grant availability was a relief and bonus for me if I’m being real.” (Participant 2, CCT)
Commitment to Teaching	Long-Term Career Intentions	Plans to stay in teaching vs. plans to leave.	“I thought teaching would be something I’d do forever, but it’s just not financially sustainable.” (Participant 1, TCT)
Commitment to Teaching	Retention Challenges	Burnout, job dissatisfaction, external career opportunities.	“The financial instability of teaching has literally eroded my overall career choice satisfaction.” (Participant 12, TCT)
Differences Between CCTs and TCTs	Training and Preparation	Differences in preparation between traditional and non-traditional pathways.	“I didn’t have a set idea of what a classroom should look like. I tried different methods until I found what worked for my students.” (Participant 6, CCT)
Differences Between CCTs and TCTs	School Culture Adjustment	How teachers adapted to norms and expectations in independent schools.	“You’re also aware there’s no union backing you. That doesn’t mean you feel unsafe—it just means you’re aware.” (Participant 8, TCT)

Table 5. Coding Structure Developed Through Manual Analysis.

Methodological Details

The phenomenological analysis in this study employed both inductive and deductive coding strategies. The data were manually coded, allowing for a deeply immersive and iterative engagement with participant transcripts. An inductive approach guided the initial stages of analysis, where the researcher conducted multiple close readings of each transcript to identify recurring ideas and significant statements, generating codes directly from the data itself. These codes were then grouped into parent and child themes, grounded in the lived experiences of participants. Simultaneously, a deductive lens was applied to align these themes with pre-established constructs from SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). This dual approach ensured that findings were both data-driven and theoretically informed. Themes such as autonomy, competence, relatedness (from SDT), self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental influences (from SCCT) were used to interpret the nuanced variations in teacher satisfaction and commitment across participant groups. To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted by inviting participants to review key themes and excerpts to confirm accuracy and resonance with their lived experiences.

To support this analysis, the study was carefully designed with research and sub-questions that aligned with these theoretical frameworks. Each sub-question was paired with targeted probe questions, allowing for rich, layered insights during both individual interviews and focus groups. These probes were intentionally developed to elicit responses that would illuminate how motivation, satisfaction, and commitment are

experienced differently by CCTs and TCTs within independent school contexts. The probe questions below reflect this design:

Probe Questions for Exploring and Comparing Commitment Levels

- CCT-Specific Probe: What were the key factors that influenced your decision to transition into teaching from another profession, and how have these factors impacted your commitment to remain in education?
- TCT-Specific Probe: Reflecting on your decision to enter teaching directly after college, how has your educational background influenced your commitment to the teaching profession?

For Identifying Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction

- CCT-Specific Probe: Can you describe any challenges or rewards you've encountered in teaching that may have been unique to your experience as someone entering from a different profession?
- TCT-Specific Probe: How has following a traditional path into teaching affected your satisfaction with your career choice, especially in terms of preparation and expectations?

For Understanding Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction Among TCTs

- CCT-Specific Probe: In what ways has your previous career experience contributed to your satisfaction or dissatisfaction within the teaching profession?
- TCT-Specific Probe: Considering your pathway into teaching, what aspects of your teacher education do you find most beneficial to your career satisfaction?

For Uncovering Factors Contributing to Differences in Satisfaction and Commitment

- General Probe for Both Groups: How do you perceive the support system in your current independent school setting, and how has this affected your career satisfaction and commitment to stay in the field of education?
- Comparative Probe: Can you compare any experiences with colleagues who have taken a different path into teaching, noting any observed differences in career satisfaction or commitment levels?

For Informing Recruitment, Retention, and Support Strategies

- General Probe for Both Groups: Based on your experiences, what recommendations would you offer to improve teacher recruitment, retention, and support in independent schools?
- Specific Probe on Support Needs: What specific types of support do you believe would most enhance the satisfaction and commitment of teachers, particularly for those in your pathway into teaching?

Probe Questions for Focus Group

- Group Dynamics Probe: How do you perceive the dynamics within your respective teacher group, and how have these dynamics influenced your experiences and perspectives as a teacher in an independent school?
- Collective Experiences Probe: Reflecting on your interactions with colleagues, what common themes or patterns have emerged in terms of career satisfaction, commitment levels, and support systems within your teacher group?

- Comparative Reflections Probe: Can you share any insights or observations regarding the differences and similarities in experiences between CCTs and TCTs within your independent school community?
- Brainstorming Solutions Probe: What specific actions or initiatives do you think could enhance teacher satisfaction, commitment, and support within independent schools, considering the diverse backgrounds and pathways of teachers in our community?

Biases & Study Limitations

This study acknowledges several methodological limitations that warrant consideration when interpreting its findings. Firstly, the sample is derived from four elite independent schools in Rhode Island, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader educational settings. The focus on independent schools under the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) umbrella introduces a potential bias towards schools with specific cultures, resources, and student demographics, which may not be representative of other independent or public-school contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Secondly, while efforts have been made to select a diverse sample of teachers, consisting of both TCTs and CCTs, the findings may not fully capture the experiences of teachers in different geographic locations or educational systems. The selection of 12 participants, with three teachers from each school, may limit the variability and depth of perspectives compared to larger-scale studies or studies involving more diverse school types (Patton, 2015).

Furthermore, the chosen theoretical frameworks of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) provide valuable insights into motivational and environmental influences on teacher satisfaction and commitment. However, these theories may not comprehensively address all factors influencing career choice and satisfaction among teachers, such as cultural, socio-economic, and institutional variables specific to different educational contexts (Creswell, 2013).

Lastly, my role as a researcher and educator in an elite independent school setting could potentially influence data interpretation and participant responses. While efforts will be made to maintain objectivity and minimize bias through rigorous analysis and debriefing with my PI (Primary Investigator), my familiarity with the school environment and educational norms may inadvertently shape the study outcomes.

These limitations illustrate the need for cautious interpretation of the findings and suggest avenues for future research to explore these phenomena across a broader range of educational settings and teacher demographics.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of this qualitative phenomenological study, which explores career choice satisfaction and commitment among CCTs and TCTs in independent schools. Drawing from twelve in-depth interviews conducted across four independent schools in Rhode Island, this chapter identifies key themes that emerged from participants' lived experiences. The findings and analysis introduce a comparative perspective on the two teacher groups, focusing on the factors that influence their experiences of career choice satisfaction and long-term commitment.

Participants in this study represent a diverse cross-section of teachers in terms of experience, subject matter, certification pathway, and career trajectory. Their narratives reveal the complexities of transitioning into and sustaining a teaching career in independent schools, shedding light on both the intrinsic motivations that drive educators and the external challenges that influence their career decisions. This chapter begins with a demographic overview of the participants, followed by a discussion of the themes that emerged through data analysis.

Demographic Profile of Participants

The study includes twelve high school teachers, representing a mix of CCTs and TCTs. For anonymity purposes, each independent school is distinguished as independent school A, B, C, and D. Participants vary in age, teaching experience, subject area, and previous career backgrounds. Below is a demographic summary, divided into two tables for clarity (Tables 6 and 7).

Participant	Gender/ Pronouns	Age	Race	Years Teaching	Degree Type	Previous Career	Subject	School
Participant 2	Male	33	White	6	M.A.	Researcher	Psycho- logy	A
Participant 3	Male	46	White	1	B.A.	Actor, Writer, Director	English	A
Participant 4	Male	66	Black	35	B.A.	Military	History	C
Participant 6	Male	38	Hispanic	7	Two M.A. Degrees	College Lecturer, Wall Street, Sports Journalist	Math	C
Participant 9	Male (Queer)	56	White	19	B.A.	Actor, Writer, Director	History& English	B
Participant 11	Male	46	White	9	M.A.	Theater & Acting	Theater Arts	D

Table 6. Demographic Characteristics of Career Change Teachers (CCTs).

Participant	Gender/ Pronouns	Age	Race	Years Teaching	Degree Type	Subject	School
Participant 1	Non Binary	34	Asian	10	M.A. In Teaching (Brown University)	English	A
Participant 5	Male	52	White	28	M.A. In Teaching (Brown University)	Biology	C
Participant 7	Male	35	White	11	M.A. In Teaching (Brown University)	Biology	B
Participant 8	Female	46	White	22	M.A. (California)	AP Chemistry & Biology	B
Participant 10	Female	37	White	13	M.A. (New York)	Math	D
Participant 12	Nonbinary	35	Black	10	M.A. In Teaching (Brown University)	History	D

Table 7. Demographic Characteristics of Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs).

Summary of Demographic Trends

The twelve participants in this study range in age from 33 to 66 years old, with most in their 30s to 50s. Their teaching experience varies significantly, from one year to over 35 years, representing a broad spectrum of career longevity. The sample includes a distribution of CCTs and TCTs across four different independent schools, with six participants in each category. Notably, all CCTs in this study are male; whereas, the TCT group is more gender-diverse, consisting of two males, two females, and two nonbinary individuals. The educational backgrounds of the two groups also differ: TCTs have a more homogeneous academic profile, with most earning a Master's in Teaching from Brown University; whereas, CCTs have varied academic experiences, reflecting the diverse career fields they transitioned from.

The study sample also exhibits limited racial diversity, with eight participants identifying as White, while two participants identify as Black, one as Asian, and one as Hispanic. This demographic composition may influence findings related to institutional support, representation, and inclusivity within independent schools. The CCT group comes from diverse professional backgrounds, including theater, military service, business, research, and academia; whereas, the TCT group followed a conventional path into education through teacher preparation programs. Participants teach a range of subjects, including English, Math, Science, History, Psychology, and Theater Arts.

Additionally, the four independent schools in Rhode Island, each have unique institutional cultures. School A emphasizes progressive education, School B is a college-preparatory school for girls, School C follows a Catholic college-prep model, and School

D operates under Quaker educational principles. Rather than analyzing each school individually, this study addresses them collectively under the umbrella term of “independent schools in Rhode Island.” The research is not concerned with how each institution uniquely shapes teacher satisfaction and commitment, but instead focuses on how teachers across these schools experience career choice satisfaction and commitment as a shared phenomenon within the independent school context based on their pathway into teaching.

Manual Coding Process

The qualitative data for this study was analyzed using a manual thematic coding process, ensuring a systematic and rigorous approach to identifying patterns in participant responses. This method was chosen over software-based coding (e.g., NVivo) to facilitate a deeper, more immersive engagement with the data, allowing themes to emerge organically rather than being dictated by algorithmic pattern recognition. Through this approach, nuanced insights were preserved, ensuring that the analysis remained faithful to participants’ lived experiences. This section outlines the step-by-step coding process, beginning with transcript preparation, followed by open coding, refinement into a structured coding system consisting of broader categories (“parent codes”) and more specific subcategories (“child codes”), which were then used to identify thematic patterns across the data and inform the final analysis.

Transcript Preparation

The first step in the coding process involved preparing and organizing the interview transcripts. Each of the twelve interviews was transcribed verbatim, capturing

all participant responses exactly as spoken, including pauses, emphasis, and conversational nuances. Preserving these details was essential for maintaining the authenticity of participants' narratives and ensuring that no meaning was lost during analysis.

To uphold confidentiality, each transcript was assigned a unique identifier (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) in place of real names. Identifiable details—such as school names, workplace identifiers, or specific locations—were either removed or replaced with neutral descriptors to protect participant anonymity.

Transcripts were then formatted in a standardized manner to enhance readability and facilitate analysis. Formatting included:

- Clear paragraph breaks to separate ideas,
- Timestamps for key moments, where necessary, and
- Consistent labeling of interviewer and participant speech to ensure clarity.

Once formatted, transcripts underwent an initial round of digital annotation using Google Docs. Key excerpts were highlighted, and preliminary comments were added in the margins to identify potential themes. The digital annotation process facilitated efficient searching for recurring phrases, comparison of responses across interviews, and refinement of early coding categories.

Following digital annotation, transcripts were printed for manual review, allowing for a more immersive engagement with the data. A color-coded system was implemented to differentiate emerging themes, and margin notes were used to refine coding structures.

This dual approach—combining digital annotation with manual review—enabled a layered and methodical analysis, ensuring accuracy and depth.

To maintain organizational efficiency, all transcripts and coding documents were stored in a structured file system, categorized into separate folders for:

- Raw transcripts (unedited versions of interviews),
- Coded transcripts (highlighted and annotated versions),
- Thematic analysis notes (documents tracking key themes and sub-themes),
- Participant comparisons (summaries highlighting differences between CCTs and TCTs), and
- Final findings (sections prepared for integration into the dissertation).

Structuring data in this manner and applying a multi-stage approach—beginning with digital annotation, refining through manual review, and systematically organizing files—helped the analysis process remain thorough, transparent, and methodologically sound.

Initial Open Coding and Development of Parent and Child Codes

Following transcript preparation, an open coding approach was employed to systematically identify recurring words, phrases, concepts, and ideas across participant responses. During this phase, transcripts were reviewed multiple times, with descriptive codes assigned directly onto the text using margin annotations and a color-coding system to mark emerging themes.

At this stage, coding was broad and exploratory, ensuring that no meaningful data was overlooked. Early codes reflected key aspects of career satisfaction, institutional support, and commitment to teaching. Common categories included:

- Motivational factors influencing entry into teaching,
- Challenges encountered in the profession,
- Institutional support and professional development experiences, and
- Commitment to remaining in the teaching profession long-term.

Upon completion of the open coding phase, preliminary codes were analyzed for patterns and relationships. Frequently occurring codes, as well as those that carried significant meaning, were consolidated into a hierarchical coding framework, composed of parent codes (major themes) and child codes (subcategories).

Final Coding Framework

After refining the initial codes, a final hierarchical coding structure was established, consisting of three primary parent codes, each encompassing several child codes to facilitate a detailed and structured analysis of participant responses. These codes were developed in alignment with the study's research questions and theoretical frameworks to ensure analytical depth and clarity. The codes are organized in the following way:

Parent Code 1: Career Choice Satisfaction

This category encapsulates the factors that influenced participants' satisfaction with teaching, including both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

- Intrinsic Motivations – Passion for teaching, subject interest, fulfillment from student interactions.
- Extrinsic Factors – Salary, job security, workload, work-life balance.

Parent Code 2: Commitment to Teaching

This category examines the extent to which participants felt committed to remaining in the field of education and the factors that influenced their long-term career decisions.

- Long-Term Career Intentions – Plans to stay in teaching vs. plans to leave.
- Retention Challenges – Burnout, job dissatisfaction, external career opportunities.

Parent Code 3: Differences Between CCTs and TCTs

This particular category captures differences in professional experiences between CCTs, and TCTs.

- Training and Preparation – Differences between Career Change pathways and traditional Certification education in teaching preparedness.
- School Culture Adjustment – Adaptation to independent school norms and expectations.

Parent Code	Child Code	Description
Career Choice Satisfaction	Intrinsic Motivations	Passion for teaching, subject interest, and fulfillment from student interactions.
Career Choice Satisfaction	Extrinsic Factors	Salary, job security, workload, work-life balance.
Commitment to Teaching	Long-Term Career Intentions	Plans to stay in teaching vs. plans to leave.
Commitment to Teaching	Retention Challenges	Burnout, job dissatisfaction, external career opportunities.
Key Differences in Training and Preparation (CCTs vs. TCTs)	Training and Preparation	How Teacher Preparation experiences impact career readiness
Differences Between CCTs and TCTs	School Culture Adjustment	Adaptation to independent school norms and expectations.

Table 8. Overview of Parent & Child Codes.

Identifying Thematic Patterns

Once all transcripts had been coded, thematic patterns were identified through comparative analysis across participant responses. This involved:

- Reviewing all coded excerpts under each child code,
- Comparing responses between CCTs and TCTs to highlight similarities and differences, and
- Identifying overarching patterns that provided insight into career choice satisfaction and commitment.

For instance, under “Intrinsic Motivations,” multiple CCTs described experiencing greater fulfillment in teaching after transitioning from previous jobs, while TCTs were more likely to cite a lifelong passion for learning as their primary motivator. Similarly, under “Institutional Support,” many CCTs described struggling with lesson planning, curriculum development, and instructional strategies due to a lack of formal

training and structured mentorship. Unlike TCTs, who had coursework and hands-on experience in pedagogy and classroom management, CCTs often had to figure things out on their own. Without the foundational training in lesson design that TCTs received, many CCTs relied on trial and error, sought help from colleagues, or spent extra time researching best practices to build their teaching skills. In contrast, TCTs generally felt more confident and prepared in these areas, crediting their teacher education programs for equipping them with the necessary tools from the start. By systematically comparing responses, themes were refined and synthesized into a clear analytical structure, forming the foundation for the sections in this chapter.

Synthesizing Findings and Structuring the Analysis

The findings are derived from two primary data sources:

1. Twelve individual semi-structured interviews, which provided rich, detailed narratives about each participant's motivations, challenges, and long-term commitment to teaching. The individual interviews allowed for deep introspection and the articulation of nuanced perspectives on career satisfaction.
2. A focus group discussion, which offered an interactive space where participants reflected on their experiences collectively. The focus group provided an opportunity to validate, challenge, and expand upon individual responses, adding another layer of analysis to the study.

The combination of both individual and group-level data ensures that findings are rooted in personal experiences while also reflecting broader patterns within the teaching profession in independent schools. This dual approach ensures that findings are both

deeply personal and collectively validated, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of career choice satisfaction and commitment in independent schools. To maintain analytical clarity in this chapter, each major theme is examined in the following way:

1. Individual interview responses are analyzed first to highlight personal experiences related to career choice satisfaction and commitment.
2. When appropriate, the focus group discussion is then incorporated to either reinforce, challenge or expand upon themes emerging from the interviews.
3. Direct participant quotes are interwoven throughout the analysis to ground findings in authentic teacher voices.

Chapter Roadmap: Organization of Findings

The findings in this chapter are presented in a structure that aligns with the thematic coding framework. The analysis is divided into the following sections:

- Section 4.5 Career Choice Satisfaction – This section examines the intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing teacher satisfaction, including passion for teaching, subject interest, salary considerations, workload, and institutional support. Professional development (PD) is analyzed as an institutional factor, with a focus on how independent schools provide—or fail to provide—differentiated support for CCTs and TCTs.
- Section 4.6 Commitment to Teaching – This section explores long-term career intentions, examining why some teachers remain in the field while others consider leaving. Retention challenges, including burnout, job dissatisfaction, and external career opportunities, are analyzed within the broader institutional and

professional context of independent schools.

- Section 4.7 Differences Between CCTs and TCTs – This section provides a comparative analysis of how CCTs and TCTs experience teacher preparation, professional development, and school culture adjustment. The varying challenges and advantages associated with each career pathway are examined, with particular attention to how these differences influence career longevity.

Each section integrates findings from the individual interviews, and, when appropriate, the focus group interview, ensuring a thorough, comparative analysis. Pertinent themes are framed using SDT and SCCT, which provide critical insights into how autonomy, competence, and institutional factors shape teacher career choice satisfaction and commitment.

This structured approach ensures that the findings remain both rigorous and accessible, offering a clear progression from individual motivations to institutional influences and long-term career outcomes. With this framework established, the next section delves into the first major theme of career choice satisfaction—Intrinsic Motivation.

Findings for Career Choice Satisfaction---Intrinsic Motivations Among CCTs

Through the interviews, several key themes emerged regarding how prior career experiences influenced CCTs' sense of fulfillment, passion for teaching, and their comparative perspective on career choice satisfaction.

Greater Appreciation for Teaching as a Career

A recurring theme among CCTs was a heightened appreciation for teaching due to firsthand experiences in alternative professions. Participants expressed that their previous careers, while often financially rewarding or prestigious, felt unfulfilling, repetitive, or disconnected from a sense of personal meaning. Teaching, by contrast, offered a level of engagement and purpose that they had not previously experienced.

One participant reflected on this shift using a relationship metaphor, likening their career transition to finally finding the right partner after years of searching:

Look. I had the experience of dating a lot of the wrong people in my 20s, so when I finally found the right person, I knew how lucky I was to be married. Teaching feels the same way. I worked in another career before this, and because of that, I know just how lucky I am to be here. (Participant 6, CCT)

Another participant echoed this sentiment, emphasizing how their prior professional experiences provided clarity and certainty about their decision to teach. “For me, having had a whole different life, or even multiple lives before I came to teaching, gives me a real sort of strength or confidence in my choice” (Participant 4, CCT).

This deliberate career transition deepened CCTs’ appreciation for teaching and reinforced their intrinsic motivation.

From Chasing External Success to Finding Immediate Fulfillment

Another major theme among CCTs was the contrast between external markers of success in their previous professions and the immediate gratification found in teaching.

Five CCT participants reflected on how their prior careers required them to constantly chase the next goal, promotion, or project—often at the expense of personal fulfillment. One participant, who transitioned from the entertainment industry, described this shift:

Well, my previous profession, success is always ahead of you, like you're always chasing it. It doesn't matter if you did the best—if you won an Oscar, if you did the best thing you've ever done—it's over, and you have to keep fighting for the next thing. With teaching, there was much more of a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction with one class or with the day. (Participant 9, CCT)

For these CCTs, teaching provided a distinct contrast, offering daily and immediate rewards in the form of student engagement, classroom interactions, and moments of intellectual and emotional connection. Unlike their previous professions, where satisfaction was often delayed or intangible, teaching provided real-time feedback and a sense of daily accomplishment.

Another participant emphasized this shift in focus, highlighting how the pressure to constantly prove oneself in their prior profession contrasted with the sustained meaning found in education. They stated, “My old job had a lot of moments of success, but they never felt satisfying. Teaching is the first time in my life where I feel like the work I do actually matters day to day” (Participant 11, CCT).

These statements illustrate that this CCT as well as the five others who echoed a similar sentiment, their intrinsic motivation was fueled by a deeper appreciation for a career where success was defined by the ongoing impact on students, rather than external validation or long-term career milestones.

A Desire for Meaning and Existential Reflection

All six CCT participants expressed how on some level, the transition to teaching was not only a career shift but also an existential reflection on purpose and meaning. These participants described how their previous careers, while successful on paper, left them feeling unfulfilled, prompting a deep search for meaningful work.

One participant articulated this reflection in profound terms:

When I graduated with my master's degree and was doing research, I was thinking a lot about death for some reason. I was reading a lot about the meaning of life, and I was feeling like life doesn't have any meaning, and so on, and that you need to create your own. I thought about whether I would be okay on my deathbed, looking back at what I did with my life, having failed. So the question was, what if I pursued something and failed? Would the pursuit, even if I failed, be worth pursuing? I was like, probably making dumb YouTube videos and music and teaching the youth, not writing these research papers that weren't as fulfilling. (Participant 2, CCT)

This perspective highlights how intrinsic motivation for CCTs is deeply tied to personal values and a sense of existential purpose, rather than external rewards. CCTs sought teaching not only as a career but as a way to contribute something meaningful, aligning their work with their deeper life philosophies.

Another participant shared a similar realization, "I wanted to do something that actually mattered, not just something that paid well or looked good on a résumé. Teaching felt like the first time I was doing something that had real value" (Participant 6,

CCT). This transition from personal achievement to collective impact was a defining factor in CCTs' intrinsic motivation. Unlike their previous careers, where meaning was often abstract or individualistic, teaching provided an immediate and tangible way to create lasting change.

Passion Over Financial Gain

Four CCTs acknowledged taking pay cuts when transitioning into teaching, yet financial trade-offs were often seen as secondary to the personal fulfillment that teaching provided. One participant explained:

I would define career choice satisfaction as 'are you happy with your work, or were you happy with your work?' And that means different things, right? Like in my other career, money is not as important as what you're creating. Or we wouldn't do anything at all because there's no money in it. In any other industry where there is money, I would say money is, you know, pretty important for your time. So, if you would take a pay cut just because you love the work that you do, then yeah, you're pretty satisfied. (Participant 3, CCT)

This statement reinforces how intrinsic rewards—personal fulfillment, student engagement, and passion for teaching—outweighed financial considerations for many CCTs.

Summary of Intrinsic Motivations Among CCTs

Ultimately, CCTs' intrinsic motivation for teaching is deeply shaped by the contrast between their previous careers and the sense of fulfillment they discovered in education. Their confidence in their career choice, their shift in values from external

success to daily gratification, and their recognition that teaching aligns with their deeper personal and professional goals all contribute to their strong sense of career choice satisfaction. This comparative perspective makes them less likely to question whether another career might have been a better fit, as they have already explored alternative options and intentionally chosen teaching as the profession that aligns with their identity and aspirations.

Overall, in a nutshell, the factors shaping intrinsic motivation for CCTs include:

- 1.) A heightened appreciation for teaching due to direct experiences in unfulfilling prior careers.
- 2.) A shift from external success to immediate fulfillment, as teaching offers a tangible and direct impact on students.
- 3.) A comparative perspective that reinforces their confidence in having chosen the right profession.
- 4.) A deeper existential reflection on meaning, as many CCTs actively redefined what career satisfaction meant to them.
- 5.) A willingness to trade financial benefits for intrinsic rewards, reinforcing passion over monetary incentives.

For CCTs, teaching is not just a profession—it is a conscious decision to prioritize purpose over financial security, to invest in meaningful work, and to contribute in ways that their previous careers did not allow. Their transition into education is rooted in clarity, reinforced by comparison, and sustained by the deeply personal satisfaction they derive from working with students.

In contrast to the career-shifting journeys of CCTs, the following section examines the intrinsic motivations of TCTs, who often entered the profession through a more direct and intentional path.

Intrinsic Motivation Among Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)

Teaching as a Lifelong Calling: Identity, Family Influence, and Representation

TCTs often describe a direct, intentional path into teaching, motivated by a deep sense of calling. Their intrinsic motivation is shaped by formative experiences, personal identity, and, for some, a desire for representation in education.

Participant 1 shared:

I think personally, I always had a tendency towards teaching and working with young people, which a lot of that happened, like through church. And then there was, I guess, more of a familial component where, like, my mom was going to be a teacher, she was going to be certified, or she was certified to teach in South Korea, but then she immigrated to the states, and then, you know, none of that is like reciprocal over here. And I think on a more racial, ethnic line, I did not have a lot of teachers who looked like me growing up. So I wanted to, I wanted to diversify the pool of K–12 teachers and be a representation for kids who maybe had never had an East Asian teacher before. (Participant 1, TCT)

This sentiment illustrates how for some TCTs—three to be exact, the motivation to teach is both personal and political. In this case it is a desire to fill a gap in representation and continue a family legacy disrupted by immigration. For these teachers, identity and purpose are inextricably linked to their career satisfaction.

Participant 12 expressed a mission-driven approach grounded in education as a vehicle for justice and transformation:

I've always believed in education as a tool for empowerment. I wanted to be the teacher that I didn't always have—someone who made history feel relevant and alive. My passion for social justice and education naturally led me into teaching, and I felt that going straight into a certification program would prepare me best.

(Participant 12, TCT)

Participant 12's motivation aligns with self-evaluative outcome expectations—a central mechanism in SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). They described a belief in education as a tool for empowerment and a desire to become the teacher they once needed. This narrative reflects more than a simple interest in teaching; it reveals a powerful internal value system rooted in social justice and personal meaning. The participant's choice to pursue teaching through a formal certification program was not motivated by external rewards but by a conviction that this path aligned with their identity and ideals.

According to SCCT, such self-directed career behavior is shaped by the interplay of strong self-efficacy beliefs (confidence in one's teaching capability), deeply held outcome expectations (especially the anticipated personal satisfaction from empowering others), and purposeful goal-setting (Lent et al., 1994). In this case, the participant's passion for history and justice functioned as an intrinsic reinforcer, shaping both their career interest and sustained motivation. Rather than simply valuing teaching as a profession, this participant views it as a moral imperative and a vehicle for transformation. This alignment between personal beliefs, expected meaningful outcomes,

and professional goals is consistent with the SCCT framework, which emphasizes how internal drives and contextual supports influence career choice and persistence (Lent et al., 1994).

Longstanding Commitment and Unwavering Professional Identity

TCTs described their decision to teach as something they had always envisioned for themselves, indicating an inherent belief in their role as educators. As Participant 8 noted: “I’ve always known I wanted to be a teacher. There was never a doubt in my mind. It’s just who I am.” This statement reflects the strength of intrinsic motivation among TCTs, as their commitment to the profession is not the result of external influences or trial-and-error but rather an internalized identity as an educator. Unlike CCTs, who often enter teaching after professional dissatisfaction elsewhere, TCTs generally do not question their career path upon entering the field.

For some, this sense of calling is rooted in a mission-driven approach to education, wherein teaching is not merely a job but a platform for making a meaningful impact. One participant emphasized, “Teaching gives me a sense of purpose, knowing that I’m shaping the future in a way no other job could.” (Participant 7, TCT) This highlights how intrinsic motivation among TCTs is tied to a larger vision of their role within society, where they see themselves as facilitators of learning, mentors, and agents of change. Unlike CCTs, who develop a passion for teaching only after transitioning from other fields, TCTs often enter the profession with a pre-established sense of purpose, making their career satisfaction deeply linked to their professional identity.

Further reinforcing this perspective, another participant stated: “I never had a backup plan. I always knew I would teach.” (Participant 10, TCT). This highlights a defining feature of TCT intrinsic motivation: limited career exploration outside of teaching. This can contribute to a strong initial commitment to the profession but may also lead to moments of questioning later in their careers, as will be discussed in a later section.

Joy in Student Engagement: Emotional and Professional Fulfillment in the Classroom

One of the strongest themes that emerged from the interviews was the role of student engagement as a central motivator for TCTs. Unlike CCTs, who often focus on their own career fulfillment, TCTs frame their motivation primarily in terms of student impact. They derive professional satisfaction from fostering intellectual growth, witnessing student progress, and developing meaningful relationships within the classroom.

A participant captured this sentiment clearly, “Seeing my students succeed means more to me than any paycheck ever could.” (Participant 5, TCT). This reflects how intrinsic motivation for TCTs is closely tied to their students’ success rather than their personal career trajectory. The act of teaching itself is not only fulfilling but also validated through student engagement, achievements, and long-term development.

Another participant emphasized the emotional energy they receive from working with students: “I get so much energy from my students. Watching them grow is why I do this” (Participant 10, TCT). This perspective differs from some CCTs, who may enter the field seeking career stability or fulfillment after leaving a prior profession. For TCTs,

teaching is not simply a second career or an alternative path—it is a continuous source of motivation that is deeply connected to the relationships they build with students.

Additionally, all TCT participants mentioned the long-term bonds they develop with students as one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching. One participant reflected, “The relationships I built with students is what kept me coming back every year” (Participant 12, TCT). This perspective illustrates how TCTs often remain in the profession not just because they enjoy teaching itself, but because of the personal and professional fulfillment derived from seeing their students succeed. According to SDT, intrinsic motivation is supported when individuals experience relatedness and connection with others, which helps foster ongoing engagement and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Passion for Subject Matter: Love for Teaching Extends Beyond the Classroom

Another core driver of intrinsic motivation among TCTs is their passion for their subject matter and the joy of sharing it with students. Many TCTs expressed that their love for their discipline played a crucial role in their career satisfaction and that teaching was a way to inspire curiosity and deeper learning in their field.

One science teacher explained: “I think the biggest thing for me is I love science, and I love getting kids to see the excitement in science” (Participant 7, TCT). This suggests that for TCTs, intrinsic motivation is not just about being in a classroom, but about engaging with the subject they love in a dynamic and interactive way.

Similarly, a math teacher linked their passion for their subject with their belief in its broader societal impact. Participant 10 (TCT) stated, “Math is a social justice issue... I

wanted to be a part of changing people’s experience with math.” This demonstrates how intrinsic motivation for some TCTs (three to be exact) extends beyond personal fulfillment and into larger educational and societal change. Their engagement with their subject matter is not just about delivering knowledge, but about fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and breaking down barriers in education. SDT emphasizes that intrinsic motivation thrives when individuals experience autonomy and competence in areas they find inherently interesting or important (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Theme	Career Change Teachers (CCTs)	Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)
Entry Motivation	Teaching pursued after dissatisfaction or lack of meaning in previous careers	Teaching chosen early in life as a clear calling or lifelong goal
Appreciation for Teaching	Heightened due to prior experience in less fulfilling professions	Rooted in a longstanding desire to teach, often influenced by personal or family experience
Sense of Purpose	Deepened by existential reflection and career comparison; teaching seen as meaningful, purpose-driven work	Grounded in a belief in education’s power to uplift, empower, and represent underrepresented identities
Student Engagement	Described as a source of daily emotional reward and validation not present in prior professions	Viewed as the primary reason for staying in the profession; a source of energy and fulfillment
Passion for Subject Matter	Sometimes developed after entering teaching through student interaction and growing appreciation	Often a core motivator from the start; participants cited a love for their discipline and desire to share it
View of Financial Trade-Offs	Participants acknowledged pay cuts but emphasized that meaning, impact, and passion outweighed income loss	Financial concerns were not central in participants’ accounts of motivation, though some expressed later-career doubts
Theoretical Alignment	Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT): Motivation shaped by outcome expectations, self-	SCCT: Motivation shaped by early self-efficacy and outcome expectations related to personal

Theme	Career Change Teachers (CCTs)	Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)
	efficacy, and purposeful reentry into teaching after career dissatisfaction (Lent et al., 1994)	identity; Self-Determination Theory (SDT): Motivation sustained through autonomy, relatedness, and a sense of competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000)

Table 9. Intrinsic Motivation CCTs & TCTs

Extrinsic Motivations for Career Change Teachers (CCTs)

While CCTs found deep intrinsic fulfillment in teaching, their career transitions were also influenced by a range of extrinsic considerations. Interview data revealed that factors such as job stability, salary, work-life balance, professional autonomy, and institutional culture contributed to their decision-making processes.

Job Stability and Security

One of the most influential extrinsic motivators for CCTs was the stability that independent school teaching offered compared to their former professions, which were often marked by unpredictability, contract-based work, or inconsistent income.

Participant 6, who transitioned from academia and finance, emphasized the lack of security and essential benefits in his previous adjunct roles. They stated,

When I dropped out of the PhD program, I needed to get a real job, and I did adjuncting full-time... I know a bunch of people who have that life, and it's just miserable. You have no stability from semester to semester. You don't get health insurance and all those benefits and stuff. (Participant 6, CCT)

Similarly, Participant 9 (CCT), who spent over a decade in the entertainment industry, described how the instability of that field made teaching an attractive

alternative:

Working in the arts and entertainment, especially in New York and LA, was pretty intense and very competitive. Cutthroat would not be the wrong term to use. Transitioning into teaching gave me structure, stability, and a predictable rhythm to my work life, which I didn't have before

These reflections highlight how independent schools provided CCTs who come from volatile careers with a sense of job security and long-term sustainability that their previous careers lacked—significantly contributing to their overall career choice satisfaction.

Salary and Financial Considerations

While teaching is often culturally framed as a vocation driven more by passion than pay, several CCTs in this study highlighted the importance of financial and material stability in their decision to pursue teaching in independent schools. For these participants, compensation—though not necessarily high relative to corporate sectors—was seen as more competitive and sustainable than in their previous professions, particularly in the arts and nonprofit sectors.

Participant 11 (CCT), who had worked in nonprofit arts administration, described the transition to teaching as financially affirming. While his decision was shaped by multiple factors, the significant salary increase served as a concrete external reinforcement:

I had been working at a nonprofit theater, making around \$40,000 a year. When I got my first job at the independent school, my salary jumped to \$52,000, and that

was a big increase for me. And then, of course, you have summers off, which in the arts world is unheard of.

This reflects an instrumental outcome expectation (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994), where teaching was viewed not solely as meaningful, but as offering tangible, practical benefits. The mention of “summers off” further highlights the perceived material advantages of the academic schedule.

Similarly, Participant 3 (CCT), who transitioned from a career in opera and theater, acknowledged that financial stability—rather than a pure sense of calling—played a decisive role in the switch:

Money. I mean, let me say, it wasn't like I could have worked at the Gap. But it was a job that fit my skill set and didn't require me to lie about the 20-year gap in my resume from directing the opera in Germany. So, yes, salary and stability were huge factors in making the switch.

Here, financial continuity and a job fit that accommodated prior experience were central decision-making levers. Rather than seeking abstract meaning, Participant 3 framed teaching as a viable, realistic solution to professional instability.

Participant 2 (CCT) elaborated on the emotional and psychological relief associated with income stability:

I know teaching doesn't pay—teaching at an independent school, the pay is even worse. But honestly, the stability of consistent pay that's not constantly fluctuating depending on grant availability was a relief and bonus for me, if I'm being real.

Although this participant acknowledged modest compensation, their statement suggests that predictability—an external yet psychologically impactful factor—can support career satisfaction. From a SDT perspective, this speaks to the basic need for competence and security (Ryan & Deci, 2000), particularly for individuals leaving precarious work environments.

While CCTs—four to be specific—initially expected to sacrifice income, many ultimately found that independent school salaries—combined with benefits like tuition remission—allowed them to view teaching not as a fallback, but as a sustainable long-term career. This reframing shows how extrinsic considerations may initially drive career transitions, but can evolve into deeper internal alignment with the profession. In this way, extrinsic motivators such as salary and job continuity may serve as stabilizing forces that enable long-term intrinsic engagement.

Work-Life Balance and Time Off

Another recurring theme among CCTs was the appeal of a more structured work schedule, predictable time off, and clearer professional boundaries—benefits that contrasted sharply with the demanding, often unregulated schedules of their prior careers. For CCTs as a collective, independent school teaching offered a lifestyle stability that had previously been out of reach, reinforcing their overall satisfaction with the transition.

Participant 6 (CCT), who transitioned from a career in finance, emphasized the extreme time demands of their previous role and the profound shift they experienced upon entering teaching:

In the finance world, you basically are there all the time—it's like 60 to 80 hours a week when you're working on Wall Street. Teaching gave me something I never had before: holidays, summers off, and a structured work schedule.

This highlights a clear instrumental outcome expectation (Lent et al., 1994), where teaching is valued not only for its content or relational aspects but also for the extrinsically rewarding structure it provides. Rather than framing teaching as a purely vocational pursuit, the participant acknowledges how predictable time boundaries offered tangible lifestyle improvements and supported overall well-being.

Similarly, Participant 2 (CCT), a former researcher, described teaching as a career that restored balance and enabled the pursuit of personal interests. They stated,

When I was working in the lab, my work consumed my life. Teaching allowed me to have a more balanced schedule, giving me time to do things I actually enjoy, like making music and working on my own creative pursuits.

Here, we see teaching framed as a means to reclaim autonomy and personal agency—a concept central to SDT. While this is still extrinsically motivated behavior—since the participant values what teaching affords outside of work—it is nonetheless self-endorsed and reflects movement toward integrated regulation, where work aligns with broader life goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Participant 4 (CCT), who came from a military background, offered a multidimensional view of work-life balance by highlighting the benefits of both time off and family-oriented perks. They stated,

Coming from a military background—3 months sold me: June, July, August—summers off. Another big thing is stability in lifestyle. I'm not leaving at random anymore. Because my kids got tuition remission, they attended the schools where I taught at, which was huge for creating a better work-life balance for me.

This response blends extrinsic motivators such as paid time off, family benefits, and lifestyle predictability—all of which influenced this participant's career satisfaction. These insights reinforce that career decision-making is often shaped not just by interest in teaching itself, but by the structural and logistical advantages it provides in contrast to prior roles.

Overall, independent schools were seen by CCTs as offering more control, predictability, and support for personal life integration than their previous careers. From a theoretical standpoint, these reflections reveal how extrinsic motivation can serve as a gateway to deeper commitment when teachers perceive their new professional environment as enabling important life goals and psychological needs. In these cases, extrinsically motivating features of the profession support sustained satisfaction and contribute to a viable, values-aligned career pathway.

Professional Autonomy and Curriculum Flexibility

Many CCTs cited academic freedom as a defining factor in their decision to teach in independent schools rather than pursue other career paths. They expressed a desire for autonomy over their instructional methods, curriculum design, and overall pedagogical approach.

Participant 4 (CCT) who had a background in the military, highlighted the stark contrast between the rigid structure of his previous profession and the flexibility he found in independent schools. They stated,

There is no autonomy in the military. It's a well-oiled machine. I benefited tremendously from the autonomy I've been afforded in independent schools. I get to shape my curriculum, adapt my lessons, and teach in a way that excites me.

Similarly, Participant 9 described how the ability to integrate diverse perspectives into his history classes made independent schools an attractive option:

From what I hear from certified teachers, Public institutions often had rigid curriculum structures that didn't allow for much flexibility. In independent schools, I can design my courses, bring in diverse voices, and engage students in ways that make learning more meaningful. (Participant 2, CCT)

This autonomy over curriculum and pedagogy was particularly appealing to CCTs who had previously worked in structured or highly regulated environments, reinforcing their long-term commitment to independent school teaching.

Institutional Culture and Collegiality

Beyond financial and structural benefits, many CCTs emphasized the appeal of independent schools' mission-driven, student-centered cultures. These environments often reflected their own values and educational philosophies, which contributed meaningfully to their career satisfaction. While these factors are not traditional extrinsic motivators like salary or schedule, they represent key aspects of contextual fit that support identified regulation and integrated motivation within SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

They also serve as environmental supports in SCCT, reinforcing career decisions through positive institutional feedback loops (Lent et al., 1994).

Participant 6 (CCT) articulated the emotional and philosophical alignment he experienced upon entering the independent school setting:

The moment I got into teaching at this independent school, I talked to the other math teachers in the department, and I was like, damn, these people are on the same page. They actually care about these kids—not just about not getting sued.

This shows a core aspect of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) relatedness need. The participant's motivation was strengthened by collegial alignment, shared purpose, and a sense of professional belonging. His contrast with previous environments—implied to be more bureaucratic or liability-driven—further highlights how value congruence and institutional culture can enhance commitment, even if not initially part of the reason for switching careers.

Similarly, Participant 11 (CCT) highlighted the familial ethos of the school community. They stated, “I saw a faculty of people who were raising their own kids while teaching other people's kids. It felt like a village—a community where people supported each other, and that was very appealing to me.” This sense of communal support satisfies both the relatedness and autonomy needs central to SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The image of “a village” conveys a workplace culture grounded in trust, mutual investment, and emotional safety—conditions that promote sustained motivation, particularly for individuals seeking more than transactional job fulfillment. For CCTs, independent schools provided more than a job—they offered an ecosystem in which their

contributions were valued, their pedagogical voices were respected, and their sense of mission could be realized. These findings suggest that institutional culture serves as a non-monetary but highly motivating contextual factor—one that reinforces and sustains teachers' professional identities and strengthens their long-term commitment to the field.

Extrinsic Motivation Among Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)

While intrinsic motivation—such as a deep commitment to education, subject-matter passion, and student engagement—formed the foundation of many TCTs initial career decisions, extrinsic factors played a decisive role in shaping their long-term satisfaction and career sustainability. Over time, the realities of salary limitations, financial instability, heavy workloads, and limited upward mobility influenced how TCTs perceived the viability of teaching as a lifelong profession. This section explores how extrinsic motivators—particularly financial compensation and job security—interacted with teachers' professional ideals to shape their lived experiences in independent schools.

Salary and Financial Considerations

Although TCTs often enter the profession driven by intrinsic values such as purpose, identity, and impact, many come to face a sobering reality: financial strain—particularly in the independent school context—can undercut the long-term viability of their career choice satisfaction. While these teachers entered the profession with clarity of purpose and intrinsic drive, many reported that the low and often stagnant pay in independent schools created long-term tension between their values and their material realities.

Participant 12 (TCT), a veteran history teacher, expressed a growing disconnect between professional confidence and financial sustainability.

I've become more confident in my ability to reach students, but the financial instability of teaching has literally eroded my overall career choice satisfaction, to keep it real. I know I'm a good teacher, but knowing that I can't sustain a decent quality of life on my salary. My salary makes it hard to stay in the field.

This sentiment reflects the erosion of motivation not because of a loss in purpose, but due to chronic extrinsic stressors—a condition that SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) suggests can undermine sustained engagement, even in intrinsically driven professions.

Participant 5, who had taught in both public and independent schools, described the financial trade-offs and family-centered incentives that influenced their career decisions:

Honestly, salary has always been a tough part of teaching, especially in public schools where the pay just didn't keep up with the cost of living. But what really made a difference for me in the independent school world was the tuition remission. I have two kids, and knowing they could attend the same school where I teach—without that financial burden—was huge. It made the lower salary feel more manageable and gave me a sense of long-term security I didn't have before.

(Participant 5, TCT)

This reflection illustrates how extrinsic motivators such as tuition remission and family-oriented financial support can significantly influence teacher satisfaction and career decisions. From a SCCT perspective, this reflects an instrumental outcome expectation:

the belief that teaching in an independent school will yield concrete, valued outcomes that directly improve quality of life (Lent et al., 1994). Simultaneously, the participant's framing of this benefit as "long-term security" speaks to the SDT need for competence and stability—basic psychological needs that, when met, can bolster motivation and reinforce professional commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). While salary alone may not drive satisfaction, the presence of meaningful financial incentives such as tuition remission reframes the teaching role as a sustainable, family-compatible profession.

Participant 1 (TCT) added a temporal dimension, describing how financial strain becomes more burdensome over time. They stated,

You have more time and more energy when you're younger. Early-career teaching is super demanding, and I knew I wasn't going to be a teacher forever. I didn't want that for myself. I knew that going in... but this is not something I'm going to do forever—it's not financially sustainable if you want to have kids and afford a certain lifestyle.

This reflection signals a pragmatic understanding that the teaching profession, while deeply rewarding, may not offer the financial trajectory needed for long-term sustainability—particularly as life circumstances shift. As participants took on more financial responsibility (e.g., housing, family, retirement planning), the gap between personal commitment and extrinsic support widened.

Taken together, these reflections reveal that for many TCTs, salary and financial considerations play a consequential role in shaping overall career choice satisfaction—particularly as their professional and personal responsibilities evolve over time. While

participants entered the field with a strong sense of intrinsic purpose, their narratives underscore a growing tension between vocational ideals and the economic limitations of independent school teaching. Rather than diminishing their passion for education, these financial constraints introduced a layer of complexity that challenged their satisfaction with having chosen teaching as a long-term career. For some, institutional benefits like tuition remission helped offset this strain, offering a degree of material stability that supported their continued engagement. However, for others, especially those navigating the demands of family life and rising costs of living, stagnant compensation emerged as a critical pain point. These accounts highlight how extrinsic realities—particularly financial viability—can significantly shape how satisfied TCTs feel with their decision to pursue and remain in the teaching profession.

Security and Stability

Job security emerged as a notable extrinsic factor influencing the career choice satisfaction of TCTs. Unlike their counterparts in public school systems, participants described independent schools as offering a strong sense of professional stability. Despite the prevalence of year-to-year contracts and the absence of union representation, TCTs reported feeling generally secure in their positions—particularly when aligned with the school's culture and expectations. This stability, however, was often accompanied by a quiet understanding that job protection was contingent on interpersonal dynamics and institutional fit.

Participant 8 (TCT) articulated this balance clearly, noting both the relief of predictability and the limits of contractual security:

There's definitely stability in independent schools. I've never worried about losing my job without cause. If you're doing the work and fitting into the community, you're good. But you're also aware there's no union backing you. That doesn't mean you feel unsafe—it just means you're aware. You don't go around rocking the boat unnecessarily.

This perspective reflects the paradox that many TCTs expressed: independent schools provided a sense of institutional trust and continuity, yet the lack of formal union protections fostered a more cautious professional posture. Teachers generally felt respected and valued, but also understood that their continued employment rested on mutual alignment rather than formalized tenure or legal recourse. Within SCCT, this reflects an interplay between environmental supports and self-regulatory awareness—where teachers' perceptions of institutional goodwill are tempered by the knowledge of limited procedural protections (Lent et al., 1994). Participant 10 (TCT) reinforced the sense of overall stability while acknowledging the need to maintain professional alignment. They stated,

I've always felt that if you're a strong teacher and a positive presence, your job is safe. The leadership here trusts faculty. But it's also not a unionized environment, so you know not to push too far outside the lines. That doesn't mean you don't have a voice—it just means you use it carefully.

This reflection points to the nuanced way job security is experienced: not as fragile or volatile, but as relationally maintained. Teachers who are effective and collegial report high levels of career satisfaction related to job stability. Yet, the awareness of limited

formal recourse subtly influences how they engage in decision-making spaces or raise concerns. From a SDT perspective, this conditional security may constrain the full expression of autonomy, even as competence and relatedness are well supported (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Overall, TCTs in this study described independent schools as reliable and professionally stable environments that stood in sharp contrast to the uncertainty of public education settings marked by budget-driven layoffs and rigid bureaucracy. While the absence of union protection was noted, it did not overshadow the prevailing sense of security and trust participants felt in their institutions. Instead, it functioned as a subtle boundary—reminding teachers to remain attuned to institutional culture, navigate relationships with care, and maintain professional alignment. These findings suggest that job security in independent schools contributes positively to career choice satisfaction, even as it comes with its own set of unspoken norms and expectations.

Workload and Professional Expectations

For TCTs, extrinsic considerations about workload and professional expectations played a significant role in shaping their initial career choice satisfaction. While intrinsic motivations such as purpose and identity drew them to the profession, the perception of teaching as offering a more sustainable lifestyle compared to other high-demand careers was a key factor in their decision-making.

Participant 7 (TCT) explained that he was intentional about avoiding careers that demanded excessive hours and constant multitasking. His decision to enter teaching was partly based on the belief that it would provide greater balance and avoid the all-

consuming nature of other professional fields. They stated, “I didn't want to put in 80-hour weeks. Not to minimize what teachers do, but I didn't want a job where I felt like an air traffic controller, juggling a million things at once with no breaks.” This reflects a clear instrumental outcome expectation (Lent et al., 1994), where the participant assessed potential careers not only based on interest but on perceived structural features—such as workload intensity, scheduling boundaries, and sustainability. While the participant acknowledged the rigor of teaching, he saw it as comparatively manageable, especially in contrast to careers with unrelenting demands and little room for personal autonomy. The other five participants reinforced this theme by describing how the independent school context offered a more predictable and contained professional rhythm—particularly when compared to environments with standardized testing pressures or overwhelming administrative burdens.

Participant 10 (TCT), for example, emphasized the value of this control:

I had to decide between a public school job and an independent school job. The public school felt unknown, and I wasn't sure I could handle the larger class sizes and testing demands. Independent schools have their own challenges, but at least I knew I could shape my classroom experience more directly.

Although the demands of independent school teaching remained high—often involving advising, committee work, and extracurricular leadership—participants perceived a degree of autonomy in how those demands were carried out. This aligns with SDT concept of autonomy-supportive environments, where external structures can still foster internal satisfaction when they allow for choice, flexibility, and self-directed professional

expression (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Participant 1 offered additional nuance, clarifying that the workload was not inherently lighter in independent schools, but its structure and framing were different. They stated, “Independent school classes are smaller, but that doesn’t mean less work. There’s still a constant expectation to innovate, mentor students, serve on committees, run clubs—it’s a lot.” (Participant 1, TCT) This reveals the complexity of workload as an extrinsic factor. While teachers were drawn to teaching due to assumptions about manageable schedules or improved balance, they later encountered layered responsibilities that required extensive time and emotional energy. However, the ability to operate in an environment that allowed creativity and professional discretion often buffered those demands.

In sum, workload and professional expectations factored into TCTs’ career satisfaction not because teaching was viewed as effortless, but because it offered a structured alternative to more unpredictable or unsustainable professions. Participants described teaching—particularly in independent schools—as demanding but navigable, provided there was room for autonomy and institutional alignment with personal values. These findings illustrate that extrinsic motivators such as professional pacing, role clarity, and institutional flexibility meaningfully shape teachers’ perceptions of sustainability and satisfaction.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance emerged as a critical extrinsic factor shaping TCTs’ career choice satisfaction in independent schools. While TCT participants appreciated the

predictability and structure of the academic calendar, they also reflected on the complexities that arise—especially for faculty who are also parents within the school community. For these teachers, the blurred line between personal and professional life sometimes complicated their ability to fully detach from work, even during non-instructional hours.

Participant 5, a faculty parent, articulated the advantages of working in an environment aligned with their family schedule. They stated, “The predictability of the school calendar is a lifesaver. I have kids, and knowing that I’ll have time off when they do makes a huge difference. Honestly, that’s what made staying in teaching even possible for me.” (Participant 5, TCT)

This sentiment illustrates an instrumental outcome expectation (Lent et al., 1994), where the external structure of the job—particularly the synchronization of schedules between work and family—functions as a meaningful and motivating condition that supports career satisfaction.

At the same time, the other six TCTs reflected on the subtle ways independent schools can blur professional and personal boundaries. Participant 8, who is also a faculty parent, noted the challenges of maintaining space between work and home when both occur within the same institutional ecosystem. They stated,

It’s a great school community, and I love that my kids are here—but it can also feel like you’re never really off. If you’re not careful, school becomes your whole life because you’re showing up as a parent, a teacher, a colleague—all at once.
(Participant 8, TCT)

This reveals a tension that sits at the heart of work-life balance in independent schools: while faculty-parent integration can enhance convenience and community belonging (fulfilling SDT's need for relatedness) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), it may also compromise autonomy if teachers feel they are constantly "on," with no delineation between personal and professional roles. Participant 10, who had taught in both public and independent schools, described the contrast in expectations:

In public schools, I felt like I was always playing catch-up—grading, standardized test prep, everything. Independent schools definitely offer more breathing room, but there's also this unspoken expectation that you're always available, always responding to students, always engaged. (Participant 10, TCT)

This perceived pressure to be perpetually accessible—even in less bureaucratic environments—illustrates how external job structures, even when well-intentioned, can create stressors that affect long-term satisfaction. Participant 7 added a perspective on emotional sustainability and role intensity. They stated,

I have students for multiple years in a row, and I see them almost every day. That kind of continuity is meaningful, but it also makes it hard to unplug. You care so much, but it's exhausting. I sometimes wonder how sustainable this level of connection really is. (Participant 7, TCT)

This statement speaks to the emotional labor involved in independent school teaching and the cumulative toll it can take, even in settings with structural advantages like small class sizes and calendar predictability. While these conditions offer stability, they may also intensify relational expectations, further complicating boundaries between personal time

and professional responsibility.

In sum, TCTs described work-life balance in independent schools as both a compelling extrinsic benefit and a subtle challenge. For many, the predictability of the academic calendar, alignment with family needs, and community ethos supported satisfaction. However, the integrated nature of independent school environments—particularly for faculty parents—sometimes created role spillover and diminished personal boundaries. These findings suggest that career satisfaction among TCTs is not only influenced by workload and compensation, but also by the degree to which the professional environment respects and protects time for rest, family, and autonomy—key external supports that, when well-managed, contribute to sustained motivation and well-being.

Salary and Financial Considerations

While TCTs often enter the profession grounded in intrinsic values like purpose, identity, and student impact, many eventually encounter a challenging financial reality—particularly within the independent school context. As their careers progress, some teachers find that stagnant pay and limited financial growth introduce tension between their professional ideals and the material demands of everyday life.

Participant 12, a veteran history teacher, expressed a growing disconnect between professional confidence and financial sustainability:

I've become more confident in my ability to reach students, but the financial instability of teaching has literally eroded my overall career choice satisfaction, to keep it real. I know I'm a good teacher, but knowing that I can't sustain a decent

quality of life on my salary. My salary makes it hard to stay in the field.

(Participant 12, TCT)

This sentiment reflects the erosion of motivation not because of a loss in purpose, but due to chronic extrinsic stressors—a condition that SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) suggested can undermine sustained engagement, even in intrinsically driven professions.

Participant 5, who had taught in both public and independent schools, described the financial trade-offs and family-centered incentives that influenced their career decisions:

Honestly, salary has always been a tough part of teaching, especially in public schools where the pay just didn't keep up with the cost of living. But what really made a difference for me in the independent school world was the tuition remission. I have two kids, and knowing they could attend the same school where I teach—without that financial burden—was huge. It made the lower salary feel more manageable and gave me a sense of long-term security I didn't have before.

(Participant 5, TCT)

This reflection illustrates how extrinsic motivators such as tuition remission and family-oriented financial support can significantly influence teacher satisfaction and career decisions. From a SCCT perspective, this reflects an instrumental outcome expectation: the belief that teaching in an independent school will yield concrete, valued outcomes that directly improve quality of life (Lent et al., 1994). Simultaneously, the participant's framing of this benefit as "long-term security" speaks to the SDT need for competence and stability—basic psychological needs that, when met, can bolster motivation and

reinforce professional commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). While salary alone may not drive satisfaction, the presence of meaningful financial incentives such as tuition remission reframes the teaching role as a sustainable, family-compatible profession.

Participant 1 added a temporal dimension, describing how financial strain becomes more burdensome over time:

You have more time and more energy when you're younger. Early-career teaching is super demanding, and I knew I wasn't going to be a teacher forever. I didn't want that for myself. I knew that going in... but this is not something I'm going to do forever—it's not financially sustainable if you want to have kids and afford a certain lifestyle. (Participant 1, TCT)

This reflection signals a pragmatic understanding that the teaching profession, while deeply rewarding, may not offer the financial trajectory needed for long-term sustainability—particularly as life circumstances shift. As participants took on more financial responsibility (e.g., housing, family, retirement planning), the gap between personal commitment and extrinsic support widened. Taken together, these reflections reveal that for many TCTs, salary and financial considerations play a consequential role in shaping overall career choice satisfaction—particularly as their professional and personal responsibilities evolve over time.

While participants entered the field with a strong sense of intrinsic purpose, their narratives highlight a growing tension between vocational ideals and the economic limitations of independent school teaching. Rather than diminishing their passion for education, these financial constraints introduced a layer of complexity that challenged

their satisfaction with having chosen teaching as a long-term career. For the three TCTs with children, institutional benefits like tuition remission helped offset this strain, offering a degree of material stability that supported their continued engagement. However, for others, especially those navigating the demands of family life and rising costs of living, stagnant compensation emerged as a critical pain point. These accounts highlight how extrinsic realities—particularly financial viability—can significantly shape how satisfied TCTs feel with their decision to pursue and remain in the teaching profession.

Job Security and Stability

Job security emerged as a meaningful extrinsic factor influencing career choice satisfaction among TCTs. While many participants noted the absence of union protections and the prevalence of year-to-year contracts, they nonetheless described independent schools as offering a reliable sense of professional stability—particularly when teachers felt aligned with the school’s culture and expectations. However, this perceived stability was tempered by an implicit understanding: continued employment was often contingent on interpersonal dynamics and institutional fit, rather than formal protections.

Participant 8 articulated this balance clearly, noting both the relief of predictability and the limits of contractual security:

There’s definitely stability in independent schools. I’ve never worried about losing my job without cause. If you’re doing the work and fitting into the community, you’re good. But you’re also aware there’s no union backing you.

That doesn't mean you feel unsafe—it just means you're aware. You don't go around rocking the boat unnecessarily. (Participant 8, TCT)

This perspective reflects the paradox that many TCTs expressed: independent schools provided a sense of institutional trust and continuity, yet the lack of formal union protections fostered a more cautious professional posture. Teachers generally felt respected and valued, but also understood that their continued employment rested on mutual alignment rather than formalized tenure or legal recourse. Within SCCT, this reflects an interplay between environmental supports and self-regulatory awareness—where teachers' perceptions of institutional goodwill are tempered by the knowledge of limited procedural protections (Lent et al., 1994).

Participant 10 reinforced the sense of overall stability while acknowledging the need to maintain professional alignment:

I've always felt that if you're a strong teacher and a positive presence, your job is safe. The leadership here trusts faculty. But it's also not a unionized environment, so you know not to push too far outside the lines. That doesn't mean you don't have a voice—it just means you use it carefully. (Participant 10, TCT)

This reflection points to the nuanced way job security is experienced: not as fragile or volatile, but as relationally maintained. Teachers who are effective and collegial report high levels of career satisfaction related to job stability. Yet, the awareness of limited formal recourse subtly influences how they engage in decision-making spaces or raise concerns.

From a SDT perspective, this conditional security may constrain the full expression of autonomy, even as competence and relatedness are well supported (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Overall, TCTs in this study described independent schools as reliable and professionally stable environments that stood in sharp contrast to the uncertainty of public education settings marked by budget-driven layoffs and rigid bureaucracy. While the absence of union protection was noted, it did not overshadow the prevailing sense of security and trust participants felt in their institutions. Instead, it functioned as a subtle boundary—reminding teachers to remain attuned to institutional culture, navigate relationships with care, and maintain professional alignment. These findings suggest that job security in independent schools contributes positively to career choice satisfaction, even as it comes with its own set of unspoken norms and expectations.

Workload and Professional Expectations

For many TCTs, extrinsic considerations about workload and professional expectations played a significant role in shaping their initial career choice satisfaction. While intrinsic motivations such as purpose and identity drew them to the profession, the perception of teaching as offering a more sustainable lifestyle compared to other high-demand careers was a key factor in their decision-making.

Participant 7 explained that he was intentional about avoiding careers that demanded excessive hours and constant multitasking. His decision to enter teaching was partly based on the belief that it would provide greater balance and avoid the all-consuming nature of other professional fields:

I didn't want to put in 80-hour weeks. Not to minimize what teachers do, but I didn't want a job where I felt like an air traffic controller, juggling a million things at once with no breaks. (Participant 7, TCT)

This reflects a clear instrumental outcome expectation (Lent et al., 1994), where the participant assessed potential careers not only based on interest but on perceived structural features—such as workload intensity, scheduling boundaries, and sustainability. While the participant acknowledged the rigor of teaching, he saw it as comparatively manageable, especially in contrast to careers with unrelenting demands and little room for personal autonomy.

The other five participants reinforced this theme by describing how the independent school context offered a more predictable and contained professional rhythm—particularly when compared to environments with standardized testing pressures or overwhelming administrative burdens.

Participant 10, for example, emphasized the importance of having control over their teaching environment:

I had to decide between a public-school job and an independent school job. The public school felt unknown, and I wasn't sure I could handle the larger class sizes and testing demands. Independent schools have their own challenges, but at least I knew I could shape my classroom experience more directly. (Participant 10, TCT)

Although the demands of independent school teaching remained high—often involving advising, committee work, and extracurricular leadership—participants perceived a degree of autonomy in how those demands were carried out. This aligns with SDT's

concept of autonomy-supportive environments, where external structures can still foster internal satisfaction when they allow for choice, flexibility, and self-directed professional expression (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Participant 8 offered additional clarification, explaining that the workload was not inherently lighter in independent schools, but its structure and framing were different. They stated, “Independent school classes are smaller, but that doesn’t mean less work. There’s still a constant expectation to innovate, mentor students, serve on committees, run clubs—it’s a lot” (Participant 8, TCT). This reveals the complexity of workload as an extrinsic factor. While some teachers were drawn to teaching due to assumptions about manageable schedules or improved balance, they later encountered layered responsibilities that required extensive time and emotional energy. However, the ability to operate in an environment that allowed creativity and professional discretion often buffered those demands.

In sum, workload and professional expectations factored into TCTs’ career satisfaction not because teaching was viewed as effortless, but because it offered a structured alternative to more unpredictable or unsustainable professions. Many participants described teaching—particularly in independent schools—as demanding but navigable, provided there was room for autonomy and institutional alignment with personal values. These findings illustrate that extrinsic motivators such as professional pacing, role clarity, and institutional flexibility meaningfully shape teachers’ perceptions of sustainability and satisfaction.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance emerged as a critical extrinsic factor shaping TCTs career choice satisfaction in independent schools. Many participants appreciated the predictability and structure of the academic calendar. However, others reflected on the complexities that arose—especially for faculty who were also parents within the school community. For these teachers, the blurred line between personal and professional life sometimes complicated their ability to fully detach from work, even during non-instructional hours.

Participant 5, a faculty parent, articulated the advantages of working in an environment aligned with their family schedule. They stated, “The predictability of the school calendar is a lifesaver. I have kids, and knowing that I’ll have time off when they do makes a huge difference. Honestly, that’s what made staying in teaching even possible for me” (Participant 5, TCT). This sentiment illustrates an instrumental outcome expectation (Lent et al., 1994), where the external structure of the job—particularly the synchronization of schedules between work and family—functions as a meaningful and motivating condition that supports career satisfaction. At the same time, other TCTs reflected on the subtle ways independent schools can blur professional and personal boundaries.

Participant 8, who is also a faculty parent, noted the challenges of maintaining space between work and home when both occur within the same institutional ecosystem:

It’s a great school community, and I love that my kids are here—but it can also feel like you’re never really off. If you’re not careful, school becomes your whole

life because you're showing up as a parent, a teacher, a colleague—all at once.

(Participant 8, TCT)

This reveals a tension at the heart of work-life balance in independent schools: while faculty-parent integration can enhance convenience and community belonging (fulfilling SDT's need for relatedness) (Ryan & Deci, 2000), it may also compromise autonomy if teachers feel they are constantly "on," with no clear boundary between personal and professional roles.

Participant 10, who had taught in both public and independent schools, described the contrast in expectations:

In public schools, I felt like I was always playing catch-up—grading, standardized test prep, everything. Independent schools definitely offer more breathing room, but there's also this unspoken expectation that you're always available, always responding to students, always engaged.

(Participant 10, TCT)

This perceived pressure to be perpetually accessible—even in less bureaucratic environments—illustrates how external job structures, even when well-intentioned, can create stressors that affect long-term satisfaction.

Participant 7 added a perspective on emotional sustainability and role intensity:

I have students for multiple years in a row, and I see them almost every day. That kind of continuity is meaningful, but it also makes it hard to

unplug. You care so much, but it's exhausting. I sometimes wonder how sustainable this level of connection really is. (Participant 7, TCT)

This statement speaks to the emotional labor involved in independent school teaching and the cumulative toll it can take—even in settings with structural advantages like small class sizes and predictable calendars. While these conditions offer stability, they may also intensify relational expectations, further complicating boundaries between personal time and professional responsibility.

In sum, TCTs described work-life balance in independent schools as both a compelling extrinsic benefit and a subtle challenge. For many, the predictability of the academic calendar, alignment with family needs, and community ethos supported satisfaction. However, the integrated nature of independent school environments—particularly for faculty parents—sometimes created role spillover and diminished personal boundaries. These findings suggest that career satisfaction among TCTs is shaped not only by workload and compensation, but also by the degree to which the professional environment respects and protects time for rest, family, and autonomy—key external supports that, when well-managed, contribute to sustained motivation and well-being.

Extrinsic Motivation	CCT Perspective	TCT Perspective
Job Stability and Security	Sought relief from unpredictable or contract-based careers; independent schools offered structure, predictability, and long-term sustainability.	Generally felt secure but noted lack of union protection. Stability tied to institutional alignment and professional reputation rather than formal tenure.
Salary and Financial Consideration	Saw teaching as financially preferable to unstable or underpaid prior fields (e.g., arts, nonprofits). Salary increases, tuition remission, and pay consistency were highly valued.	Faced financial strain over time. Tuition remission helped, but many described low or stagnant salaries as a barrier to long-term sustainability.
Work-Life Balance and Time Off	Valued structured schedules, holidays, and predictable time off compared to high-demand careers (e.g., finance, science). Cited improvement in lifestyle and personal well-being.	Appreciated calendar alignment with family life but noted role spillover and difficulty ‘unplugging,’ especially for faculty parents.
Workload and Professional Expectations	Generally positive; experienced a manageable workload with more autonomy compared to prior careers. Teaching offered greater personal and professional alignment.	Chose teaching to avoid overwhelming work cultures, but later found demands (e.g., committee work, clubs) to be intense though manageable with autonomy.
Professional Autonomy and Curriculum Flexibility	Highlighted freedom to design curriculum and teach creatively. Appreciated contrast with rigid systems (e.g., military, public institutions).	Less emphasized. Some noted autonomy in the classroom as a buffer against institutional demands but not a major extrinsic driver.
Institutional Culture and Collegiality	Found alignment between personal values and school mission. Felt respected, supported, and professionally affirmed. Emphasized community and collegiality.	Valued collegial environments but experienced emotional fatigue due to continuous engagement with students and community. Community ethos was both a support and a source of pressure.

Table 10. Extrinsic Motivations CCTs & TCTs

Focus Group Insights on Career Choice Satisfaction

The focus group added a vital comparative lens to the individual interviews, enabling CCTs and TCTs to reflect collectively on their career choice satisfaction in independent schools. This real-time, dialogic space allowed for the co-construction of meaning as participants validated, questioned, or expanded on one another's perspectives. As a result, this setting offered deeper insights into how teachers—regardless of their route into the profession—make sense of their motivations, institutional environments, and perceived alignment between personal values and professional realities. Several themes emerged, revealing key differences and commonalities in how extrinsic and intrinsic motivators shaped teacher satisfaction.

Shared Validation of Career Choice Satisfaction

Despite their differing entry points, both CCTs and TCTs expressed a high degree of satisfaction with teaching as a career. TCTs often framed their satisfaction as a continuation of a long-standing vocational identity, while CCTs tended to describe teaching as a welcomed pivot from prior careers marked by disillusionment or burnout. Participant 8 (TCT) stated: “For me, there was never another option. I always wanted to be a teacher. I didn't fall into this profession—it was the plan. And even though it's tough, I've never regretted that decision.” Participant 6 (CCT), by contrast, reflected on the conscious decision to leave a more lucrative field: “I come from finance, where every day felt like a grind. Teaching, for me, is a choice—a choice I'm grateful for. It doesn't mean it's easy, but at least I know my work has purpose.”

These comments highlight a shared sense of intrinsic satisfaction, though rooted in different pathways. According to SDT, this reflects the internalization of professional values that fulfill psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). TCTs entered the profession already aligned with these needs, while CCTs experienced fulfillment as a post-transition discovery.

Salary and Financial Considerations: Stability vs. Stagnation

When financial realities were discussed, participants' prior career experiences shaped their interpretations. CCTs, having often left unstable or underpaid sectors (e.g., nonprofit, arts, or freelance work), were more likely to perceive independent school teaching as financially stabilizing. In contrast, TCTs, who had spent their entire careers in education, were more likely to express frustration with salary stagnation and limited financial mobility. Participant 2 (CCT) shared: "I used to chase bonuses and commissions, and while I made more money, the stress and uncertainty were unbearable. Teaching may not be high-paying, but it's stable. I don't have to worry about getting laid off every quarter." In contrast, Participant 12 (TCT) voiced a growing sense of financial discontent: "I never expected to be rich as a teacher, but when you're ten years in and your salary barely moves, it starts to wear on you. There's only so much passion can compensate for financial limitations." This contrast illustrates a central tenet SCCT: that outcome expectations—particularly financial and material ones—interact with prior experience to shape satisfaction and future decision-making (Lent et al., 1994). For CCTs, teaching was an upward move toward predictability; for TCTs, it increasingly felt like a plateau.

Workload and Work-Life Balance: Assumptions and Adaptations

The focus group also revealed differences in how participants perceived workload and its impact on their personal lives. TCTs were generally unsurprised by the multifaceted demands of independent school teaching, having been socialized into the profession through traditional certification programs. CCTs, however, were more likely to be caught off guard by the intensity of emotional labor, grading, and extracurricular responsibilities.

Participant 9 (CCT) admitted:

Coming in, I thought teaching would be demanding but manageable. I didn't fully grasp how much energy it takes to be 'on' all day, plus grade, plus handle clubs and advisory. The hours may be different from my old job, but the mental load is massive.

Participant 1 (TCT) responded with pragmatic acceptance: "It's always been like this. You don't go into teaching thinking you'll have a 9-to-5 job. It's exhausting, but that's part of it." Despite these differences in expectation, CCTs were often more willing to accept the workload as part of a meaningful trade-off. As Participant 11 (CCT) noted: "I feel drained some days, but at least I know why I'm tired. In my old job, I'd be exhausted and wonder what I was doing with my life. At least here, the exhaustion comes from something meaningful." This highlights an important point in SDT: when external demands align with intrinsic values, even heavy workloads can be internalized and viewed as self-concordant goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The burden becomes more tolerable when it serves a purpose that resonates.

Institutional Culture and Professional Growth

Institutional culture was another area where perspectives diverged. TCTs—having more experience in the educational system—often expressed a desire for clearer professional advancement pathways. CCTs, meanwhile, appreciated mentorship and community support as key enablers of their career adjustment. Participant 8 (TCT) noted: “I don’t see a clear path forward. I’ve been teaching for over a decade, and unless I move into administration, there’s not much room for career growth.” Conversely, Participant 4 (CCT) emphasized the value of informal support: “I came in with zero teaching experience. The best thing that happened to me was having veteran teachers take me under their wing. I don’t know if I’d still be here without that support.”

These reflections align with SCCT’s emphasis on environmental supports as critical to persistence and satisfaction (Lent et al., 1994). For TCTs, the absence of structured progression weakened outcome expectations. For CCTs, the presence of relational support helped solidify their professional identity.

Focus Group Overview

The focus group findings enriched the broader analysis by offering a comparative lens through which to understand career choice satisfaction among teachers with different training backgrounds. Key insights include:

1. Divergent paths, shared satisfaction: TCTs and CCTs both expressed high levels of career satisfaction but grounded it in different logics—lifelong passion versus deliberate reinvention.

2. Financial perspectives shaped by experience: CCTs found teaching to be financially stabilizing, especially when compared to volatile previous careers. TCTs, by contrast, often experienced frustration with salary stagnation.
3. Workload interpreted through values: TCTs were acclimated to the demands of teaching, while CCTs had to adjust—but often accepted the intensity as worth the trade for meaningful work.
4. Institutional supports matter differently: TCTs sought advancement; CCTs valued mentorship. Both desired institutional alignment, but their needs for support were shaped by their entry routes.

Together, these findings reinforce the dynamic interplay between extrinsic motivators and intrinsic values. The degree to which external conditions (e.g., compensation, support, culture) align with personal meaning and self-concept significantly affects how satisfied teachers feel with their decision to enter and remain in independent school teaching.

Commitment to Teaching: Long-Term Career Intentions of Career Change

Teachers (CCTs)

The commitment of CCTs to long-term teaching careers is shaped by a confluence of personal, professional, and institutional factors. These include the alignment of work with lifestyle, the emotional rewards of teaching, institutional opportunities, and evolving life circumstances. Overall, CCTs express a strong, enduring connection to the teaching profession. Building on the comparative insights of the focus group, this section explores

the motivations and contextual factors that reinforces CCTs' long-term engagement in teaching.

Reasons for Staying in Teaching: Alignment, Passion, and Growth

One of the most compelling reasons CCTs remain committed to teaching is the alignment between their professional responsibilities and personal lives. All participants highlighted the advantages of the profession's structured schedule, particularly those with families. One participant expressed:

Teaching has been a big part of my personal life as a single dad, and being able to have a schedule and a lifestyle that is in sync with my kids is huge. Being able to afford my kids opportunities because of the profession, that they might not otherwise have, has been huge. So, it has been a big, big, big part of why I'm committed to teaching. (Participant 9, CCT)

This demonstrates how work-life integration can enhance career commitment, especially when teaching provides stability and personal benefits that other professions may lack.

Five out of six CCTs entered education seeking deeper meaning after leaving careers that felt less fulfilling. This passion for purpose translates into a strong sense of permanence in their career choice.

There was a time when I almost left my first school. I was burnt out putting in 120% effort. I did not have a good work-life balance. I actually took a little time to think about what else I might want to do. That lasted five minutes, and it was like, 'There's nothing else I want to do. I just need to be better about having balance there.' I can't imagine doing anything else. (Participant 4, CCT)

This sentiment reflects a common theme among all CCTs: although moments of doubt can arise—often tied to workload intensity—their intrinsic motivation ultimately reinforces their commitment to teaching.

Career changers collectively express complete confidence that they made the right decision. They describe a strong sense of identity and purpose within the profession, which further solidifies their intent to stay.

10 out of 10? 100% I know I am in the right job, and I don't ever want to see myself doing anything else. I have the confidence of someone who knows that they made the right choice. (Participant 6, CCT)

For these individuals, career satisfaction is not just about day-to-day stability—it's about conviction in their calling.

Additionally, one CCT expresses that he remains committed because he feels that he is still growing professionally and he is currently building a program within the school. This sense of contribution and momentum fuels his engagement. Participant 2 (CCT) stated, "There are no plans to leave. I enjoy what I am doing; I'm trying to build up the psych program anyway, so I feel like I'm just kind of at the beginning."

These insights emphasize the importance of institutional investment and ongoing professional development in fostering teacher retention. All CCTs find long-term motivation in shaping their roles and making lasting contributions to school communities.

Considerations for the Future: Openness to Career Changes

While many CCTs express strong current commitment, one acknowledged that future personal circumstances—such as family aspirations or a new career paths—may eventually lead them elsewhere. Participant 11 stated,

Selfishly, I feel like I'm certainly committed. I'm committed to teaching in this capacity at independent schools until my students are old enough to graduate. And as long as I love it, as long as I'm not tired—although I'm not going to be the same person in five years—I'm going to have different cells in my body, and a lot more experience. I hope I remain open to new opportunities. My wife dreams of having a farm, a goat farm with chickens and stuff—that might be a fun thing to do at 60. I'm in my 50's right now, but maybe at 60. When my kids graduate, I'll be like, 'Okay, let's buy a goat farm.' (Participant 11, CCT)

This statement suggests that while all CCTs are committed for the foreseeable future, their long-term plans may remain flexible as life circumstances evolve, as is the case with this participant.

Teaching as the Best Alternative

For career changers as a collective, teaching represents the best available career path, even if it was not their initial plan. They view it as the most fulfilling and practical option relative to their previous professions.

As you know, this is my first year transitioning into teaching as a Career Changer.

After I had this wonderful opportunity, teaching is my top choice of other jobs. I

wouldn't rather go work in a law office or drive for Uber—it's the next best thing.

I don't see myself ever leaving at this point in my life. (Participant 3, CCT)

This highlights an important theme: some CCTs remain committed not just because teaching is ideal, but because it is preferable to other career alternatives they have considered.

Overview of Findings

The findings from this section suggest that CCTs exhibit a high degree of long-term commitment to the teaching profession, anchored in a sense of personal fulfillment, lifestyle alignment, and professional identity. For all participants, teaching is not only a career choice but a calling that offers emotional reward, autonomy, and meaningful work-life integration—particularly for those raising families. Participants often contrasted their teaching experience with prior careers that felt either unfulfilling or misaligned with their personal values, reinforcing their conviction that teaching was the right long-term path.

While five CCTs conveyed strong intentions to remain in the profession indefinitely, one participant noted that future decisions could be shaped by evolving life circumstances, such as family goals or the pursuit of new experiences. This openness did not signal dissatisfaction, but rather a recognition that personal aspirations may evolve over time. Even though he expressed such openness to pivot in the future, he still characterized teaching as his top professional choice in the present.

Overall, the data paints a portrait of a deeply committed group of career changers who find teaching to be both professionally sustaining and personally meaningful. Their continued engagement is likely to be reinforced by institutional support, professional

growth opportunities, and efforts to maintain a healthy work-life balance. These insights provide a compelling contrast to the experiences of TCTs, whose long-term career intentions are examined in the next section.

Commitment to Teaching: Long-Term Career Intentions (TCTs)

The long-term commitment of TCTs is shaped by a confluence of intrinsic motivation, institutional factors, financial realities, and professional aspirations. Unlike CCTs, who often frame their commitment in comparison to past professions, TCTs evaluate their career longevity within the context of lifelong expectations, systemic challenges, and personal life circumstances. This section delves into the complex decision-making processes that drive TCTs to either remain in the profession or consider alternative career pathways, supported by direct participant insights.

Reasons for Staying in Teaching: Intrinsic Passion and Identity as an Educator

For TCTs, teaching is more than a profession—it is a core aspect of their identity, cultivated through formal training and years of immersion in the educational landscape. This deep-seated passion often acts as a stabilizing force for some, reinforcing their commitment to the classroom.

I'm definitely committed. I don't see myself leaving teaching anytime soon. But have I ever thought about it? Of course. I think every teacher has those moments where they wonder if they could do something else—especially during particularly exhausting years. But ultimately, I always come back to the fact that I love this work. What keeps me committed is seeing the impact I have on students and feeling like I'm still growing as an educator. (Participant 8, TCT)

Unlike CCTs, who may experience a sense of renewed professional purpose, three out of six TCTs exhibit a sustained commitment that is reinforced by long-term professional and emotional investments in teaching. Even in moments of doubt, the intrinsic rewards of the profession—intellectual engagement, mentorship, and student relationships—serve as critical retention factors.

Stability, Familiarity, and Risk Aversion

While passion plays a role in commitment, four TCTs highlight the stability and predictability of teaching as key reasons for staying. Unlike career changers who actively sought transformation, some traditionally trained teachers express a preference for consistency and professional security over change.

This will be my career till I retire. I'm pretty sure I'm not going to go back to my genetic counselor idea. I sort of fantasized about becoming a genetic counselor at one point in my teaching career. But, why give up now? I mean, I enjoy it, obviously, and I'm risk-averse, so I don't like change. I don't want to go back and relearn things, because my brain doesn't want to do that anymore. And there's a lot of lifestyle smoothness right now that I would have to give up or put at risk to revisit anything else different. So this is what I will do because I like it. You know, I'm not stuck. I don't hate it. (Participant 5, TCT)

This perspective emphasizes the idea that commitment is not always a function of passion, but sometimes a reflection of pragmatic decision-making. Teaching, for these individuals, represents a known entity, and the potential risks associated with a career transition—such as financial instability or professional re-training—serve as deterrents to

leaving.

Institutional and Community Connections

Another major factor anchoring TCTs to their profession is the deep-seated relationships they have cultivated within their schools. Unlike CCTs, whose commitment is often shaped by personal fulfillment, four out of the six TCTs view their school communities as an extension of their professional identity, which strengthens their loyalty to teaching.

I think I'm very committed to it. I enjoy it. It's a fun job, and I really like what I'm doing. I think what keeps me here is the satisfaction, the relationships with colleagues, with students, with their families. I think that's what really keeps me at this independent school where I work at specifically—it's those relationships. They keep you in a place because it means something to you. (Participant 7, TCT)

I think it affects it immensely. My wife and I have a house in Providence. I can walk to school. That is gold. It's like, oh my god, I am never leaving this job just because of that—it's so nice. And then my wife, long ago, attended this independent school and thinks very highly of this institution, too. We have said that when we someday have kids, well probably send them here. And I think that keeps me connected to teaching here because I want to feel that connection to where my kids are going to school. (Participant 7, TCT)

This suggests that for these four TCTs, teaching is not merely a career choice but an embedded part of their social and familial structures, making the prospect of leaving even more complex.

Considerations for Leaving Teaching

For one TCT, the desire to leave is driven not by dissatisfaction with teaching itself, but rather the broader institutional and systemic pressures shaping the profession. The increasing politicization of education, external societal influences, and shifting administrative expectations have led them to question their long-term viability in the field.

Going into teaching, I set a goal and it was to exit the classroom at some point and to find something that continues to use the skill sets that I developed, but maybe in a different capacity. So, yeah, I am planning on leaving very soon—within the next year. I see a difference between the field of education and the act of educating because the field of education has become a battleground for things that exist beyond a kid's life. If you think about Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, all the things that are happening in the ecosystem are seeping into the mesosystem, the microbes. Those things are taking over so that you can't necessarily even teach a lesson and have it be effective. So yes, I'm absolutely planning on exiting education as an institution. (Participant 1, TCT)

This perspective highlights the growing mismatch between pedagogical intent and institutional realities, leading this educator to disengage from the profession despite their dedication to students.

Financial Barriers to Long-Term Sustainability

A recurring theme among the two TCTs considering departure is the financial strain associated with independent school teaching, particularly for those without dual-income support structures.

Yes, unfortunately. As much as I love teaching, I can't sustain myself financially in this field. The only setting I want to teach in is an independent school, but the pay just doesn't allow me to live comfortably as a single person supporting family members. It's that 'Black Tax' kinda thing. If I had a partner supplementing my income, I might have stayed, but that's not my reality. I've already secured something else outside of teaching, so this is actually my last year teaching to be transparent with you. (Participant 12, TCT)

This finding illustrates the tension between professional commitment and economic feasibility, as financial precarity can force even passionate educators to explore alternative career paths.

Overview of Findings

The findings show that TCTs have a wide range of commitment levels, from those who are deeply dedicated to those actively planning to leave. This variation highlights how personal passion, financial stability, institutional support, and larger systemic issues all shape the long-term career decisions of teachers. Out of the six TCT participants, two (Participants 1 and 12) have already decided to leave teaching, citing financial challenges, and frustration with the education system as their main reasons. Their experiences suggest that even teachers who love the act of teaching can feel pushed out

when the realities of the profession make it unsustainable.

On the other end of the spectrum, one participant (Participant 5) is fully committed to staying, mainly because of the stability and familiarity teaching provides. This shows that for some educators, commitment is less about passion and more about practicality—sticking with what feels safe and known rather than taking risks on something new. Other teachers fall somewhere in between. Participants 7 and 10 aren't actively looking to leave, but they're open to opportunities if the right one comes along—whether that's a job that aligns more with their personal interests or offers a better work-life balance. Their responses suggest that for some, commitment isn't black and white; it's dependent on circumstances staying favorable.

Meanwhile, Participant 8 is highly committed but acknowledges moments of doubt, a feeling many teachers can likely relate to. Even those who love the profession sometimes wonder if there's something else out there, especially during difficult school years.

What This Means

These findings make it clear that teacher retention is about more than just passion. Even teachers who love their work may leave if the pay isn't enough, if they feel unsupported, or if the system makes their job harder than it needs to be.

1. Financial struggles and systemic challenges push some teachers out, even if they love the work.
2. For others, stability, relationships, and lifestyle factors keep them in the classroom.

3. Some teachers aren't looking to leave, but they are not ruling it out either. Their future in teaching depends on whether the job continues to meet their needs.

Ultimately, these findings suggest that independent schools need to do more than just foster a passion for teaching—they also need to address real concerns like workload, salaries, and career growth opportunities. Understanding what makes teachers stay or leave is essential for improving retention, which will be explored further in the next sections.

Comparative Commitment: Focus Group Insights on CCTs vs. TCTs

This section draws exclusively from the focus group session conducted with both CCTs and TCTs. Participants engaged in a reflective and comparative discussion about their long-term commitment to teaching. While both groups expressed varying levels of dedication, the focus group illuminated nuanced psychological, experiential, and motivational differences in how CCTs and TCTs approach their career trajectories in independent schools.

The Role of Experience in Career Commitment

One of the most revealing differences between CCTs and TCTs lies in how they arrived at teaching and how that impacts their sense of professional certainty. CCTs express a deep confidence in their choice, often comparing it favorably to previous careers that were less fulfilling. Because they have experienced alternative fields, they tend to frame their commitment to teaching as a deliberate and reaffirmed choice rather than a default path. “For me, having had a whole different life, or even multiple lives before I came to teaching, gives me a real sort of strength or confidence in my choice.”

(Participant 4, CCT). TCTs, in contrast, often entered teaching straight out of formal education and, while many are highly satisfied, they sometimes question what else might have been possible had they explored other career paths first. This sense of curiosity or mild professional restlessness does not necessarily indicate dissatisfaction, but rather a latent wondering about alternative possibilities.

I don't wonder if I would be happier in a different job, but I like wonder if I wonder if I would be happier in a different job. If that makes sense. Like, there are times where I sort of go like, you know, I started teaching when I was 22 and I have these sort of existential moments where I'm like, am I going to just do this? Is this all I'm going to do? (TCT)

Stability vs. Informed Conviction: The Marriage Analogy

The focus group introduced a compelling metaphor that captured the psychological distinction between CCTs and TCTs in terms of their long-term commitment to the teaching profession. One TCT participant described the difference between the two groups as akin to marrying one's high school sweetheart versus dating widely before settling down:

I think it's fair to say that traditionally certified teachers are like marrying your high school sweetheart without ever playing the field. Over time, they might feel like they're missing out on something, but because they love the security of the relationship, it's like, 'I don't have to find out, but I'm definitely fantasizing about leaving this marriage, right?' But career changers? They're the ones who stayed single for a while, played the field, and realized, 'Oh, I've dated, and it's a rough

pool out there. I know this is for me. (Participant 10, TCT)

This analogy sheds light on a critical psychological distinction: while TCTs often demonstrate commitment rooted in stability and predictability, CCTs frame their commitment as an informed conviction. That is, having experienced the demands and dissatisfaction of prior careers, CCTs reaffirm their decision to teach with greater certainty. From the perspective of SCCT, this reflects strong outcome expectations and growing self-efficacy, shaped by comparative life experience (Lent et al., 1994).

Another TCT extended this metaphor to differentiate between their personal and professional commitments:

I got married this summer, and I did not marry my high school sweetheart, thank God. I did date those terrible people, so I'm more secure in my marriage. But with my career, I committed so early as a science teacher that I do sometimes wonder what else is out there. However, I don't actually think I would leave—I guess it's just nice to fantasize about sometimes. (Participant 7, TCT)

In contrast, CCTs often express certainty about their career choice by comparing it to failed or unfulfilling paths:

I have the knowledge of having dated a bunch of terrible people in my 20s to know how lucky I am to be married. It's just like teaching. I did a different career, so I know how lucky I am to be a teacher. And so that definitely gives me the confidence and reassurance that even on the tough days, I'm in the right building—I'm in the right place. (Participant 6, CCT)

From the lens of SDT, this confidence reflects high levels of internalized autonomy and relatedness—two core psychological needs that, when fulfilled, support long-term motivation and commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2000). CCTs appear to reaffirm their identity and values through teaching, making their choice not just rational, but deeply self-congruent.

Security vs. Reinvention: What Drives Long-Term Commitment?

Beyond the metaphor, the focus group revealed a broader theme: TCTs and CCTs are driven by distinct psychological anchors. TCTs frequently associate their commitment to teaching with professional security, whereas CCTs describe it as a fulfilling reinvention of their career identity. This divergence shapes how each group perceives and navigates the future. For example, one CCT likened their clarity about teaching to their clarity about marriage:

I was able to sort of look at it and be like, you know, this is a place where I am really happy and I feel really stable in my life and things do feel right, and I know what it feels like when something feels right. And then when I met a woman who is now my wife, I felt the same way. I felt like, yeah, this feels right. This feels like teaching. (Participant 4, CCT)

This alignment between emotional fulfillment and professional identity reflects SDT's core premise that intrinsic motivation is sustained when work supports psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). CCTs, having already exited careers that failed to meet these needs, now find stability and satisfaction in teaching.

By contrast, three TCTs described their commitment as grounded more in consistency than deep existential fit:

There's a lot of lifestyle smoothness right now that I would have to give up or put at risk to revisit anything else different. So, this is what I will do because I like it.

You know, I'm not stuck. I don't hate it. (Participant 5, TCT)

This comment reflects a form of career satisfaction based on equilibrium—a key idea in SCCT that acknowledges how environmental supports and manageable demands can reinforce commitment even in the absence of overt passion (Lent et al., 1994). In this case, the absence of discontent reinforces the desire to stay.

In essence, CCTs remain because teaching offers meaning, autonomy, and relational fulfillment. TCTs stay because teaching offers stability, structure, and identity continuity. Both groups are committed, but for different psychological reasons.

Thematic Summary and Implications

The focus group discussion illuminated key psychological and experiential differences in how CCTs and TCTs relate to long-term commitment in the teaching profession. These differences suggest distinct patterns of engagement, motivation, and vulnerability to career transitions. CCTs demonstrated a strong and reaffirmed sense of career commitment, often grounded in prior dissatisfaction with other professional fields. Their reflections indicated a deep conviction that teaching aligns with their values, identity, and purpose. Having explored other careers, CCTs described teaching not only as a fulfilling profession but also as their most stable and meaningful option. Notably, none of the CCTs expressed immediate intentions to leave the profession, and even

Participant 3—who was in his first year of teaching—expressed strong satisfaction and intent to remain in the field.

TCTs, by contrast, while still committed, expressed more ambivalence about long-term continuation. Their reflections revealed periodic “what if” thinking and subtle emotional distancing from the profession—especially among those who had never worked outside of education. This was most evident in the cases of Participant 1 and Participant 12, both of whom are actively planning to exit teaching by the next academic year. For four out of six TCTs, the comfort of teaching’s predictability was a primary reason for staying, rather than a reaffirmed passion or belief in the profession’s ongoing alignment with their evolving identities.

The marriage analogy, which emerged organically in the focus group, vividly captured these differences. CCTs likened their commitment to that of someone who has dated widely and confidently chosen a life partner, while TCTs described their path as more akin to marrying their high school sweetheart—sometimes secure, sometimes stable, but occasionally infused with curiosity about what might have been.

Ultimately, both groups derived meaning from teaching, but in qualitatively distinct ways. CCTs found confidence and validation in the contrast between teaching and their previous careers, making them less risk-averse and more secure in their choice. TCTs, on the other hand, often remained out of loyalty, habit, or the institutional security the profession offered, rather than as a result of continuous recommitment. These findings suggest that CCTs may be more likely to remain in education long-term, provided the profession continues to offer fulfillment and alignment with their redefined

identities. TCTs, while foundationally committed, may require more opportunities for renewal, professional growth, and re-engagement to counteract stagnation and preempt attrition. As such, teacher retention strategies should be tailored to the psychological profiles and career narratives of each group—a topic that will be further explored in Chapter 5.

*Retention Challenges: Burnout, Job Dissatisfaction, & External Career Opportunities
Among (CCTs)*

While career changers often enter the teaching profession with a renewed sense of purpose, they are not immune to the systemic and institutional challenges that impact long-term retention. Many CCTs in this study expressed varying degrees of burnout, administrative dissatisfaction, and external career considerations, often shaped by the contrast between their former professions and the realities of independent school teaching.

Unlike TCTs many of whom had envisioned a lifelong trajectory in education, CCTs bring with them the experience of other careers, which can provide both resilience and a critical lens on institutional shortcomings. As a result, their commitment is often contingent upon how well the teaching profession aligns with their long-term goals, personal fulfillment, and institutional support. This section examines three central retention challenges: burnout, job dissatisfaction, and external career opportunities.

Burnout: Does Passion Have Limits?

One of the prevailing themes among CCTs was the tension between their initial enthusiasm for teaching and the long-term sustainability of the profession. While many

career changers entered teaching with intrinsic motivation, they also experienced periods of exhaustion—some fleeting, some persistent. Participant 3 described the physical and mental toll of adjusting to teaching, noting that the sheer structural shift in lifestyle was exhausting:

The schedule was a killer. I came from a field where my hours were flexible, and suddenly I had to be up at 5:45 AM every day, in the classroom by 8:15AM, and constantly 'on' until the day ended. That was a huge adjustment. (Participant 3, CCT)

For the five remaining others, burnout was not necessarily a daily experience, but a periodic reckoning with the demands of the profession. Participant 11 described his first year as an overwhelming convergence of personal and professional stress:

The first year was brutal. I gained 30 pounds, I was constantly exhausted, and I was just trying to keep everything together. It's wild how much teaching demands of you—mentally, physically, emotionally. (Participant 11, CCT)

Participant 9, however, framed burnout as a temporary phase rather than a persistent threat to his commitment, noting that experience and adaptation played a significant role in overcoming initial struggles:

Yeah, my first year was rough. I think I was just trying to survive. But then something clicked—I got better at managing my time, I stopped over-preparing for everything, and I realized I could actually enjoy the job without it consuming me. (Participant 9, CCT)

These accounts highlight the reality that while CCTs bring a sense of renewed purpose to education, the adjustment period can be taxing. Notably, however, none of the participants cited burnout alone as a reason for leaving. Instead, their continued commitment appeared contingent upon institutional support and work-life balance.

Administrative Frustration and Job Dissatisfaction—the Institutional Reality

A dominant factor impacting retention among CCTs was dissatisfaction with school administration. While all participants valued the autonomy of independent schools, they simultaneously expressed frustration with bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of teacher support, and institutional rigidity.

Participant 9 was particularly vocal about the stark contrast between what administration prioritized versus what actually mattered in the classroom: “There are things I would just roll my eyes at—like, ‘This is what we’re spending time debating?’ The meetings, the administrative red tape—it’s exhausting.” (Participant 9, CCT)

Similarly, Participant 6 described his frustration with the misalignment between administrative decisions and teacher input:

There’s this expectation that teachers should just adapt to whatever changes are thrown at them, but rarely are we actually asked for our input. We’re the ones in the classroom every day, but somehow decisions are being made from a completely disconnected place. (Participant 6, CCT)

For CCTs, independent school environments were preferable to their prior careers, but this did not shield them from the frustrations of navigating administrative inefficiencies. This dissatisfaction was not necessarily a deal breaker, but it created an additional burden

that compounded other retention challenges.

External Career Opportunities: Teaching as a Long-Term Commitment

Unlike TCTs, many of whom saw teaching as their singular career trajectory, CCTs often framed their commitment as a choice rather than a default path. Their professional backgrounds allowed them to perceive alternative career opportunities, yet their interviews revealed a strong, enduring dedication to teaching. Participant 2, for example, expressed contentment with teaching but acknowledged that external factors could shift his trajectory, although not very likely:

I enjoy what I'm doing, and I don't have any immediate plans to leave, but I also know that if another opportunity came up that aligned with my interests, I would consider it. That being said, I don't see myself pursuing anything else—I'm happy here. (Participant 2, CCT)

Participant 11 articulated a contingent commitment, citing both his family situation and the possibility of other life pursuits:

I love what I do, and I plan to stay as long as I love it. But I also know that in ten years, I might wake up and want to do something completely different. My wife wants a farm—we might end up doing that one day. But that's years away, and right now, I don't see myself leaving this career anytime soon. (Participant 11, CCT)

Participant 3 reinforced the idea that his experience in other fields had given him an even stronger commitment to teaching: “I think about my old jobs, and there's just no comparison. Teaching is hard, but it's meaningful. I've had jobs that paid more, but I

never felt this kind of satisfaction” (Participant 3, CCT). While TCTs sometimes wondered whether they had missed out on other professions, CCTs demonstrated a unique confidence in their choice, precisely because they had explored other career paths before committing to teaching.

Overview of the Enduring Commitment of Career Changer Teachers

Contrary to common assumptions that career changers may be more prone to leaving due to their varied professional backgrounds, the findings suggest that CCTs exhibit strong, reaffirmed commitment to teaching. Their prior career experiences serve as a reference point, reinforcing their belief that education provides a sense of fulfillment, stability, and personal meaning that was lacking in previous roles. While administrative frustrations and external career opportunities exist, CCTs overwhelmingly expressed confidence in their long-term commitment to teaching. The very experience of transitioning from another field appears to have solidified their belief that they have made the right career choice—a stark contrast to TCTs, who, as explored in the previous section, were more likely to express doubt or consider alternative paths. The next section will examine whether TCTs experience similar or distinct patterns of burnout, job dissatisfaction, and external career considerations, providing further insights into the complexities of teacher retention.

Retention Challenges Among TCTs: Burnout, Job Dissatisfaction, and External Career Opportunities

Retention in teaching is influenced by multiple factors, including burnout, dissatisfaction with job conditions, and the lure of alternative career opportunities. Unlike CCTs, whose varied professional backgrounds often reinforced their commitment to teaching, the narratives of TCTs reveal a more complex relationship with retention. While some remain steadfast in their roles, others grapple with systemic challenges, particularly dissatisfaction with administration, financial instability, and the appeal of other professional paths.

Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion: The Invisible Weight of Teaching

While participants did not report severe long-term burnout, all TCTs acknowledged experiencing periods of exhaustion, particularly in the early years of their careers. The emotional labor of teaching, combined with administrative pressures, contributed to this burnout. Participant 1 reflected on their struggles:

I think in my first couple of years, I didn't realize how much emotional energy teaching required. It's not just about lesson planning and grading—it's about being emotionally available to your students. That's what drained me the most. And honestly, there were times when I wondered, 'Can I do this long-term?'
(Participant 1, TCT)

Similarly, Participant 7 described the constant mental toll that teaching exacted, particularly in navigating difficult student relationships:

I had a student who was just really hard to reach—disruptive, disengaged, and sometimes outright hostile. And after a while, I started to realize how much it was affecting me outside of school, like I was carrying the stress home. There’s only so much emotional energy you have, and when it’s constantly being depleted, it’s hard to feel like you’re thriving in your job. (Participant 7, TCT)

Participant 8 echoed this sentiment, describing how the unpredictability of student behavior and the lack of clear institutional support contributed to exhaustion: “I love my students, but I also feel like some days I’m putting out fires all day long. And when there’s no real system in place to support teachers, it just builds up.” (Participant 8, TCT). Although all TCT participants acknowledged feeling fatigued in those early years, not all characterized their experiences as full-blown burnout. Instead, three participants framed their exhaustion as a natural part of the profession, something that required conscious effort to manage rather than an insurmountable barrier to retention. Participant 5 (TCT) noted: “I’ve had exhausting years, sure. But I’ve also figured out ways to keep myself balanced. I’ve found a rhythm that works for me.”

Job Dissatisfaction: Disillusionment with Administration and Institutional Culture

Dissatisfaction with school administration emerged as a key theme among TCTs. Two TCTs reported frustrations with leadership decisions, lack of professional agency, and feeling undervalued. Participant 12, who ultimately decided to leave the profession, highlighted the disconnect between teachers and administrators: “The hardest part wasn’t the teaching—it was dealing with leadership that didn’t listen. It’s frustrating to know that you’re doing good work in the classroom, but the people making the

big decisions don't value your voice.” (Participant 12, TCT)

Participant 1 expressed frustration with a culture of inertia that stifled innovation and described feeling constrained by institutional norms: “There were moments when I wanted to try something new, but the response was always, ‘Well, this is how we’ve always done it.’ That kind of mentality is incredibly demotivating, because it makes you feel like your ideas don’t matter.” (Participant 1, TCT)

Collectively TCT dissatisfaction was rooted in financial instability, particularly for those without external financial support. Participant 12 explicitly linked their decision to leave teaching to financial constraints: “I love this job, but I can’t sustain myself on this salary. If I had a partner supplementing my income, maybe I could justify staying. But that’s not my reality.” (Participant 12, TCT)

Participant 10 also shared concerns about workload expectations versus compensation, expressing frustration over the imbalance between effort and reward: “There’s a disconnect between how much is expected of us and what we’re actually compensated for. It doesn’t add up, and after a while, that starts to wear on you.” (Participant 10, TCT)

External Career Opportunities: The Temptation of Alternative Paths

Unlike CCTs, who often saw teaching as a deliberate and final career choice, TCTs entertained the possibility of leaving for other professions. The notion of an “exit plan” was especially prevalent among those who had always viewed teaching as a stepping stone rather than a lifelong career. Both Participant 1 and Participant 12—who share similar backgrounds as queer educators of color with masters degrees from Brown

University—stated that this was their final year in education. Despite working at different Rhode Island independent schools, their narratives closely aligned.

Participant 1 openly discussed their plans to leave education, citing a growing disillusionment with the field:

Going into teaching, I set a goal to exit the classroom at some point. I'm planning on leaving very soon—within the next year. The field of education has become a battleground for things that exist beyond a kid's life, and I don't want to keep fighting a system that feels broken. (Participant 1, TCT)

Similarly, Participant 12 noted: “I've reached a point where I know this isn't sustainable for me long-term. I've given everything I can to this profession, but I also know that I need to do what's right for me.” (Participant 12, TCT)

Conversely, three TCTs were resolute in their long-term commitment, despite recognizing the appeal of other careers. Participant 5 exemplified this mindset: “This will be my career until I retire. I thought about becoming a genetic counselor at one point, but why give up now? I like what I do, and there's a level of stability that I appreciate.” (Participant 5, TCT)

Summary

While three TCTs demonstrated strong commitment, all TCT participants experienced burnout during their early years. Three TCTs expressed dissatisfaction with administration. All TCTs expressed how financial instability was a major factor of concern; however, only three TCTs expressed that it made retention difficult at times. Notably, Participants 1 and 12—both queer educators of color from similar educational

backgrounds—ultimately decided to leave education after experiencing similar frustrations with institutional structures and financial constraints. Unlike CCTs, who often viewed teaching as a conscious and final career shift, TCTs entertained alternative career pathways, either actively or passively. Moreover, dissatisfaction with school administration emerged as a prominent challenge amongst all TCT participants, reinforcing the need for institutional changes that prioritize teacher well-being and professional agency. These findings emphasize the necessity of stronger retention strategies for traditionally certified teachers, particularly in addressing administrative challenges, financial sustainability, and professional growth opportunities.

In the next section, we will explore how both CCTs and TCTs navigated their initial transition into the teaching profession, including the training and preparation experiences that shaped their early years.

Training and Preparation Challenges Among Career Changer Teachers (CCTs)

The transition from a prior profession into teaching presents significant challenges for CCTs many of whom enter the field without formal pedagogical training. Unlike their TCT counterparts, CCTs frequently lack structured preparation and must navigate their first years in the classroom through trial and error. This section explores how the absence of formal teacher training shaped their transition, the ways in which they sought mentorship from trusted colleagues, and the impact of inadequate professional development offerings. Despite these challenges, CCTs found that their non-traditional backgrounds encouraged pedagogical flexibility, allowing them to experiment with teaching approaches that ultimately benefited their students.

Lack of Formal Training and Its Consequences

Unlike traditionally trained educators, CCTs in this study entered teaching without completing a structured teacher preparation program. This absence of formal pedagogical training made their early years particularly difficult, requiring them to self-teach essential classroom management strategies, curriculum design, and assessment methods. All 6 CCT participants described how this initial gap in knowledge created a steep learning curve.

I had to create an entire curriculum from scratch. Public schools, from what I've learned, they have very set curricula, with worksheets, tests, and structured guidance. But in my independent school, I was handed a book list and told to figure it out. That was daunting. (Participant 3, CCT)

I did not know what I was getting into. I thought teaching math was just about putting formulas on the board. But very quickly, I realized that teaching is 5% content and 95% navigating teenager's emotions and learning processes. I had no training for that. (Participant 6, CCT)

The abrupt transition into the classroom meant that CCTs often learned through direct experience rather than through structured training. Two CCTs described experiencing imposter syndrome, as they grappled with the complexities of student engagement, behavior management, and differentiated instruction.

I think everyone had those feelings of imposter syndrome. I was 23, and some of my students were 19. I had no formal background in teaching, and yet I was

expected to command a classroom. It took years to feel like I actually belonged in this role. (Participant 4, CCT)

The Critical Role of Informal Mentorship

Given the lack of formal preparation, mentorship from colleagues played a crucial role in helping CCTs find their footing in the classroom. Without structured mentorship programs in place, most CCTs had to actively seek out experienced teachers for guidance. “I had to rely on my colleagues. There was no formal training, no one checking in regularly. If I needed help, I had to go knock on someone’s door and hope they had time to answer my questions.” (Participant 2, CCT)

I had never read ‘Their Eyes Were Watching God,’ before teaching it. A colleague sat me down and walked me through its literary significance. That conversation completely reshaped my approach, and I realized how much I had to learn. But there was no system in place—if I hadn’t reached out, I would have struggled alone. (Participant 3, CCT)

Despite the lack of structured support, these informal mentoring relationships were often transformative. All six CCTs described how one-on-one guidance from experienced teachers helped them develop effective teaching strategies and avoid critical early mistakes.

Inadequate Professional Development and the Need for Self-Guided Learning

PD opportunities varied widely among CCTs, but yet all six CCTs found that the offerings provided by their schools were either inadequate or irrelevant to their immediate classroom needs. Faculty meetings and required PD sessions often felt

detached from the actual challenges they faced in the classroom.

Faculty meetings were almost never useful. The topics weren't relevant to what I needed—like how to manage a class, how to structure a syllabus, how to actually teach. I had to find that information on my own. (Participant 4, CCT)

CCTs took it upon themselves to seek out external resources, enrolling in workshops, watching instructional videos, or reading pedagogical research independently. “I did a lot of professional development on my own, particularly in how to teach students with learning differences and ADHD. It wasn't something my school offered, but I knew I needed it.” (Participant 9, CCT) While some schools provided professional development, these offerings were often geared toward teachers with formal training, leaving CCTs to fill in the gaps on their own.

The Hidden Benefit: Open-Mindedness and Experimental Teaching

Interestingly, all six CCTs noted that the lack of formal training also had an unexpected advantage: it freed them from rigid pedagogical frameworks and allowed them to experiment with novel approaches to teaching. “Since I wasn't trained traditionally, I didn't have a set idea of what a classroom should look like. I tried different methods until I found what worked for my students” (Participant 6, CCT). “I was less concerned about doing things ‘the right way’ and more focused on figuring out what engaged my students. That meant I could be more flexible, more creative in my approach” (Participant 2, CCT). This adaptability allowed CCTs to incorporate elements from their previous careers into their teaching styles. They all noted that their unconventional paths helped them bring fresh perspectives to the classroom, which

students often found engaging. “My background in theater helped me teach literature in a way that felt alive. I didn’t just lecture—I performed. That energy made my class more engaging.” (Participant 3, CCT)

The findings illustrate that while the lack of formal training posed significant initial challenges for CCTs—including imposter syndrome, limited institutional support, and inadequate professional development—these barriers also catalyzed a deep sense of self-reliance, the pursuit of informal mentorship, and an openness to pedagogical experimentation. CCTs expressed frustration that faculty meetings and school-provided PD rarely addressed their most urgent needs—such as classroom management, differentiated instruction, or foundational teaching strategies. As a result, they turned to external resources and peer networks to fill in critical knowledge gaps. This self-guided learning process not only shaped their instructional approach but also helped them build confidence and ownership over their teaching. Importantly, the very struggle to adapt often reinforced their long-term commitment to the profession: by developing personalized, student-centered strategies rooted in flexibility and creativity. In doing so, CCTs found renewed purpose and career choice satisfaction. These findings suggest that nontraditional entry into teaching, while challenging, can also foster highly motivated educators whose resilience and adaptability contribute meaningfully to independent school communities. These insights set the stage for the next section, which will explore how these early challenges and sources of support compare to the experiences of TCTs.

Training and Professional Readiness Among Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)

TCTs frequently pointed to student teaching as one of the most invaluable aspects of their certification programs. Unlike CCTs, who had to rely on trial and error when learning classroom management and instructional techniques, TCTs benefited from supervised teaching experiences before assuming full responsibility for a classroom. Participant 7 reflected on the role that structured training played in building confidence before entering the profession:

I got my master's at Brown. It was a Master of Arts in Teaching with a concentration in secondary education. Even though I teach high school science now, I think it was extremely helpful because it was really focused on the bare-bones, basics of teaching. We had content classes, but the real game-changer was student teaching. (Participant 7, TCT)

Similarly, Participant 5 emphasized that student teaching provided an essential bridge between theory and practice:

The main reason I went to Brown for my certification was that I loved the idea of teaching, but I knew that I would need structure. I had all these creative ideas, but I wanted to know how to implement them effectively. The program gave me a framework to evaluate what works and what doesn't, rather than going in and just throwing things at the wall and hoping they stick. (Participant 5, TCT)

Another key distinction between TCTs and CCTs was the availability of structured mentorship. While CCTs had to actively seek out experienced colleagues for

guidance, TCTs were paired with mentor teachers during their student teaching placements. This built-in support system helped them refine their instructional methods and troubleshoot classroom challenges before entering the profession independently. “My mentor had a habit of having a weekly one-on-one with each of his student teachers. That was the single most effective way to help me feel supported in my job” (Participant 7, TCT).

The presence of a formalized support network allowed TCTs to develop confidence in their teaching abilities before they were fully responsible for their own classrooms. This was a stark contrast to CCTs, who frequently reported struggling alone in their early years due to the absence of built-in mentorship.

Professional Development: Redundant for TCTs, Yet Essential for CCTs

One of the most striking differences between TCTs and CCTs was their perception of PD. While CCTs needed PD that addressed their specific gaps in training, they frequently found the PD offerings inadequate and unrelated to their immediate needs. In contrast, TCTs—who had already received comprehensive training—often viewed PD as redundant and uninspiring rather than as an essential learning tool.

Most of the professional development that’s helpful has been in-house. When we bring somebody in from the outside, they spend two hours explaining what Google Classroom is, and I’m sitting there thinking, ‘I know all of this already—let’s move on.’ (Participant 8, TCT)

Additionally, Participant 12 (TCT) stated, “Faculty meetings were supposed to be professional development, but they rarely addressed the real challenges I was facing in the classroom.” This contrast highlights a critical issue in how PD is structured within independent schools: while CCTs needed targeted training to compensate for their lack of formal preparation, they were often given generalized sessions that did not meet their needs. At the same time, TCTs, who already had pedagogical training, found many PD offerings unnecessary. This misalignment suggests a lack of differentiation in professional development opportunities, ultimately limiting its usefulness for both groups. Participant 7 (TCT), “The best PD I ever had was just sitting down with my department head and asking questions. That one-on-one time was infinitely more valuable than any mandated workshop.” This sentiment highlights the greater importance of personalized mentorship and informal peer learning over standardized PD sessions, particularly for experienced teachers.

Burnout and Exhaustion: Expected, Yet Manageable

While TCTs benefited from a strong foundation in pedagogical training, they still encountered the inevitable exhaustion of their early years in teaching. However, unlike CCTs, who often felt blindsided by the mental and emotional toll of the job, TCTs were prepared for these challenges and had the tools to navigate them.

I didn't feel super confident in my first two years. But that was expected. I knew the exhaustion was coming, but I also knew that by year three or four, I would hit my stride. And that's exactly what happened. (Participant 1, TCT)

This sense of preparedness—knowing what to expect and having strategies to cope with

it—was a key distinction between TCTs and CCTs. While CCTs frequently mentioned feeling overwhelmed and unprepared, TCTs were more likely to view early-career exhaustion as a temporary phase rather than a potential long-term deterrent. Participant 7 (TCT), “I think I had a normal amount of insecurity and naivete as a first-year teacher. I made a billion mistakes. But I also had the tools to learn from my mistakes, and that has definitely helped me over time.”

This suggests that formal teacher training programs do not eliminate the difficulties of teaching, but they provide a structured framework for managing them. TCTs still experienced stress and burnout, but their training gave them a roadmap for navigating these challenges in a way that CCTs had to discover independently.

Overview of Structured Advantage of Certification

The experiences of TCTs illustrate the critical role that structured preparation plays in shaping early career experiences. While CCTs had to navigate teaching through trial and error, TCTs benefited from formal training, structured mentorship, and student teaching experiences that eased their transition into full-time teaching. However, the findings also highlight the limitations of professional development in independent schools. TCTs, having already received pedagogical training, found most PD sessions redundant and unnecessary, while CCTs needed targeted support but often did not receive it. This discrepancy highlights a need for more differentiated and meaningful professional learning opportunities.

Ultimately, while TCTs were better prepared to manage the inevitable challenges of teaching, preparation alone was not enough to ensure long-term retention. Some, like

Participant 1 and Participant 12, ultimately decided to leave the profession due to factors beyond their training, including financial constraints and dissatisfaction with school administration. Their experiences highlight that even with strong pedagogical foundations, systemic challenges such as inadequate compensation and institutional support play a critical role in shaping teacher's long-term career decisions.

Focus Group Discussion: Contrasting Training and Preparation Between Career Changer Teachers (CCTs) and Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCTs)

The focus group discussion between CCTs and TCTs illuminated the stark contrast in how each group experienced their entry into the teaching profession. Despite these differences, the conversation also highlighted a fundamental truth: no amount of training can fully prepare an educator for the realities of teaching. Both CCTs and TCTs alike face exhaustion, long hours, and the emotional toll of the profession—particularly in their first few years. However, after about three years, most teachers found their footing, developing confidence and balance in their professional lives. A particularly resonant analogy emerged during the discussion, comparing teaching to diving into deep water:

TCTs are told in advance that the water will be cold and rough. Not only are they warned, but they are also given wetsuits, goggles, and proper training to handle the plunge. So when they finally dive in, they still feel the shock of the freezing water, but at least they were prepared for the impact and had the right equipment to adapt quickly. (Participant 10, TCT)

Participant 6 stated, “For CCTs, it’s more like being pushed in with no warning. You hit the water midair, and only then do you realize you have to figure out how to swim while you’re already sinking.”

This analogy resonated with many in the discussion, as it accurately reflected how TCTs felt a sense of preparation but not immunity to the stressors of teaching, while CCTs felt completely disoriented upon entry into the profession. While TCTs had clear instructional frameworks, student teaching experience, and exposure to the classroom setting prior to becoming full-time teachers, CCTs found themselves having to learn everything in real-time, without a structured support system.

Another analogy emerged in the discussion, emphasizing the difference between formal preparation and innate ability.

I’m going to throw in one more analogy. I would say that it’s kind of like playing music. So in terms of the traditionally certified teachers, you can learn how to read music, and that is an important thing to do. And then there are some people who are just naturally gifted—they pick up an instrument, or, like, you know, they can sing. At the end of the day, both of those people are going to be playing music. When it comes to teaching, it depends on what your goal is. Do you want to pass on the love of music? Then you don’t necessarily need to be traditionally certified, although it could help. But if you want to compose or develop curriculum, then you probably need a deeper understanding of the structure. Teaching works both ways, but the main point is that you have the love of music to begin with. (TCT Participant 12)

This insight raised an important point about how training and experience interact in teaching. A love for the profession and the ability to connect with students are crucial, but without an understanding of pedagogy, curriculum development, and assessment strategies, a teacher may struggle to translate that passion into effective classroom practices.

Training as a Head Start—But Not an Exemption from the Struggles of Teaching

TCTs collectively acknowledged that their training gave them an undeniable advantage in terms of backward planning, curriculum design, and classroom management. Their structured programs exposed them to lesson scaffolding, assessment strategies, and educational psychology, allowing them to enter the profession with a framework to rely on. Participant 5 (TCT) stated,

The training didn't make me a better teacher right away, but it did make me a more prepared teacher. There's a difference. I still had to spend extra hours planning lessons, still had moments of self-doubt, still went home drained some days. But I had tools. I had frameworks to fall back on when things got tough.

That didn't mean I was automatically great at teaching—just that I knew where to start when things weren't going well. (Participant 5, TCT)

However, all TCTs were adamant that training did not insulate them from burnout or exhaustion. Having a roadmap did not mean they did not struggle; it simply meant they had a guide when they did. They still endured long nights of planning and grading, as well as emotional and physical fatigue. However, unlike CCTs, they had a level of predictability—they knew what to expect, which made the stress more manageable.

Participant 1 (TCT) stated,

Training gave me a head start, sure. But did it make me immune to burnout? Absolutely not. I knew the stress was coming—I had professors warn me about the late nights, the endless grading, the emotional labor—but knowing something is coming doesn't make it easier to deal with. It just meant that when the exhaustion hit, I didn't panic. I knew how to swim through it, but that didn't mean I wanted to keep swimming forever.

CCTs: Learning in Real-Time, Taking Risks, and Filling in the Gaps

CCTs in the focus group frequently described the frustration of having to self-educate on pedagogical best practices that TCTs had learned through formal coursework. Many found themselves scrambling to understand core teaching concepts, feeling as though they were playing catch-up in faculty meetings and professional development sessions.

I was totally lost when teachers would throw around terms like 'backward planning' and 'formative assessment.' These were things I had never even heard of, and suddenly I was expected to know how to do them. I had to figure it out on my own, or just quietly Google things during meetings so I didn't look clueless.

(Participant 3, CCT)

What was most difficult wasn't just figuring out how to lesson plan, it was understanding classroom culture. When I first started, I was too rigid. I treated my students the way I treated my team in my previous career, and I quickly realized that wasn't going to work. I had to learn how to adjust my approach, to become

more flexible, to listen more, and that took time. (Participant 9, CCT)

Even after finding a sense of rhythm after three years, CCTs continued to feel gaps in their knowledge.

I feel more confident now, but I still sometimes feel like there are missing pieces. Like, when I hear my colleagues talk about certain instructional strategies, I realize there are things they just know from their training that I had to pick up over time. I don't think it makes me a worse teacher, but I do think it's something I've had to work extra hard to fill in. (Participant 2, CCT)

Overview of Findings: Two Different Paths, One Common Challenge

The focus group discussion made it clear that structured training provides a head start, but does not eliminate struggle, and lack of training does not equate to failure.

- TCTs benefited from structured preparation but still faced burnout and stress in their early years.
- CCTs lacked formal preparation but demonstrated adaptability and creativity, though they continued to encounter knowledge gaps even after several years in the profession.
- After three years, most teachers found their footing, but CCTs still found themselves filling in missing pieces of their pedagogical knowledge.

Ultimately, teaching is a profession learned through doing. While TCTs entered with a structured foundation and CCTs had to construct theirs over time, both groups had to ultimately navigate their own path toward effectiveness and fulfillment in their careers.

School Culture Adjustment: CCTs and the Transition into Independent Schools

Transitioning from a previous career into teaching requires not only pedagogical adaptation but also an adjustment to school culture. CCTs and independent schools provided a level of autonomy that facilitated this transition, especially for those from creative, research-driven, or entrepreneurial backgrounds. However, autonomy alone did not eliminate the challenges of adjusting to independent school norms, faculty dynamics, and student expectations. CCTs frequently reflected on the contrast between the highly structured environments of their previous professions and the relative flexibility of independent schools.

Autonomy: A Defining Feature of Independent Schools

Across the board, CCTs expressed appreciation for the professional autonomy granted in independent schools. Many described this as a stark contrast to the bureaucratic or rigid structures of their previous careers, where decision-making was often slow and constrained by external regulations. In the independent school setting, they found creative freedom in designing curriculum, experimenting with teaching methodologies, and shaping their classroom environments.

When I was doing research, I was told what to do. I had to do what I was told.

And now, for the most part, I have full autonomy. I can teach storytelling how I want. I can teach neuroscience how I want. And they're very supportive.

(Participant 2, CCT)

For CCTs with artistic backgrounds, the ability to craft lessons around student

engagement rather than prescribed content was particularly rewarding. One participant who transitioned from the theater industry noted that autonomy allowed for a more immersive and student-driven learning experience:

In the theater world, creativity is non-negotiable. You adapt to the actors, the audience, the moment. When I came into teaching, I was prepared for restrictions, but instead, I found that I could build something entirely my own. It's like directing a play where I also get to write the script and choose the cast.

(Participant 11, CCT)

For those coming from corporate, research, or technical fields, this autonomy also extended to pedagogical innovation, allowing them to integrate industry-relevant skills into the classroom:

I created a neuroscience class from scratch—one that didn't follow a traditional test-and-quiz model but was more project-based. My department head loved it and greenlit it immediately. That level of trust in my expertise was unheard of in my last profession. (Participant 2, CCT)

The Challenge of Adjusting to Unwritten Norms

Despite the autonomy that CCTs enjoyed, many struggled to decode the unwritten rules and norms of independent schools. Unlike their TCT counterparts, who had extensive training in faculty culture, school traditions, and administrative expectations, CCTs often grappled with the subtleties of faculty interactions, student-teacher relationships, and institutional customs. One challenge cited by several participants was navigating faculty dynamics. Four CCTs described independent schools as collegial but

insular—where long-standing traditions and faculty bonds made it difficult for newcomers to integrate seamlessly. While they found professional freedom, they also encountered an unspoken expectation to conform to existing pedagogical cultures. Participant 6 (CCT) stated, “The school trusts you, but there’s also this underlying expectation that you don’t rock the boat too much. You have freedom, but within certain invisible guardrails. If you push too hard for change, you start feeling like an outsider.”

A Double-Edged Sword: Freedom Without Guidance

For CCTs, the transition into independent schools was both liberating and isolating. While they relished the independence, they also lacked structured support systems that could have eased their adjustment. Unlike TCTs, who benefited from formal teacher preparation programs that included mentorship, student teaching, and pedagogical frameworks, CCTs were often left to figure things out on their own. One participant described this as being “thrown into deep water without knowing what’s below.”

In my previous career, I was used to structure, even in creative work. There were always clear expectations, a step-by-step approach. Here, I felt like I had to learn the culture in real-time, and there were moments where I wasn’t sure if I was doing things ‘right’—not in terms of teaching, but in terms of fitting into the broader school environment. (Participant 3, CCT)

This experience highlights how these independent schools, while granting immense freedom, do not always provide clear guidance on institutional norms and expectations. While CCTs received onboarding, their unfamiliarity with independent school culture meant that adapting to faculty relationships, student expectations, and broader school

traditions took time. Many had to learn through observation and informal mentorship, gradually decoding the expectations placed upon them.

Student-Teacher Relationships May Be a New Adjustment

Unspoken expectations—though not explicitly stated—may be socially enforced in subtle ways, particularly in the area of student engagement:

- 1.) Independent schools tend to emphasize strong student-teacher relationships, advisory programs, and a holistic approach to education.
- 2.) CCTs coming from corporate or other professional backgrounds may not be accustomed to the level of student engagement expected beyond academics.
- 3.) Mentorship, extracurricular involvement, and faculty presence at student events may feel like additional, unspoken expectations they have to adapt to.

For CCTs as a collective, this shift was one of the most surprising aspects of their transition. In prior careers, workplace relationships were largely professional and transactional—centered on deliverables, deadlines, and performance metrics. The expectation that teachers not only educate but also build deep personal connections with students was both rewarding and, at times, overwhelming. Participant 9 (CCT) stated,

I was used to a work culture where you separate personal and professional life. In teaching, that separation doesn't exist in the same way. You have to be available to students outside of class, you have to invest in them beyond their academics, and that was an adjustment.

Participant 6 (CCT) stated, “At first, I didn't realize how much of my role would be pastoral. It's not just about content delivery; it's about mentorship, emotional support,

and helping students navigate their personal and academic growth.” While CCTs embraced these relationships over time, they noted that this was not an aspect of teaching they had anticipated—and one that required a mental and emotional adjustment.

Overview: The Intersection of Freedom, Adaptation, and Growth

For CCTs, adjusting to the culture of independent schools was a complex process shaped by autonomy, creative freedom, and the absence of formalized training structures. While they overwhelmingly cited independent schools as an ideal environment for their teaching philosophy and personal fulfillment, their adjustment was marked by a dual challenge: navigating the freedom to teach as they pleased while learning the unspoken expectations of their institutions.

The biggest advantage for CCTs was autonomy, which enhanced their career satisfaction and allowed them to implement innovative approaches. However, that same autonomy sometimes exacerbated the steep learning curve, as they lacked the formal mentorship or structured professional development that could have accelerated their adaptation. They leaned on colleagues for support, but this process was informal, often leaving them feeling like they were “figuring things out on the fly.”

Ultimately, CCTs found that independent schools aligned with their strengths, particularly those from artistic or research-based backgrounds who were accustomed to self-direction and unconventional thinking. The freedom they gained in independent schools validated their career switch, reinforcing their long-term commitment to teaching. However, their experiences also highlighted the need for better onboarding structures for

career changers, ensuring that autonomy does not come at the cost of initial disorientation and self-doubt.

School Culture Adjustment: TCTs and the Transition into Independent Schools

Transitioning to an independent school setting was, for most TCTs a welcome shift from the bureaucratic and rigid structures of public education. Across interviews, autonomy in curriculum development, greater trust from administration, and a sense of shared competence among colleagues emerged as key factors that made independent schools attractive. TCTs described the adjustment as smooth and refreshing—a space where they could finally focus on teaching without external pressures dictating their every move.

However, not all aspects of the transition were effortless. While independent schools provided an environment of professional trust and flexibility, they also came with unique cultural norms, expectations, and hidden constraints that required adjustment. Teachers described a strong sense of community, but also noted that the insular nature of some schools meant traditional hierarchies and long-standing institutional customs could be difficult to challenge.

A Welcome Shift: Autonomy and Professional Trust

The most commonly cited positive of independent schools was the autonomy that teachers had over their curriculum. Unlike in public school settings, where standardized testing and district-mandated curricula often dictate lesson plans, independent schools allowed TCTs the creative freedom to develop their own courses, select materials, and shape classroom experiences based on their expertise and teaching philosophy.

In an independent school setting, it's kind of a double-edged sword. Yes, there's autonomy in what I teach—I get to choose which books are in my syllabus and how I'm structuring my lessons. But then, in other ways, I felt my autonomy being limited on a more vague level. There are school politics—things you can and can't say in front of students—that I wasn't prepared for. (Participant 1, TCT)

Although autonomy was deeply valued, TCTs also acknowledged that freedom came with a silent set of expectations. Unlike public schools, where strict regulations left little room for interpretation, independent schools offered more flexibility—but with unspoken traditions and cultural norms that new teachers were expected to navigate intuitively.

In public school, if something needed to be changed, there was a clear process—data-driven, structured, bureaucratic, yes, but it was transparent. Here, the culture is different. Change happens through informal relationships, through who has influence in a given moment. That took some getting used to.

(Participant 12, TCT)

The Power of Community and Colleague Competence

Another major difference TCTs appreciated was the consistently high level of instructional quality among their colleagues. Whereas in public school settings, teachers often encountered wide disparities in competency due to varying levels of training and experience, TCTs in independent schools were surrounded by like-minded, passionate educators who valued pedagogy as much as they did.

In my previous school, I worked with some truly amazing teachers, but I also worked with people who were just coasting—teachers who had tenure and no

incentive to improve. Here, that's not really a thing. The baseline expectation is that you're a strong teacher. That makes such a difference. (Participant 5, TCT)

Beyond competence, a strong sense of community was frequently mentioned as a defining feature of independent schools. The smaller class sizes, close faculty-student relationships, and strong institutional traditions created an environment where teachers felt a deep connection to their school. Participant 7 (TCT), "What keeps me here is the relationships—the relationships with colleagues, with students, with families. That sense of connection really makes this a place where I feel like I belong." However, three TCTs expressed how this very sense of tight-knit community could also feel insular and resistant to change. Unlike public schools, where policies and procedures evolve based on district mandates and changing societal needs, independent schools tend to hold onto traditions more tightly. Participant 1 (TCT), "The answer is almost always going to be, 'Well, we've always done it this way.' Trying to push for change can feel impossible sometimes because tradition is such a big deal here."

Hidden Challenges—Adjusting to the Independent School Culture

While collectively all TCTs found independent school culture more supportive and fulfilling, they also highlighted some cultural expectations that took time to adjust to. One of these was the expectation for faculty to be deeply involved in the broader school community—attending student events, participating in advisory programs, and fostering relationships beyond the classroom. Participant 12 (TCT) stated,

In public school, your job is to teach. That's it. Here, teaching is just one part of the job. You're expected to go to student performances, have lunch with them,

show up to school events—it's a whole different level of involvement.

Another challenge was the lack of formal professional development. All six out of six TCTs noted that while they felt well-prepared from their teacher training programs, independent schools offered fewer structured opportunities for ongoing professional learning. Participant 10 (TCT) stated, "I appreciate that we're trusted as professionals, but I do wish there was more structured professional development. Public schools emphasize PD in a way that independent schools don't." Additionally, Participant 8 (TCT) stated, "The irony is that CCTs need more professional development, but they don't get it. TCTs don't really need it, but when we do have it, it's often redundant."

Overall, TCTs described their transition into independent schools as overwhelmingly positive, citing autonomy, professional trust, and strong relationships as key factors that made the adjustment worthwhile. Unlike CCTs, who often struggled with pedagogical gaps and a steep learning curve, TCTs entered independent schools fully equipped with the necessary skills and were able to focus on refining their teaching rather than learning the fundamentals. However, while most TCTs embraced the culture of independent schools, not everyone found it to be the right fit. Four out of six participants felt constrained by the unspoken rules and traditions that governed decision-making. All six TCTs found the expectation for faculty involvement beyond teaching to be overwhelming, especially for those who preferred a clearer work-life balance. Participant 5 stated (TCT),

I'm deeply grateful for the level of respect and trust we're given as educators

here. But at the same time, I can see how this isn't for everyone. It's a very specific kind of culture—you have to want to be fully embedded in it for it to work.

Ultimately, TCTs who valued flexibility, intellectual freedom, and strong professional relationships found independent schools to be a highly fulfilling environment. But for those who sought clearer boundaries between work and personal life or a more progressive approach to institutional change, the transition was not always seamless.

Conclusion: Final Synthesis of Research Findings

This study explored the career choice satisfaction and commitment of CCTs and TCTs in independent schools. Guided by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), and grounded in a phenomenological approach, the findings show how intrinsic motivation, extrinsic realities, and career trajectories converge and diverge across these two teacher groups. Drawing from interview and focus group data, this final section synthesizes key insights and offers a comparative view that connects directly to the research questions supporting this inquiry.

Table 6.

Research Focus	Question
Primary Question	How do the career choice satisfaction and level of commitment to remain in the field of education compare and differ between high school teachers who transitioned from other professions into teaching (CCTs) and those who followed a traditional teaching path directly after college (TCTs), specifically within the context of an independent school setting, and what factors contribute to these differences?
Sub-Question 1	How do the levels of commitment to remain in the field of education compare between CCTs and TCTs within independent schools?
Sub-Question 2	What factors influence career choice satisfaction among CCTs in independent schools?
Sub-Question 3	What factors influence career choice satisfaction among TCTs in independent schools?
Sub-Question 4	What are the factors contributing to the differences in career choice satisfaction and commitment between CCTs and TCTs within independent schools?
Sub-Question 5	What are the factors contributing to the similarities in career choice satisfaction and commitment between CCTs and TCTs within independent schools?

Comparative Commitment Levels: CCTs vs. TCTs

Across the data, CCTs demonstrated high levels of commitment to remaining in the field of education, often rooted in a sense of gratitude and purpose developed through prior career disillusionment. Their decision to enter teaching was often a result of deliberate career reflection and therefore felt “reaffirmed” through comparison with previous professions—an affirmation that aligns with SCCT’s emphasis on outcome expectations and self-efficacy derived from real- world experience (Lent et al., 1994).

Even when CCTs encountered challenges such as lack of formal training or workload stress, most expressed clarity that teaching was their preferred and permanent professional identity. For example, Participant 3, who had just completed his first year of teaching after transitioning from another career, described teaching as his top career choice and expressed strong long-term commitment.

In contrast, TCTs—while still intrinsically motivated—demonstrated more variability in long-term commitment. Notably, Participants 1 and 12, both traditionally certified, reported plans to leave the profession next year. Their decisions were influenced by financial unsustainability, especially in the independent school context, as well as the accumulation of stress related to work-life balance and stagnant compensation. These findings suggest that while TCTs may enter the profession with lifelong intentions, real-world extrinsic pressures can erode initial commitment over time—especially when institutional supports fail to meet psychological needs for competence and stability (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction Among CCTs

CCTs' career satisfaction was shaped by several interlocking factors:

- Personal fulfillment and purpose, often described as lacking in their previous careers.
- Work-life compatibility, particularly the predictability of the academic calendar and alignment with family responsibilities.
- Professional autonomy, especially the ability to innovate in independent school settings—an environment that SDT identifies as supportive of intrinsic motivation when autonomy is respected (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

- Supportive mentorship, which helped them bridge gaps in formal training and build self-efficacy (Lent et al., 1994).
- Experiential affirmation, where previous negative professional experiences reinforced the value of teaching as a purposeful career path.

Notably, while many CCTs lacked formal pedagogical training, they compensated through informal mentorship, self-directed learning, and a flexible approach to teaching. This process aligns with both SCCT's model of learning through performance accomplishments (Lent et al., 1994) and SDT's view of competence as a foundational psychological need (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Their success, forged through adaptation, often deepened their vocational identity and reinforced long-term commitment.

Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction Among TCTs

TCTs reported high levels of intrinsic satisfaction—especially related to student engagement, subject-matter passion, and professional identity—all of which align with the intrinsic motivation constructs outlined in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, their satisfaction was significantly tempered by:

- Financial strain, including stagnant salaries and long-term financial insecurity, which undermined sustained motivation when the basic need for stability was unmet.
- Workload expectations, particularly in schools where extracurricular involvement was implicitly required.
- Blurred work-life boundaries, especially for faculty parents embedded within tight-knit school communities—creating autonomy-related strain (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

- Limited advancement opportunities, which led some to question the long-term viability of teaching as a career.

These extrinsic stressors—particularly when prolonged—can diminish outcome expectations and reduce commitment (Lent et al., 1994), especially in environments that lack robust institutional support or mechanisms for professional growth.

Differences and Similarities in Satisfaction and Commitment

The most striking difference between the two groups lies in their relationship to teaching as a chosen identity. For many TCTs, teaching was a default or lifelong path, but one they had never critically compared to other careers. This occasionally gave rise to “what if” thinking or perceived professional stagnation. In contrast, CCTs had actively chosen teaching over alternative careers, and this comparative validation bolstered their long-term commitment, even in the face of challenges—confirming SCCT’s assertion that career decisions are shaped by cumulative outcome expectations and contextual learning experiences (Lent et al., 1994).

However, both groups shared key motivators that sustained them:

- Strong relationships with students, fulfilling SDT’s psychological need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
- A desire to make a meaningful contribution through education, reinforcing a sense of purpose and impact.
- Appreciation for autonomy, particularly in independent school settings, which often fostered professional creativity.
- Emotional investment in classrooms and school communities, leading to sustained

vocational identity.

The findings suggest that retention strategies in independent schools must be attuned to the different psychological profiles and contextual realities of CCTs and TCTs. Professional development, financial structures, mentorship systems, and workload policies must be designed to meet teachers' evolving needs and to support satisfaction across diverse entry pathways.

Together, these insights reinforce the urgency of reimagining teacher retention and support in independent schools—not as one-size-fits-all solutions, but as differentiated strategies informed by the diverse pathways and lived experiences of teachers themselves. The following chapter builds on this foundation to offer actionable recommendations for how schools can cultivate conditions where both CCTs and TCTs are not only prepared to succeed but also deeply motivated to stay.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion, Implications, And Recommendations

This chapter builds upon the findings presented in Chapter 4, offering a broader interpretation of the data through the lens of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and implications for practice in independent schools. Whereas the previous chapter presented the results thematically, this chapter addresses the implications of those findings in response to the study's primary research question and sub-questions. Specifically, this chapter considers how the comparative experiences of CCTs and TCTs in independent schools can inform future recruitment, retention, and teacher support strategies.

This chapter also synthesizes findings into key interpretive categories. These interpretations are guided by two theoretical frameworks: SDT and SCCT, both of which offer insight into the motivations, satisfactions, and long-term career intentions of educators in independent school settings.

Theoretical Framework Revisited

To interpret the career satisfaction and commitment of both CCTs and TCTs, this study employed SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) as dual theoretical lenses.

SDT posits that individuals are most intrinsically motivated and satisfied when three innate psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), when social environments support these needs, individuals tend to experience enhanced self-motivation and psychological well-being.

Conversely, when these needs are thwarted, motivation and satisfaction deteriorate. This theory was especially useful in analyzing how independent school environments either supported or hindered teachers' intrinsic motivations—particularly in relation to workload, autonomy, institutional support, and faculty relationships.

SCCT developed by Lent et al. (1994), emphasizes the dynamic interplay between self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. SCCT explains how individuals form interests, make career decisions, and maintain commitment in response to environmental and personal experiences. The theory also highlights how prior learning experiences and contextual factors shape career persistence or attrition. In this study, SCCT provided a framework for understanding how teachers' prior careers, perceptions of teaching efficacy, and expected professional outcomes influenced their career satisfaction and long-term intentions—particularly among CCTs, whose career transitions were marked by reflective decision-making and comparative validation.

Together, these frameworks provided a cohesive interpretive structure to understand not only the *what* of teacher career choice satisfaction and commitment, but also the *why* behind diverging patterns across CCTs and TCTs. These theoretical insights now guide the practical implications and recommendations that follow.

Implications & Recommendations for Recruitment, Retention, and Teacher Training

The findings of this study offer critical implications for independent school leaders, policymakers, and teacher education stakeholders. The differing pathways and motivational profiles of CCTs and TCTs demand distinct but complementary recruitment

strategies, differentiated retention efforts, and responsive approaches to teacher training and professional development. These eight implications and recommendations are rooted in empirical findings from this study, anchored in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and SCCT (Lent et al., 1994).

Targeting Career Change Teachers (CCTs) through Values-Based Messaging

CCTs in this study often entered teaching as a purposeful and reflective career shift, motivated by a desire for meaningful work, relational fulfillment, and moral purpose. This finding aligns with the work of Hogg et al. (2023), who emphasized that CCTs frequently identify personal, altruistic, and philosophical reasons for entering education, including dissatisfaction with corporate environments and a desire for social contribution. Recruitment messaging for CCTs should therefore highlight teaching's emotional rewards, autonomy, and societal impact rather than focus exclusively on financial compensation or credential requirements.

This study also confirmed that many CCTs brought a wide range of transferable skills—such as project management, public speaking, and content expertise—which they successfully adapted to the teaching context. As White et al. (2025) argued, recognizing and explicitly valuing these prior professional experiences during the recruitment process increases the likelihood that CCTs will feel seen, validated, and encouraged to make the leap into education. Failure to acknowledge their previous expertise may contribute to early disillusionment.

Reframing Recruitment for TCTs: Identity and Representation

TCTs often enter the profession from a strong sense of identity and social mission. Several participants in this study cited early vocational clarity and a desire to increase representation in the teaching workforce, particularly as educators of color. Research by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) underscored that teacher identity is a powerful driver of career satisfaction, especially in early-career educators, but it must be reinforced by institutional recognition and opportunities for development. Independent schools should center recruitment campaigns around inclusion, representation, and identity alignment—especially when seeking to recruit candidates from underrepresented backgrounds.

Narrative-Driven Recruitment Strategies

Participants from both CCT and TCT groups described their decision to enter teaching as deeply story-driven. This supports Beauchamp and Thomas's (2009) assertion that teacher identity and vocational clarity are often formed through personal narrative and reflection. Recruitment materials, therefore, should include teacher testimonials and authentic storytelling that reflect diverse entry points into the profession and speak to the emotional dimensions of teaching as a transformative career path.

Addressing Burnout and Career Sustainability Across All Entry Paths

This study found that both CCTs and TCTs experienced burnout within their first years of teaching, although the causes and coping mechanisms varied. For TCTs, burnout was frequently associated with a misalignment between professional expectations and institutional realities, including inadequate compensation, workload intensification, and

lack of recognition. For CCTs, early burnout was more often related to the steep learning curve and lack of formal pedagogical preparation. These findings echo the broader literature indicating that early-career attrition is driven by both structural challenges and unmet expectations (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; White et al., 2025).

Therefore, retention efforts should focus not only on improving financial and workload conditions but also on clarifying expectations, providing mentoring, and helping educators recalibrate their professional goals. In particular, independent schools should carefully look the recruitment of CCTs to avoid viewing this group as being less at risk of leaving due to their prior career history as revealed in this study. As Hogg et al. (2023) noted, CCTs bring high levels of intrinsic motivation but are equally vulnerable to institutional fatigue if their contributions are undervalued or unsupported.

Fostering Autonomy and Professional Growth

Autonomy emerged as a key component of satisfaction for both groups of teachers. Independent schools—often lauded for their curricular flexibility—must ensure that this autonomy is not undermined by excessive oversight, rigid administrative mandates, or a culture of performativity. According to SDT, when teachers feel a high degree of professional autonomy, they are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and long-term commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Opportunities for professional growth, differentiated leadership roles, and lateral career mobility were also identified as factors that could sustain teacher engagement over time. This aligns with findings from Klassen and Chiu (2011), who argued that career

advancement opportunities significantly predict teacher retention, particularly when paired with supportive environments that foster competence and relatedness.

Mentorship as a Structured Institutional Norm

CCTs in this study frequently described the importance of informal mentorship relationships, which helped them navigate their transition into teaching. However, the ad hoc nature of these supports often left them vulnerable to inconsistent or incomplete guidance. TCTs, despite having gone through formal preparation programs, also reported needing mentorship beyond their first year, particularly when dealing with evolving institutional pressures.

Research by Ingersoll and Strong (2011) supports the integration of structured mentorship programs as a cornerstone of teacher retention efforts. Such programs enhance teacher efficacy (SCCT), nurture feelings of relatedness (SDT), and reduce early attrition. Mentorship in independent schools should be formalized, inclusive of both pedagogical and cultural guidance, and tailored to the differing needs of CCTs and TCTs.

Teacher Training and Professional Development---Tailoring Preparation Pathways for CCTs

CCTs often enter the profession without formal teacher training, relying instead on lived experience and transferable skills. While these assets are valuable, participants in this study highlighted significant gaps in classroom management, lesson planning, and assessment design. Hogg et al. (2023) emphasized that effective initial teacher education (ITE) for CCTs must not assume that maturity or prior expertise negates the need for pedagogical grounding.

Bridge programs tailored to CCTs—whether through post-baccalaureate coursework, residency models, or structured induction seminars—should address these gaps explicitly, while validating the prior knowledge that CCTs bring. Doing so aligns with SCCT’s focus on increasing self-efficacy and aligns with empirical recommendations for differentiated pathways to teacher credentialing (White et al., 2025).

Reframing Teacher Preparation Around Identity and Purpose

This study confirmed that both CCTs and TCTs are more likely to remain in the profession when their work aligns with a coherent professional identity. As Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) noted, teacher identity is dynamic and shaped by emotion, agency, narrative, and context. Teacher education programs and independent school PD structures must make space for ongoing identity reflection—not only for pre-service teachers but also for mid-career educators navigating role evolution. Structured opportunities for reflection—through journaling, mentorship, or facilitated dialogue—can help teachers realign their personal motivations with institutional realities, reducing burnout and increasing career longevity (Rodgers & Scott, 2008).

Embedding Motivation Science into Faculty Development

Finally, faculty development should be informed by psychological and motivational factors, especially according to SDT and SCCT. PD that cultivates teacher autonomy, affirms competence through constructive feedback and strengthens relational bonds can enhance professional well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Similarly, training that builds self-efficacy, addresses realistic outcome expectations and acknowledges

environmental supports can foster greater resilience and satisfaction (Lent et al., 1994). Rather than offering one-size-fits-all training, independent schools should differentiate their PD to meet teachers where they are—considering life stage, pathway into the profession, and current institutional positioning. Only then can professional development become a tool for renewal rather than obligation.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study offers valuable insights into the career choice satisfaction and long-term commitment of CCTs and TCTs in four independent schools in Rhode Island, several limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations concern the scope of the sample, the methodological framework, the context of independent schools, the potential influence of researcher subjectivity, and the constraints inherent in qualitative phenomenological design. A clear understanding of these boundaries is essential to accurately interpret the findings and to inform future research directions.

Sample Size and Generalizability

As is characteristic of qualitative phenomenological studies, this research employed a small, purposive sample to gain deep insight into the lived experiences of participants. The study included twelve high school teachers (six CCTs and six TCTs) across four independent schools in Rhode Island. While this sample size was appropriate for the depth and rigor required by phenomenological inquiry, it necessarily limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations and other independent schools.

The participants represented a specific geographic and institutional context—Rhode Island independent schools—and their experiences may not reflect those of

teachers in public schools, charter schools, parochial schools, or independent schools in other regions. Furthermore, independent schools vary widely in terms of size, governance, mission, and culture. Although the study included schools with different philosophical orientations (e.g., Quaker, progressive, Catholic, and single-gender college preparatory), these institutional contexts were not analyzed as variables. As such, the nuances of how specific school cultures shape teacher experiences were not captured in this study and may have influenced findings in unexamined ways.

Demographic Representation

While the study sought a diverse sample, certain demographic imbalances emerged. All six CCTs in the study were male, whereas the TCT group was more gender-diverse, including two nonbinary teachers, two women, and two men. This gender imbalance may have influenced the comparative data, particularly in areas such as work-life balance, mentorship experiences, and institutional belonging. Similarly, the sample was predominantly White (8 of 12 participants), with limited representation from teachers of color (1 Black CCT, 1 Hispanic CCT, 1 Black TCT, and 1 Asian TCT). These limitations may have constrained the exploration of how race and gender intersect with career satisfaction and institutional support in independent schools.

Given that independent schools in the U.S. have historically struggled with faculty diversity and often lack racially inclusive infrastructures, the limited representation of educators from minoritized groups in this sample may have prevented deeper exploration of systemic inequities, racialized stressors, or culturally relevant supports that influence teacher satisfaction and retention. Additionally, one participant

identified as queer and one as nonbinary, providing only limited insight into how LGBTQ+ identity interacts with institutional culture and professional motivation.

Pathway and Role Diversity Within Groups

The study's distinction between CCTs and TCTs was clear and purposeful, aligning with the research questions. However, variability within each group introduces some interpretive limitations. For example, CCTs entered teaching from vastly different sectors—such as the military, performing arts, finance, and academia—and brought a range of skills, assumptions, and needs to their new roles. While this diversity reflects the broader reality of the CCT population, it also introduces heterogeneity that complicates attempts to identify uniform patterns across participants.

Likewise, the TCT group, while more academically homogeneous (most held M.A.T. degrees from Brown University), varied in terms of subject taught, career length, and life stage. Some TCTs had been teaching for over 20 years, while others had only 10 years of experience. This variation may influence how commitment and satisfaction were experienced, particularly as mid- and late-career concerns (e.g., family needs, financial planning) differ from those of early-career educators.

Moreover, the study did not account for differences in teaching roles or responsibilities—such as advising, department leadership, or extracurricular coaching—which may have affected workload, stress, and career satisfaction. Future studies might explore these role-based variables in greater depth to further refine understandings of teacher motivation and commitment.

Focus on Independent Schools

This study intentionally limited its scope to teachers in independent schools, given the unique governance structures, pedagogical autonomy, and cultural dynamics that distinguish these institutions from public schools. However, this context-specific focus presents limitations in terms of broader applicability. Independent schools often operate without union representation, follow different hiring protocols, and provide more curricular autonomy than public or charter schools.

As such, findings related to autonomy, institutional culture, and professional flexibility—while valid within the independent school context—may not extend to educators in more bureaucratically structured or standardized systems. For example, the sense of agency and creativity expressed by many participants may be significantly constrained in environments governed by district mandates or rigid accountability frameworks. Similarly, institutional supports and community dynamics in independent schools—where teachers often have access to smaller class sizes and greater collegial intimacy—may not be replicable in other settings.

It is also important to acknowledge that independent schools tend to enroll students from more affluent socioeconomic backgrounds. This demographic reality may affect the nature of student-teacher relationships, classroom challenges, and teacher stressors in ways that are not generalizable to public schools serving more economically diverse populations. These contextual differences must be considered when interpreting findings or applying them to broader policy conversations.

Temporal Limitations and Lack of Longitudinal Perspective

This study provides a snapshot of participants' career satisfaction and commitment at a particular moment in time. While some participants shared reflections across multiple career stages, the research design was not longitudinal. As such, it cannot capture the evolution of teacher satisfaction, motivation, or commitment over time. Participants' stated intentions to stay in or leave the profession may shift in response to personal, institutional, or societal changes—such as new leadership, policy shifts, or life events.

Given that burnout was a significant theme—especially during the early years of teaching for both CCTs and TCTs—a longitudinal approach might reveal whether such challenges subside, intensify, or are mitigated by institutional supports over time. Similarly, motivations for teaching may evolve in response to classroom experiences, administrative changes, or shifting personal goals. Future research employing longitudinal methods would provide a more in depth understanding of how satisfaction and commitment unfold across teachers' careers.

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As the researcher, I bring to this study both professional and personal dimensions that shaped how I designed, conducted, and interpreted the research. I identify as a Black woman and mother of two children who attend the same independent school where I serve as a full-time high school teacher. Moreover, this school is a sample independent school setting in this study. My intersecting roles—as educator, parent, and member of the independent school community—have deeply informed my understanding of the lived

experiences of teachers in similar environments. This dual positionality as both an insider and a critical observer provided me with unique access to this research setting and shaped the ways in which participants engaged with me in terms of transparency and interactions around the study.

My identity as a Black woman working in predominantly white independent school spaces heightened my sensitivity to issues of representation, institutional culture, equity, and emotional labor. While the study did not focus explicitly on race or gender, I was attuned to how participants navigated issues of identity, belonging, and professional recognition. My own experiences with structural inequities, work-life integration, and the pressures of independent school culture informed the questions I asked, the themes I identified, and the resonance I found in participants' narratives—especially around autonomy, burnout, and relational dynamics.

At the same time, I acknowledge the interpretive risks that accompany such proximity. My shared context with participants—especially those who are also parents or teachers of color—may have contributed to a positive rapport, but it also carried the potential for assumption or projection. I may have been more attuned to certain narratives while overlooking others that did not align with my own experience. As a qualitative researcher operating within a phenomenological framework, I employed sustained reflexivity throughout the research process to mitigate these risks. This included intentional bracketing of my assumptions during data collection and analysis, maintaining a reflective journal, and engaging in multiple rounds of coding to ensure that findings emerged inductively from participants' lived experiences rather than from my

expectations or biases.

Additionally, I was aware that my role as a colleague within the broader independent school community could influence how participants presented their experiences. While three of the participants worked at my specific school, I share professional networks and cultural norms with many of the others. I approached interviews with transparency and ethical care, emphasizing that their insights would be represented authentically and confidentially.

This reflexive process was not a one-time event but a continuous stance throughout the study. By foregrounding my positionality, I aimed to model the critical awareness that qualitative inquiry demands and to offer a more honest accounting of how knowledge is co-constructed in interpretive research. The findings presented in this dissertation are thus shaped by both the voices of the participants and the lens through which I received and interpreted those voices—with humility, respect, and scholarly rigor.

Recommendations for Independent School Leaders and Hiring Committees

The findings from this study point to specific, actionable strategies that independent schools can adopt to strengthen teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development. Drawing on the lived experiences of both CCTs and TCTs, this section offers tailored recommendations grounded in the study's themes and informed by SDT and SCCT. These recommendations aim to support and build institutional cultures that focus on autonomy, professional growth, and long-term commitment.

Proactively Recruit Mid-Career Professionals into Teaching

Participants who entered teaching as a second or third career described making the transition after deep personal reflection and dissatisfaction in other fields. For CCTs, teaching was not a fallback, but a purposeful career shift aligned with their values. These participants brought strong intrinsic motivation, life experience, and emotional resilience—characteristics schools should actively seek.

Recommendations:

1. Independent schools should develop recruitment strategies that intentionally target career changers. This might include partnerships with graduate programs, second-career transition networks, or public campaigns that frame teaching as a meaningful, purpose-driven profession.
2. Job postings should explicitly welcome non-traditional applicants and emphasize transferable skills, subject-area expertise, and alignment with the school's mission.

Recruit Based on Values Alignment and Life Experience

Many CCTs emphasized that their decision to teach was deeply existential and identity-driven, often involving themes of legacy, purpose, or spiritual alignment. Rather than simply being recruited through formal campaigns or institutional messaging, they sought out teaching roles based on personal conviction.

Recommendations:

1. Hiring committees should revise interview protocols to include questions that explore a candidate's values, motivations, and philosophy of education—especially for applicants from non-traditional backgrounds.
2. Applications could invite personal statements that allow candidates to connect their life and work history to their vision for teaching, which may reveal readiness and reflective capacity beyond formal credentials.

Maintain a Focus on Representation and Identity in Hiring TCTs

TCTs in this study often entered the profession early, driven by a sense of calling or identity alignment. For some participants—particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds—representation and equity were significant motivators.

Recommendations:

1. Independent schools should prioritize inclusive hiring practices that center racial, gender, and cultural representation.
2. Hiring panels should be diverse, and schools should ensure that job materials and public-facing materials signal a commitment to belonging, mentorship, and inclusion.

Establish Sustained Mentorship for New and Mid-Career Teachers

Participants across both groups emphasized the importance of collegial support and mentorship, particularly during their first years. Several CCTs relied heavily on informal mentors to navigate unfamiliar pedagogical territory, while TCTs expressed a desire for continued mentorship beyond the traditional first-year focus.

Recommendations:

1. Schools should implement structured mentorship programs that extend beyond the first year and differentiate support based on experience level and pathway into teaching.
2. Mentors should be trained in adult learning theory and given protected time for check-ins, co-planning, and classroom observation debriefs.

Create Growth-Oriented Pathways to Avoid Professional Stagnation

While participants found classroom teaching meaningful, several TCTs described a lack of professional growth opportunities and a flattening of their trajectory after the early years. This lack of forward movement contributed to thoughts of leaving the profession, especially when paired with financial strain or burnout.

Recommendations:

1. Schools should develop tiered advancement options—such as lead teacher roles, instructional coaching positions, or opportunities to design and pilot interdisciplinary curricula.
2. Teachers should be invited to apply for internal fellowships, research grants, or sabbaticals that allow for intellectual renewal without necessitating a shift into administration.

Strengthen Early-Career Support to Prevent Burnout in the First 1–3 Years

Burnout was a common experience for both CCTs and TCTs, but it was most acute during the first one to three years of teaching. Participants from both groups described this early period as physically and emotionally taxing due to the demands of

lesson planning, classroom management, and adapting to school culture. Importantly, several teachers reported that once they gained confidence and rhythm, their experiences improved markedly. This finding highlights the need for robust early-career support to prevent attrition and promote long-term retention.

Recommendations:

1. Schools should frontload support in the first 1–3 years of teaching through weekly check-ins, mentorship, collaborative planning periods, and reduced non-teaching duties for new teachers.
2. Administrators should communicate explicitly that struggle in the first years is expected and support is available—normalizing the steep learning curve rather than pathologizing it.
3. Consider phased onboarding models that gradually introduce extracurricular duties, advising roles, and committee work over a teacher’s first two years.

Reexamine and Reframe Compensation Structures

TCTs in particular cited compensation as a major contributor to attrition intentions. While CCTs often entered the profession knowing they would take a pay cut, both groups emphasized the unsustainability of current compensation relative to the workload and cost of living.

Recommendations:

1. Schools should increase salary transparency and conduct equity reviews to ensure fair compensation across departments and demographics.

2. Where base salary increases are constrained, schools might offer housing support, tuition remission, summer sabbaticals, or stipends for additional duties.

Differentiate Professional Development for CCTs and TCTs

CCTs expressed a need for training in instructional design, classroom management, and adolescent psychology—areas not covered by prior careers. TCTs, while strong in pedagogy, voiced a need for renewal, challenge, and opportunities for leadership.

Recommendations:

1. PD programs should be tiered by years of experience and pathway into the profession.
2. For CCTs, provide structured workshops on lesson planning, classroom strategies, and assessment literacy. For TCTs, offer advanced seminars on mentoring, instructional leadership, or DEI facilitation.

Build in Reflective Practice and Identity Work

Both CCTs and TCTs spoke of motivation and satisfaction in terms of purpose, belonging, and alignment. However, schools often lack structured time and space for teachers to engage in reflective practice or reevaluate their professional identity.

Recommendations:

1. Create space for ongoing reflection through journal prompts, peer discussion groups, or annual retreats focused on purpose, mission alignment, and career mapping.

2. Encourage department chairs and team leaders to integrate check-ins that go beyond logistics to ask: “What’s fueling your work this term?”

Train School Leaders in Motivation-Centered Leadership

The emotional and motivational climate of a school—shaped by administrators—has a direct effect on teacher well-being and retention. According to SDT, teachers need to feel autonomous, competent, and connected; according to SCCT, they must believe their work is meaningful, sustainable, and supported.

Recommendations:

1. Offer leadership training for administrators grounded in SDT and SCCT principles.
2. Encourage leaders to use supervision not only for evaluation but also for coaching, affirmation, and professional development planning.
3. Assess school climate annually with attention to faculty morale, equity of voice, and workload sustainability.

Future Research

This study has provided a rich, nuanced understanding of how CCTs and TCTs in independent school’s experience career choice satisfaction and long-term commitment to the profession. However, the findings also reveal key areas where further research is needed to expand the field’s understanding of teacher motivation, preparation, and retention—especially within the unique context of independent schools. The following recommendations for future research are directly informed by the patterns, limitations, and gaps observed throughout this study.

Explore Gender and Racial Representation Among Career Change Teachers

One clear demographic limitation of this study was the lack of gender diversity among CCTs. All six CCT participants identified as male, whereas the TCT group was more gender-diverse. This homogeneity among CCTs limited the study's ability to explore how gender intersects with motivation, institutional support, or perceptions of professional identity. Additionally, only two participants across both groups identified as Black and only one identified as Hispanic. As issues of representation, identity, and belonging emerged as relevant—particularly in the context of independent schools—it is imperative that future studies prioritize more diverse sampling.

Recommendation:

Future research should intentionally seek to include women, nonbinary individuals, and teachers of color who have transitioned into teaching from other careers. Investigating how gender and race intersect with the experiences of CCTs may yield important insights into recruitment, preparation, and institutional belonging, particularly in predominantly white, affluent independent school environments.

Examine the Impact of Formal Training and Certification Pathways on Teacher Efficacy and Satisfaction

This study shed light on significant differences in how CCTs and TCTs experienced training and preparation. CCTs frequently described a lack of structured pedagogical training and initial uncertainty regarding lesson planning, classroom management, and instructional design. Several relied heavily on informal mentorship or trial-and-error in the early years. In contrast, TCTs generally reported entering the field

with strong pedagogical foundations, which contributed to a sense of early competence and confidence. However, this study was not designed to systematically evaluate the efficacy or long-term outcomes of various preparation models.

Recommendation:

Future research should explore how different certification pathways—traditional university-based programs, alternative licensure routes, residency models, or informal training—impact teacher efficacy, classroom performance, and long-term retention. Longitudinal studies tracking teachers’ perceived preparedness and satisfaction over time would be particularly valuable in identifying best practices for onboarding and training second-career educators.

Investigate the Evolution of Career Satisfaction Across the Teaching Lifecycle

One of the most striking patterns in this study was the difference in how participants experienced burnout or doubt during specific phases of their careers. Both CCTs and TCTs reported that burnout and questioning were most acute during the first one to three years of teaching. However, participants also indicated that as they gained experience and competence, their satisfaction increased. TCTs who had spent over a decade in the classroom sometimes reported moments of questioning or “what if” curiosity about other possible careers—not rooted in dissatisfaction, but in the absence of prior career exploration.

Recommendation:

Future studies should explore how career choice satisfaction and commitment evolve over time, particularly across three key phases: early career (0–3 years), mid-

career (4–10 years), and veteran (10+ years). Research might also examine how different factors—e.g., institutional support, professional development opportunities, or life stage—interact with satisfaction across these phases. This would help schools design supports tailored to the needs of teachers at different points in their careers.

Conduct Comparative Studies Between Independent and Public-School Contexts

Because this study focused exclusively on independent schools in Rhode Island, the findings may not generalize to public school settings, which often involve different working conditions, levels of accountability, union representation, and salary scales. Several participants—particularly TCTs—mentioned compensation as a significant factor shaping their long-term satisfaction and even their consideration of leaving teaching altogether. These pressures may play out differently in public schools, where compensation structures, job security, and professional development protocols differ.

Recommendation:

Future research should conduct comparative studies between independent and public-school teachers—both CCTs and TCTs—to better understand how institutional context influences teacher motivation, burnout, and commitment. In particular, researchers could examine how policy differences (e.g., union protections, standardized testing mandates, tenure policies) intersect with psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness as outlined in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

*Explore the Role of Institutional Culture and Leadership in Sustaining Teacher
Motivation*

A recurring theme across both CCT and TCT responses was the critical role of institutional culture, collegial relationships, and supportive leadership in shaping their career satisfaction. Teachers described how strong alignment with school values, opportunities for collaboration, and administrative recognition helped sustain their motivation—especially during the challenging early years. However, the degree to which schools intentionally cultivate these conditions was outside the scope of this study.

Recommendation:

Future research should investigate how school leadership practices and organizational culture affect teacher motivation, satisfaction, and retention. Qualitative studies that include administrators, department heads, and faculty could help illuminate how autonomy-supportive leadership and culturally responsive supervision influence professional well-being, particularly among faculty navigating new career transitions. These findings would be especially relevant for independent schools, where administrative structures are often more flexible and localized.

Analyze the Influence of Faculty Parent Roles in School Communities

Several participants in this study were faculty members whose children attended the schools where they taught. This dual role emerged as a unique dimension of work-life balance, institutional belonging, and personal investment in the school community. Some participants described this dynamic as enriching and affirming, while others highlighted the challenges of never fully "clocking out," given the overlap between professional and

parental roles. While the topic arose organically, it was not a targeted focus of this study and warrants further exploration.

Recommendation:

Future studies should examine the experiences of faculty who are also parents within the school community. This line of inquiry could illuminate how this dual role affects motivation, boundary setting, institutional loyalty, and burnout. In independent schools—where family and faculty roles often blend—this topic may be especially pertinent to understanding long-term satisfaction and retention in both public and independent schools.

Investigate Institutional Responses to Career Change Teachers' Needs

While this study revealed the unique assets and challenges CCTs bring to the profession, it also raised questions about whether schools are sufficiently adapting to meet their needs. Many CCTs described entering teaching without access to differentiated onboarding, formal pedagogical training, or mentorship calibrated to their background. Yet they also expressed strong commitment to the field and deep intrinsic motivation.

Recommendation:

Future research should examine how independent schools currently support (or fail to support) CCTs during their transition into teaching. Mixed-methods studies could assess the impact of targeted induction programs, peer mentoring, and differentiated PD on CCTs' efficacy, satisfaction, and retention. Such research would offer valuable guidance to schools seeking to tap into this increasingly important workforce pipeline while ensuring career changers are set up for long-term success.

Collectively, these lines of inquiry will deepen the field's understanding of what drives and sustains teacher motivation—particularly for educators entering the profession through diverse pathways. They will also support independent schools in designing inclusive, effective, and equitable systems for recruiting, developing, and retaining faculty in ways that align with the psychological needs and lived experiences of today's teaching workforce.

Final Reflection

This study has been, at its core, an exploration not only of others' experiences, but also of my own. As a Black woman, educator, and mother working in an independent school, I entered this research with questions that were both scholarly and deeply personal: What sustains a teacher in this profession? What draws someone to teaching—and what compels them to stay? And how do institutional structures, identity, and personal history shape the answers to those questions?

What I discovered through the voices of my participants was not a single answer, but a complex constellation of motivations, challenges, and truths CCTs reminded me that purpose can be rediscovered later in life, that fulfillment is often born from disillusionment, and that it is possible to begin again. TCTs revealed the power of early calling, of vocational clarity, and of the heartbreak that can emerge when systems fail to nurture that original passion.

Both groups affirmed that teaching is not simply a job, but a calling shaped by meaning, belonging, and the hope of making a difference. Yet they also reminded me—

and the field—that commitment is not guaranteed by passion alone. It must be supported, cultivated, and protected by the institutions in which teachers work.

Conducting this study while raising two children who attend the school where I teach, I found myself navigating multiple identities—mother, teacher, researcher, insider, outsider—all at once. These roles sharpened my lens, but also humbled me. I recognized in my participants’ stories the familiar contours of fatigue, joy, compromise, and quiet triumph. Their reflections deepened my own understanding of what it means to teach with integrity in a space that often asks more than it gives.

This research has convinced me that independent schools—like all educational institutions—must move beyond assuming that teachers will remain simply because they care. We must design cultures that honor autonomy, recognize effort, provide mentorship, and compensate fairly. We must acknowledge that teachers are whole people, shaped by previous careers, family commitments, and cultural identities, and that supporting them means embracing that fullness.

Most of all, I leave this study with a renewed respect for the power of narrative—how telling one’s story can shed light on structural realities and personal truths simultaneously. To listen deeply is, in its own way, an act of justice. And to tell the truth about teaching—its beauty and its burdens—is a contribution to a profession that desperately needs both honesty and hope.

APPENDIX 1

Recruitment Email

Re: Invitation to Participate in a Study on Teacher Career Paths – Investigator Joanne Charles Lafortune

Dear Teachers,

I hope this message finds you well. I am reaching out to you as a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership & Policy (ELPS) program at Boston University's Wheelock College of Education & Human Development. I am conducting a study that is focused on understanding the factors influencing career choice satisfaction and commitment among high school teachers, particularly comparing those who have transitioned into teaching from other careers to those who have followed traditional certification pathways. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study.

Why This is a Great Opportunity for You

Participating in this study offers a unique opportunity to reflect on and share your experiences, which can provide invaluable insights into how educational policies and teacher support programs can be shaped to better meet the needs of educators like yourself. Your involvement will contribute directly to advancements in educational research, potentially influencing improvements in teacher retention and job satisfaction across the profession.

Your contact information was provided by the Head of Upper School, who identified you as a potential participant who could provide valuable insights for our research. Please be assured that your consideration of this opportunity does not obligate you to participate.

Study Overview

This research aims to explore various aspects of teacher experiences and satisfaction in independent schools. Participation would involve completing a virtual interview and possibly engaging in a focus group discussion, which will be audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy of data collection. The expected duration of participation is approximately one to two hours, and discussions will take place virtually via Zoom. All personal information and responses will be handled with strict confidentiality and stored securely as per Boston University's stringent data protection protocols.

Sincerely,

Joanne Charles Lafortune

Doctoral Candidate

joannecl@bu.edu

Educational Leadership & Policy (EdD)

Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

Boston University

APPENDIX 2**Participation Information Sheet**

RESEARCH TITLE: Career Choice Satisfaction and Teaching Commitment Research

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT: My name is Joanne Charles Lafortune, a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership & Policy (ELPS) program at Boston University's Wheelock College of Education & Human Development. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Smith-Mumford. This study aims to explore and understand the factors influencing career choice satisfaction and commitment among high school teachers, specifically comparing the experiences of Career Change Teachers (CCT) and Traditionally Certified Teachers (TCT). The research seeks to provide data that may inform future educational policies and support mechanisms for teachers.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE? Participation in this study involves completing a detailed survey, participating in a one-on-one in person interview, and a focus group discussion. The focus groups will be audio-recorded to accurately capture discussions. The expected duration of participation is approximately one to two hours, and discussions will take place at convenient locations within the school.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART? You have been selected as a potential participant because of your unique experiences as a teacher, which were identified by the Head of Upper School as valuable to this research. Your insights are essential in comparing the perspectives of CCTs and TCTs within independent schools.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART? Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

You have the right to withdraw at any time without any consequences, and you may choose not to answer any specific questions during the study.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF TAKING PART?

While there are no direct benefits to participants, your involvement will contribute to a deeper understanding of teacher satisfaction and retention, which may benefit educational practices broadly. The primary risk involves potential discomfort when discussing personal experiences, though measures are in place to ensure discussions are conducted respectfully and sensitively.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL? Your anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained. Identifiable information will be accessible only to the research team and stored on secured Boston University servers. In exceptional cases, such as if the information disclosed during the study indicates harm to yourself or others, confidentiality may need to be breached as per legal and ethical guidelines.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED, AND PROTECTED? All interviews will be audio-recorded and securely stored on the BU Restricted Use network drive, with access limited to the research team. Following my dissertation defense, all audio recordings will be securely destroyed. A de-identified transcript of the interviews will be retained for an additional two years for further analysis.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY? The findings from this study will be disseminated through my doctoral dissertation and may also be presented at conferences to contribute to the broader field of educational research.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION? For further information or inquiries about the study, please contact me, Joanne Charles Lafortune, at joannecl@bu.edu.

Thank you for considering participation in this important research. Your contribution is highly valued and will help shape the future of educational practices and teacher support.

Sincerely,

Joanne Charles Lafortune

Doctoral Candidate

Educational Leadership & Policy (EdD)

Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

Boston University

APPENDIX 3

Interview Protocol Career Change Teachers (CCTs)

Background and Pathway

1. Career History:

- What is your highest level of education?
- What subjects did you major in and why?
- Can you tell me about your previous career? What was your role and what drew you to that profession initially?
- How many years did you spend in your previous career before transitioning to teaching?

2. Pathway to Teaching:

- What inspired or motivated you to switch to a teaching career?
- Can you describe the process you went through to become a teacher (e.g., certification programs, additional education)?
- What were the biggest challenges you faced during this transition, and how did you overcome them?

Based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

3. Autonomy:

- How does the level of autonomy you experience in teaching compare to your previous profession?

- Can you provide a specific example of a time when you felt particularly autonomous in your teaching role? How did it affect your motivation and satisfaction?

4. Competence:

- How did your previous career skills translate to your teaching role? In what ways do you feel competent as a teacher?
- What professional development opportunities have you pursued to enhance your teaching skills? How have these opportunities impacted your sense of competence?

5. Relatedness:

- How have you built relationships with your students and colleagues since transitioning to teaching?
- Can you share an experience where a strong connection with a student or colleague significantly impacted your teaching experience?

Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

6. Self-Efficacy:

- How confident did you feel about your ability to succeed in teaching when you first started compared to now?
- Can you describe a challenging situation in teaching that you successfully navigated? How did this experience affect your self-efficacy?

7. Outcome Expectations:

- What were your initial expectations about teaching before you

transitioned? How have these expectations been met or changed?

- How do the rewards and outcomes of teaching compare to those of your previous career? What aspects have been most satisfying or disappointing?

8. Personal Goals:

- What personal and professional goals did you set when you decided to become a teacher?
- How have these goals evolved since you started teaching, and what new goals have you set for yourself in your teaching career?

Based on Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA)

9. Abilities and Job Requirements:

- How well do you feel your previous job prepared you for the demands of teaching? Can you provide specific examples?
- How do your current job responsibilities align with your skills and abilities? Are there areas where you feel particularly well-suited or mismatched?

10. Needs and Job Rewards:

- What needs are being met in your current teaching role that were not met in your previous profession?
- How satisfied are you with the rewards (e.g., salary, benefits, recognition) of your teaching job compared to your previous career? What changes would enhance your satisfaction?

For Career Change Teachers (CCTs)**1. Initial Expectations vs. Reality:**

- What were your initial expectations when you decided to switch to teaching? How have these expectations matched or differed from your actual experiences?
- Can you describe a moment when you felt particularly fulfilled or disappointed in your teaching career? What contributed to those feelings?

2. Personal Fulfillment:

- In what ways has teaching met your personal and professional needs that your previous career did not?
- How do you measure personal success and satisfaction in your teaching role compared to your previous profession?

3. Job Aspects:

- Which specific aspects of teaching do you find most satisfying? Are there any aspects that you find particularly challenging or unsatisfying?
- How have student interactions and relationships impacted your satisfaction with your career choice?
- How satisfied are you with your career choice and why?

Personal Reflection**For Career Change Teachers (CCTs)****1. Reflecting on the Transition:**

- Looking back, how do you feel about your decision to transition from your

previous career to teaching? Would you make the same decision again?

- What advice would you give to someone considering a similar career change to teaching?

2. Career Satisfaction:

- How do you define career choice satisfaction, and how has teaching met or not met this definition for you?
- What personal and professional values have been most important in guiding your career decisions?
- What key experiences or turning points have shaped your teaching career and satisfaction?
- Do you currently regret selecting teaching as a career choice? Explain why or why not.

3. Future Aspirations:

- What are your aspirations for the future in the field of education? How do you plan to achieve them?
- How do you envision your teaching career evolving over the next five to ten years?

Career Legacy:

- What legacy do you hope to leave in the field of education? How are you working towards this legacy?
- How do you want your students and colleagues to remember you as a teacher?

- What motivates you to continue teaching year after year?
- Are there specific moments or experiences that have reinforced your decision to stay?
- How committed are you to remaining in the field of education? What factors influence your level of commitment?
- Have you ever considered leaving the teaching profession? If so, what prompted these thoughts, and what has kept you in the field?
- Are you planning on exiting the field of education? If so why? Why not?

2. Professional Support:

- How do the support systems (e.g., mentors, colleagues, administration) at your school influence your commitment to teaching?
- What types of professional development or career advancement opportunities would enhance your commitment to remain in the field?

3. Personal Impact:

- How does your personal life and family situation affect your commitment to teaching? Are there specific supports or challenges in balancing personal and professional commitments?
- What advice would you give to someone considering a career in teaching, based on your experiences?

APPENDIX 4**Interview Protocol –****Traditionally Certified Teachers (Tcts)****Background and Pathway**

1. Career History:

- Can you describe your educational background and the pathway you took to become a teacher? What drew you to this career path?
- How many years have you been teaching since completing your certification?

2. Pathway to Teaching:

- What motivated you to pursue a teaching career directly after college?
- What teaching certification program did you complete, and how well do you feel it prepared you for your role?

Based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

3. Autonomy:

- How do you feel about the level of autonomy you have in your teaching methods and classroom management?
- Can you share a specific example of a situation where you felt a strong sense of autonomy in your teaching? How did it affect your job satisfaction?

4. Competence:

- How confident did you feel entering the teaching profession with your

traditional certification? How has this confidence evolved?

- What types of support or professional development have been most beneficial in enhancing your teaching competence? Can you give specific examples?

5. Relatedness:

- How do you build and maintain relationships with your students and colleagues?
- Can you describe an experience where these relationships significantly impacted your teaching experience?

Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

6. Self-Efficacy:

- How has your confidence in your teaching abilities changed since you began your career? What factors have influenced this change?
- Can you describe a challenging situation in teaching that you successfully navigated? How did this experience affect your self-efficacy?

7. Outcome Expectations:

- What were your initial expectations about teaching, and how have they been met or changed over time?
- How do the rewards and outcomes of teaching align with your initial career aspirations? What aspects have been most satisfying or disappointing?

8. Personal Goals:

- What personal and professional goals did you set when you chose to become a teacher?
- How have these goals evolved, and what new goals have you set for your future in teaching?

Based on Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA)

9. Abilities and Job Requirements:

- How well did your certification program prepare you for the realities of teaching? Can you provide specific examples?
- How do your current job responsibilities align with your skills and abilities? Are there areas where you feel particularly well-suited or mismatched?

10. Needs and Job Rewards:

- What needs are being met in your teaching role that aligns with your personal and professional goals?
- How satisfied are you with the rewards (e.g., salary, benefits, recognition) of your teaching job compared to your expectations when you started? What changes would enhance your satisfaction?

1. **Educational Preparation:**

- Reflecting on your initial years in teaching, what were the key factors that contributed to your satisfaction or dissatisfaction?

2. Professional Growth:

- How have opportunities for professional development and growth influenced your career satisfaction?
- Can you provide an example of a significant achievement or milestone in your teaching career that has enhanced your job satisfaction?

3. Daily Experiences:

- What are the daily aspects of teaching that bring you the most joy and satisfaction? Conversely, what daily challenges do you face that impact your satisfaction?

For Both Groups:

Commitment to Remain in Education:

1. Career Longevity:

2. Reflecting on Career Choice:

- Reflecting on your journey from certification to your current role, how satisfied are you with your career choice? Would you choose the same path if given the opportunity to start over?
- What key experiences or turning points have shaped your teaching career and satisfaction?
- Do you currently regret selecting teaching as a career choice? Explain why or why not.

3. Impact on Students:

- How do you measure the impact you have had on your students? Can you

share a memorable experience where you felt you made a significant difference?

- How does the feedback from students and parents affect your sense of satisfaction and commitment?

Career Legacy:

- What legacy do you hope to leave in the field of education? How are you working towards this legacy?
- How do you want your students and colleagues to remember you as a teacher?
- What motivates or initially motivated you to continue teaching year after year?
- Are there specific moments or experiences that have reinforced your decision to stay?
- How committed are you to remaining in the field of education? What factors influence your level of commitment?
- Have you ever considered leaving the teaching profession? If so, what prompted these thoughts, and what has kept you in the field?
- Are you planning on exiting the field of education? If so why? Why not?

4. Professional Support:

- How do the support systems (e.g., mentors, colleagues, administration) at your school influence your commitment to teaching?

- What types of professional development or career advancement opportunities would enhance your commitment to remain in the field?

5. Personal Impact:

- How does your personal life and family situation affect your commitment to teaching?
- Are there specific supports or challenges in balancing personal and professional commitments?
- What advice would you give to someone considering a career in teaching, based on your experiences?

APPENDIX 5

Focus Group Questions

Probe Questions for Exploring and Comparing Commitment Levels:

- **CCT-Specific Probe:** What were the key factors that influenced your decision to transition into teaching from another profession, and how have these factors impacted your commitment to remain in education?
- **TCT-Specific Probe:** Reflecting on your decision to enter teaching directly after college, how has your educational background influenced your commitment to the teaching profession?

For Identifying Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction:

- **CCT-Specific Probe:** Can you describe any challenges or rewards you've encountered in teaching that may have been unique to your experience as someone entering from a different profession?
- **TCT-Specific Probe:** How has following a traditional path into teaching affected your satisfaction with your career choice, especially in terms of preparation and expectations?

For Understanding Factors Influencing Career Choice Satisfaction Among TCTs:

- **CCT-Specific Probe:** In what ways has your previous career experience contributed to your satisfaction or dissatisfaction within the teaching profession?
- **TCT-Specific Probe:** Considering your pathway into teaching, what aspects of your teacher education do you find most beneficial to your career satisfaction?

For Uncovering Factors Contributing to Differences in Satisfaction and

Commitment:

- **General Probe for Both Groups:** How do you perceive the support system in your current independent school setting, and how has this affected your career satisfaction and commitment to stay in the field of education?
- **Comparative Probe:** Can you compare any experiences with colleagues who have taken a different path into teaching, noting any observed differences in career satisfaction or commitment levels?

For Informing Recruitment, Retention, and Support Strategies:

- **General Probe for Both Groups:** Based on your experiences, what recommendations would you offer to improve teacher recruitment, retention, and support in independent schools?
- **Specific Probe on Support Needs:** What specific types of support do you believe would most enhance the satisfaction and commitment of teachers, particularly for those in your pathway into teaching?

Probe Questions for Focus Groups

- **Group Dynamics Probe:** How do you perceive the dynamics within your respective teacher group, and how have these dynamics influenced your experiences and perspectives as a teacher in an independent school?
- **Collective Experiences Probe:** Reflecting on your interactions with colleagues, what common themes or patterns have emerged in terms of career satisfaction, commitment levels, and support systems within your teacher group?

- **Comparative Reflections Probe:** Can you share any insights or observations regarding the differences and similarities in experiences between CCTs and TCTs within your independent school community?
- **Brainstorming Solutions Probe:** What specific actions or initiatives do you think could enhance teacher satisfaction, commitment, and support within independent schools, considering the diverse backgrounds and pathways of teachers in our community?

Focus Group Questions

Section I: Motivation and Pathway to Teaching

1. Initial Career Decisions:

- **For All Participants:** *What motivated you to choose teaching as a career?*
 - **Probe:** *For those who entered teaching directly after college, what factors influenced your decision at that stage?*
 - **Probe:** *For those who transitioned from another profession, what prompted you to make that change?*

2. Influence of Background on Teaching Approach:

- *How do you think your pathway into teaching (traditional vs. career change) has shaped your approach to teaching and interacting with students?*
 - **Follow-up:** *Can you provide specific examples of how your background influences your teaching style or classroom management?*

Section II: Preparedness and Professional Development (10 minutes)

3. Perceived Preparedness Upon Entry:

- *Reflecting on your first year of teaching, how prepared did you feel for the classroom environment?*
 - **Follow-up for TCTs:** *In what ways did your traditional certification program prepare you or leave gaps?*
 - **Follow-up for CCTs:** *How did your previous professional experiences influence your readiness to teach?*

4. Professional Development Experiences:

- *What types of professional development or support have been most beneficial to you as a teacher?*
 - **Probe:** *Are there specific programs or experiences that have significantly enhanced your teaching competencies?*

Section III: Career Satisfaction Factors

5. Sources of Career Satisfaction:

- *What aspects of teaching bring you the most satisfaction and fulfillment?*
 - **Probe:** *How do these aspects compare to your expectations when you first entered the profession?*
 - **Comparison:** *Do you think these sources of satisfaction differ between those who entered teaching directly and those who transitioned from another career?*

6. Challenges Impacting Satisfaction:

- *What challenges have you faced in your teaching career that have impacted your job satisfaction?*
 - **Follow-up:** *How have you addressed or overcome these challenges?*
 - **Comparison:** *In your opinion, do these challenges differ based on the pathway into teaching?*

7. Influence of School Environment:

- *How does working in an independent school setting affect your career satisfaction?*
 - **Probe:** *Are there unique factors in this environment that enhance or diminish your satisfaction?*

Section IV: Commitment to Remain in Education (10 minutes)

8. Commitment Levels:

- *How committed are you to remaining in the field of education?*
 - **Probe:** *What factors most influence your level of commitment?*
 - **Comparison:** *Do you feel that your commitment levels are influenced by whether you entered teaching directly or transitioned from another career?*

9. Future Career Intentions:

- *Have you considered leaving the teaching profession? If so, what factors contributed to these thoughts, and what has influenced your decision to*

stay or plan to leave?

10. Impact of Personal Life:

- *How does your personal life and family situation affect your commitment to teaching?*
 - **Probe:** *Are there specific supports or challenges that influence your ability to balance professional and personal commitments?*

Section V: Factors Contributing to Differences in Satisfaction and Commitment

Comparative Reflections:

- *Based on your experiences, what do you believe are the key factors that contribute to differences in career satisfaction between teachers who entered the profession directly and those who transitioned from another career?*

12. Role of Prior Experiences:

- *For those who transitioned from another career, how do your previous professional experiences influence your satisfaction and commitment in teaching?*
- *For those who entered teaching directly, how do you think starting your career in education has shaped your perspectives on satisfaction and commitment?*

13. Influence of School Support Systems:

- *How do support systems within your school (e.g., administration, colleagues, mentorship programs) impact your career satisfaction and*

commitment?

- **Comparison:** *Do you perceive any differences in how these support systems affect traditionally certified teachers versus career change teachers?*

Section VI: Recommendations for Recruitment, Retention, and Support (5 minutes)

14. Improving Teacher Experience:

- *Based on our discussion, what strategies or initiatives do you believe would enhance teacher recruitment, retention, and support in independent schools?*
- **Probe:** *Are there specific recommendations that would particularly benefit either career change teachers or traditionally certified teachers?*

15. Advice for Aspiring Teachers:

- *What advice would you give to someone considering a career in teaching, whether they are coming straight from college or transitioning from another profession?*
- **Final Thoughts:**
 - *Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't discussed but you feel is important regarding career satisfaction and commitment in teaching?*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- American Educational Research Association (AERA). (2011). *Ethical guidelines for conducting educational research*. <https://www.aera.net/About-AERA/AERA-Rules-Policies/Professional-Ethics>
- American Psychological Association (APA). (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). American Psychological Association.
- Angus, D. (2001). *Professionalism and the public good: A brief history of teacher certification*. The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.
- Bassett, P. (2011). *Why teach in an independent school*. <https://www.nais.org/careers/why-teach-in-an-independent-school>
- Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2009). Understanding teacher identity: An overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(2), 175–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640902902252>
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A methodological approach to enhance participant engagement in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1802–1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- Booth, A., Sutton, A., & Papaioannou, D. (2016). *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review*. Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Buchanan, J. (2010). May I be excused? Why teachers leave the profession. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 30(2), 199–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791003721952>
- Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation. (2023). *What is accreditation? CAEP*. <https://caepnet.org/accreditation/about-accreditation/what-is-accreditation>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(1), 1–44.
<https://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/392>
- Dawis, R. V. (2005). The Minnesota theory of work adjustment. In S. D. Brown & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 3-23). Wiley.
- Dawis, R. V., & Lofquist, L. H. (1984). *A psychological theory of work adjustment: An individual-differences model and its applications*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Self-determination theory*. Springer.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268.
https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Education Commission of the States. (2021). *Response to information request. Cassidy Francies and Sarah Glover*. https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/State-Information-Request_Alternative-and-Paraprofessional-Pathways.pdf
- Eggerth, D. E., & Flynn, M. A. (2012). Applying the theory of work adjustment to Hispanic immigrants. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 20(3), 292–310.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072711434415>
- Ford, T. G., Olsen, J., Khojasteh, J., Ware, J., & Urick, A. (2019a). The effects of leader support for teacher psychological needs on teacher burnout, commitment, and intent to leave. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 57(6), 615–634.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-09-2018-0185>
- Ford, T. G., Olsen, J. K., Khojasteh, J., Ware, J., & Urick, A. (2019b). Teacher leadership and motivation in the United States: Support for the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 86, 102882.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.102882>
- García, E., & Weiss, E. (2019, March 26). *The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought: The first report in 'The Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market' series*. Economic Policy Institute.
<https://files.epi.org/pdf/163651.pdf>
- Gius, M. (2015). A comparison of teacher job satisfaction in public and private schools. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 19(3), 155–164.
<https://www.alliedacademies.org/articles/aelj3issue.pdf>

- Goe, L. (2007). *The link between teacher quality and student outcomes: A research synthesis*. National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED496558>
- Guarino, C. M., Santibañez, L., & Daley, G. A. (2006). Teacher recruitment and retention: A review of the recent empirical literature. *Review of Educational Research, 76*(2), 173-208. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543076002173>
- Hogg, L., Elvira, Q., & Yates, A. (2023). What can teacher educators learn from career-change teachers' perceptions and experiences: A systematic literature review. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 132*, 104208. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104208>
- Hong, Y., & Matsko, K. K. (2015). Looking inside and outside of mentoring: Effects on new teachers' organizational commitment. *American Educational Research Journal, 56*(6), 2368–2407. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219843657>
- Ingersoll, R., & May, H. (2011). *Recruitment, retention, and the minority teacher shortage*. Consortium for Policy Research in Education. https://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_policybriefs/40
- Ingersoll, R., & Strong, M. (2011). The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Educational Research, 81*(2), 201–233. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311403323>
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(3), 499–534. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038003499>
- Keigher, A. (2010). *Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2008-09 teacher follow-up survey*. National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010353.pdf>
- Klassen, R. M., & Chiu, M. M. (2011). The occupational commitment and intention to quit of practicing and pre-service teachers: Influence of self-efficacy, job stress, and teaching context. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 36*(2), 114–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2011.01.002>
- Lent, R. W., & Brown, S. D. (2006). Integrating person and situation perspectives on work satisfaction: A social-cognitive view. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 69*(2), 236–247. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2006.02.006>
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45*(1), 79–122. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1994.1027>

- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (2000). Contextual supports and barriers to career choice: A social cognitive analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 47(1), 36–49. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.47.1.36>
- Lincoln School. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <https://www.lincolnschool.org/>
- Maddox, C., Jr. (2024). *Teacher retention in independent schools* (Publication No. 30995293) [Doctoral dissertation, Southeastern University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research (6th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- McElroy, A. (2019). *Alternate route - An examination of alternatively certified teachers' job satisfaction and self-efficacy* (Publication No. 27960881) [Doctoral dissertation, Nova Southeastern University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Mikulecky, M., Shkodriani, G., & Wilner, A. (2004). *A growing trend to address the teacher shortage*. Education Commission of the States. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED486428.pdf>
- Moses Brown School. (n.d.). Moses Brown School. Retrieved from <https://www.mosesbrown.org/>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications.
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2010). *Preparing teachers: Building evidence for sound policy*. The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/12882>
- National Council on Teacher Quality. (n.d.). *What makes teacher prep traditional or non-traditional*. https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/NCTQ_-_What_Makes_Teacher_Prep_Traditional_or_Non_Traditional
- National Council on Teacher Quality. (2011). *Student teaching in the United States [NCTQ Report]*. https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Student_Teaching_United_States_NCTQ_Report
- Nelsen, E. A., & Giebink, J. W. (1968). Teachers' motives for career choice. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 36(4), 73–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1968.11011077>
- Nielson, D., & McLeod, B. (2016). The role of teacher preparation programs in fostering career changers' professional identity development. *Journal of Career*

- Development*, 43(5), 445-460. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845316633520>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice (4th ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Redding, C., & Smith, T. M. (2016). Easy in, easy out: Are alternatively certified teachers turning over at increased rates? *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(4), 1086–1125. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216653206>
- Richards, L. C. (2022). *Retention strategies for non-traditional pathway teachers: Keeping new teachers in the profession* [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Alabama at Birmingham]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Rodgers, C. R., & Scott, K. H. (2008). The development of the personal self and professional identity in learning to teach. In M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, & D. J. McIntyre (Eds.), *Handbook of Research On Teacher Education* (3rd ed., pp. 732–755). Routledge.
- Roth, G., Assor, A., Kanat-Maymon, Y., & Kaplan, H. (2007). Autonomous motivation for teaching: How self-determined teaching may lead to self-determined learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99(4), 761–774. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.99.4.761>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers (3rd ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Sharkey, N. S., & Goldhaber, D. (2008). Teacher licensure status and student achievement: Lessons from private schools. *Economics of Education Review*, 27(5), 504–516. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2007.09.009>
- Tobin, K. (2012). Control of teacher certification in the United States. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 87(4), 485–499. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41725450>
- U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. (2018). *Certification programs. Condition of Education*. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/tlc>
- van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy (2nd ed.)*. Routledge.
- Weiss, E. M. (1999). Perceived workplace conditions and first-year teachers' morale, career choice commitment, and planned retention: A secondary analysis. *Journal*

of Educational Administration, 37(5), 512–529. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ598302>

The Wheeler School. (n.d.). The Wheeler School. Retrieved from <https://www.wheelerschool.org/>

White, S., Bourke, T., Mills, R., Mills, M., van Leent, L., Wood, C., & Readette, M. (2025). Career change teachers: Solving the teacher shortage? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 48(1), 97–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2024.2407546>

Zhang, G., & Zeller, N. (2016). A longitudinal investigation of the relationship between teacher preparation and teacher retention. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 43(2), 73–92. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1850121538>

CURRICULUM VITAE





