

# The Courage to Stand Up: A Qualitative Research Into the Perspective of a Potential Primary School Leader

Masters' Thesis

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## **Abstract**

The educational field in Europe deals with staff shortages. Recently, the attention to school leader shortages increased in the Netherlands specifically. However, the empirical research on school leader shortage across Europe is still scarce. Because school leaders often have an origin in teaching, we need to understand what drives or demotivates a teacher nowadays to become a school leader in the first place. The goal of this study was to get more insight into the perception of Dutch primary school teachers on their current job and on a school leader's function. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted among teachers, focusing on motivation from job satisfaction and self-efficacy. Results show that teachers altogether were motivated for their current job yet were demotivated by the additional tasks the teaching job includes. The reasons for possibly taking a school leader's job entailed taking a personal challenge and stating clear goals for a school. Teachers all gave a confident impression when asked about their self-efficacy, nonetheless, teachers expected to need more work experience in order to perform a school leader's function. This could Most participants were relatively young and future research could discuss motivational factors with older teachers. Also, a connection between motivation for becoming a school leader and current job satisfaction arose from the data. This invites for further investigation.

*Keywords:* Shortage, motivation, teachers, school leaders.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
The Courage to Stand Up.....	4
Accepting or Rejecting a School Leader’s Function.....	4
Leader Shortage in the Netherlands .....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Motivation .....	7
Job Satisfaction .....	8
Self-efficacy .....	9
Aim of Study .....	10
Method .....	10
Research Design.....	10
Participants .....	11
Instruments and Materials .....	12
Procedure.....	12
Data-Analysis .....	13
Results.....	14
Motivation .....	14
Job Satisfaction .....	18
Self-Efficacy.....	20
Discussion.....	22
Earlier Research .....	23
Limitations .....	26
Future Research.....	27
Practical Implications.....	29
References.....	30
Appendices.....	37
Appendix 1: Interview Guide.....	37
Appendix 2: Information Letter .....	39
Appendix 3: Informed Consent.....	41

## **The Courage to Stand Up**

Every organisation needs a leader, but not every organisation has one. This also applies to the educational sector, in which not every school has a school leader. “Despite the critical importance of the principal position, fewer people are choosing to leave the teaching ranks and become school principals (...)” (Hewitt et al., 2012, p. 74). Ten years later, at the time of writing this, the school leader shortage is still unsolved. It leaves schools, teachers, and students uncoordinated, which can harm the safe learning environment a school should be for students (Helf, 2012; Prashanti & Ramnaravan, 2020). Although the teacher shortage gets quite some international attention in research (García & Weiss, 2019; Steiner-Khamsi & Teleshaliyev, 2020; Swanson & Mason, 2018; Wiggan et al., 2021), e.g., because of strikes (Robert & Tyssens, 2008), the shortage in school leadership specifically seems less researched. Striking, considering the reports about school leader shortage across Europe and their call for more research about this problem (Can Korkut & Llaci, 2016; Tulowitzki et al., 2019). Several reasons for the leader shortage problem occur in literature. After expanding the problem within its context (primary schools), it will be compared to relevant literature within a theoretical framework and the research aim will follow accordingly. For the sake of consistency in this study, terms such as ‘school leader’, ‘school principal’ and ‘school head’ all fall under the generic name of ‘school leader’: someone that leads a primary school in (key) terms of instructional leadership, management, and administration (Cooner et al., 2008). The term ‘potential school leaders’ refers to teachers that could become school leaders.

### **Accepting or Rejecting a School Leader’s Function**

In trying to understand the problem of school leader shortage, it is important to investigate the target group of teachers. After all, many Dutch primary school leaders have an origin in teaching (Sapulete & Vrieling, 2020). In the investigation of Bass (2006), 860 American students that studied to become school leaders gave external inhibitors (or; obstacles) for

filling the leader's position. They mentioned the pressure from standardised test scores, family responsibilities, excessive paperwork, and bureaucracy. A more current external inhibitor could be the instability of the job due to current COVID-19 restrictions in primary schools. Internal inhibitors were also mentioned. These included stress, time management, or lack of discipline (Bass, 2006). Teachers may have the same motivators for rejecting or recruiting the function of a leader. Here, the lack of research into motivation for recruiting or rejecting the function of school leaders appears. Therefore, focussing on motivation for (not) taking the job of school leader is important: it will expand the knowledge of the underlying causes of school leader shortages.

Tulowitzki et al. (2019) recently contributed to this lack of literature. They found that teachers that become school leaders are often motivated to take the lead in arranging good education and stimulating learning. But the extra workload of the tasks that they, as school leaders, must perform, is demanding and often underestimated (Tulowitzki et al., 2019). However, this is one of few studies; research from European countries on this topic is still scarce (Barton, 2011; Bass, 2006; Tulowitzki et al., 2019).

### **Leader Shortage in the Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, more attention from higher management and the government goes out to the shortage problem since last years. The research of Adriaens et al. (2021) was one of the first big investigations into staff shortages in the Dutch educational field, commissioned by the Dutch government (General Association of School Leaders, 2021). It shows that the estimated leader shortage has risen to a mean of 12.9%. This means that approximately 13% of the total Dutch educational Full-time Equivalent (FTE), would not be staffed. This is true for 12,7% of FTE in primary school and 13,9% in special primary education (Adriaens et al., 2021). Table 1 provides the translation of these percentages in working hours. It shows not

only the scale of this shortage problem within the Netherlands but also the need for investigation into the underlying causes of these deficits.

**Table 1**

*Mean School Leader Shortage in the Netherlands in FTE's*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage FTE</b>	<b>Hours FTE</b>	<b>Total FTE</b>
Primary School	12,7%	890	7.020
Special Primary Education	13,9%	50	360
All Schools	12,9%	1.060	8.230

*Note.* Adapted from “*Personeelstekorten Primair Onderwijs,*” by Adriaens, H., Elshout, M.,

Elshout, S., & de Cock, E., 2021, p. 45.

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2021/12/14/eindrapport-personeelstekorten-primair-onderwijs-peildatum-1-oktober-2021>

The investigation of Adriaens et al. (2021) also shows that, against expectations, the correlation between the shortage of teachers and the shortage of leaders is minimal to not present. It means that a high teacher shortage slightly (or not) increases the chance of a high school leader shortage. This indicates a separate approach in searching for solutions for teacher- and school leader shortages. Therefore, the school leader shortage should be handled independently and deserves as much attention (Stone-Johnson, 2014) and this substantiates the scope of this study. It adds to the literature by asking questions about motivational factors in the leader shortage problem, such as: How do potential school leaders feel about their current job (job satisfaction)? What (de)motivates them to become school leaders? How confident are they about their skills if they would choose to lead a school (self-efficacy)? To ask these kinds of questions to teachers, we must first establish what motivation entails in terms of job satisfaction and self-efficacy.

## Theoretical Framework

This framework discusses literature about the concept of motivation and factors that influence motivation. It presents definitions of motivation, job satisfaction and self-efficacy. Then, these three constructs are related to the context of this study. Based on this framework, the research aim and research question are formulated.

### Motivation

Because this study focuses on the motivation of teachers to (not) become school leaders, it is important to know something about motivation and its' context. Motivation is about the drive to act, and from an Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) perspective, it is about the drive to achieve something (Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). This study aims at the drive to take or reject a path to become a school leader. Research in the educational field shows this theory is solid for use in current study (Dickhäuser & Stiensmeier-Pelster, 2003; Guo et al., 2015; Shang et al., 2022).

Leaper (2011) explains that EVT builds on the assumption that someone's motivation is twofold. On the one hand, there is the *expectation of success*. On the other hand, there is the *subjective task value*. A high expectation of achieving success, in combination with a high value to that success, suggests a high motivation for achievement. The value that one links to success can differ in origin (Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) and separates importance (attainment value), personal enjoyment (intrinsic value), usefulness (utility value) and costs. According to the expectancy-value model, expectations for success and task value are shaped by a combination of factors (Wigfield, 1994). These include characteristics such as abilities, previous experiences, goals, self-concepts, beliefs, expectations, interpretations, and environmental influences that are culture, socializers' beliefs, and socializers' behaviours. In this study, primary teachers are asked to explain their motivation for teaching and for becoming a school leader, in terms of expectations and achievements. Though

motivation in this context is mostly about achieving something, age can also influence the motivation of teachers' professionalisation. Hildebrandt & Eom (2011) reported a higher motivation amongst teachers aged mid-30 compared to other age categories. Hunzicker (2017) even found that this influence is present in teachers' motivation toward leadership as well. Therefore, age is considered an important motivational factor.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Through time, literature describes job satisfaction as an effective orientation or emotional state, caused by an employee's work role (Kalleberg, 1977; Locke, 1969). Locke (1969) in his definition, lies a specific focus on achieving a result that someone values. If a certain outcome of work is valued and achieved, job satisfaction increases (Locke & Latham, 1990). But this also has to do with expectations. If a certain outcome is expected but not achieved, this might lead to dissatisfaction (Kalleberg, 1997).

More recent research focuses on understanding what causes and influences job satisfaction among (primary school) teachers (Demirtas, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Türkoglu et al., 2017). A teacher's job can be experienced as demanding yet satisfying (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Morgan & Craith, 2015). Among others, teachers' job satisfaction consists of satisfaction with the work itself, the current supervisor, the pay, the advancement opportunities, the colleagues, the students, and more. These factors can be caught in the term of school context (Demirtas, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). Other factors that influence job satisfaction are emotional commitment and self-efficacy (this last factor is also considered the last construct of this study). To understand how teachers feel about their current job, questions will be asked about the school context and their emotional commitment to the teacher's job.

Also, little empirical research connects the job satisfaction of teachers and their motivation to become school leader. It is plausible to assume that teachers, when satisfied with their

current job, are less likely to consider another job. On the other hand, when teachers like the influence of the job on students, they might want to expand that influence (Tulowitzki et al., 2019). After all, teachers mention this as one of the motivators for becoming a school leader (Tulowitzki et al., 2019; Bass, 2006). Results may point to a deeper understanding of this relationship between job satisfaction and motivation among primary school teachers.

### **Self-efficacy**

Do teachers feel secure enough to become school leaders? Self-efficacy sometimes gets confused with self-esteem or self-confidence, but Jaaffar et al. (2019) explain the difference. Generally, self-esteem is about the impression an individual has of himself. Self-confidence adds value to that impression; a belief that the individual knows how to do something, or at least has the ability to do it (Kukulu et al., 2013). These two concepts are thus clearly focused on the personal characteristics, perceived by the individual itself (Jaaffar et al., 2019).

Self-efficacy is not just about the person and his perception. It is about an impression or judgement of the self, using specific skills in specific situations (also called performance abilities; Carpenter, 2011; Jaaffar et al., 2019). It differs from self-esteem and self-confidence in that it takes the context of the individual into account. This means that self-efficacy can differ per situation and is investigable from different angles than just the self. A high self-efficacy can be promoted by learning a new behaviour, making someone feel comfortable with the situation one is in and with the abilities one carries (Jaaffar et al., 2019; Türkoglu et al., 2017).

In the light of this study, self-efficacy is an important factor in motivation to become a school leader. When a teacher believes to have the performance ability to be a school leader, motivation is more likely (Margolis & McCabe, 2006). Once more motivated, the chances of pursuing the school leaders' function increase (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018). This also

means that when a teacher expects to be unable to perform well as a school leader, motivation (and so the chance to pursue the function) decreases.

### **Aim of Study**

To sum up, the shortage of school leaders in Dutch primary schools is established and current (Adriaens et al., 2021), but a clear motivational explanation for this shortage has not been forthcoming so far. Little is known about how Dutch potential school leaders feel about becoming school leader themselves. The first step of solving a problem is understanding the problem and therefore, a first step in solving the problem of school leader shortage is understanding how potential school leaders think about the leader's function. Literature shows that job satisfaction and self-efficacy have a positive influence on motivation (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018; Margolis & McCabe, 2006). Consequently, this study aims to discover the self-perception of teachers in their current role, and in their possible role as school leader, using the following Research Question (RQ): How do teachers feel about becoming a school leader in the future, considering their current job, motivation, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This research had a qualitative design, based on a constructivist paradigm: people give different meanings to phenomena and have therefore different realities (Chandra & Chang, 2017). The goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers experience their current job and what their point of view is on the function of a school leader. This research tended to generate more understanding of current experiences in the educational field in Europe, specifically in the Netherlands. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were conducted to find out how teachers feel about this topic. To answer the RQ, motivation, job satisfaction and self-efficacy of the teacher were considered.

## Participants

Participants all taught at Dutch primary schools and were gathered via online connections (social media) and offline connections in Education, all over the Netherlands. The goal was to interview at least ten teachers, in which saturation was found because no new information was provided by nor expected from interviewees (Saunders et al., 2018). There were some conditions considered in the process of choosing participants. Firstly, every teacher had the will to become a school leader, or seriously considered this career path. This means: the teacher either actively approached a colleague or school leader with questions or suggestions about a school leader's function; or investigated this function otherwise, e.g., via the internet; or considered applying for the job; or thought about the consequences of the choice to become a school leader. Secondly, every teacher in a primary school could participate under these conditions, regardless of work experience or age. However, age categories of 20-30 years, 30-45 years and 45-65 years were made (Table 2) because age can influence the motivation of teachers to become a leader (Hildebrandt & Eom, 2011; Hunzicker, 2017) and might therefore play a role. Thirdly, the reasons for not conducting the interview were the participant retiring or taking another job.

**Table 2**

*Participant Age Categories*

<b>Age category</b>	<b>Ages of participants</b>	<b>Total participants</b>
20-30 years	23, 23, 24, 25, 27	5
30-45 years	30, 36, 39, 40	4
45-65 years	49	1

## **Instruments and Materials**

The constructs from literature formed the base for the interview guide of this study (Appendix 1). Mainly open questions were formulated to achieve as much objectivity as possible, but also to deepen topics by gathering enriched data (Weller et al., 2018). The guide lent for physical as well as online use and was pointed to an interview no longer than 30 minutes.

The interviewee was asked in advance if there was any preference for an online meeting (e.g., because of Covid-19 measures). If there was no indicated preference for an online meeting, the interview took place in real life. If the interview was conducted online, the programme Microsoft Teams was used. Under the approval of the participant, audio recordings were made to be able to process the data. Offline interviews provided a better opportunity for notes about body language and facial expression than online interviews. It was therefore considered to use visual footage of the interviews to reflect on this non-verbal communication. However, due to equality in offline and online results, only audio recordings of the interview were used as data. This way, the effect of interview context and personal bias on the interview outcome could be minimalised, therefore reliability strengthened (Janghorban et al., 2014).

## **Procedure**

By using the literature to review the topic of school leader shortage, the three constructs of motivation, job satisfaction and self-efficacy were chosen to build the interview guide upon. The research plan used, included a time schedule and an approval from the Faculty's Ethical Review Board (FERB). This way, safety and integrity were ensured. After that, the search for participants began using the earlier-mentioned conditions. Every willing participant received an information letter with explanation of the goal and procedure of this research (Appendix 2). Once both parties agreed on conducting an interview, the participant filled out and handed

in an informed consent (Appendix 3). The interviews were scheduled physically unless the interviewee preferred an online meeting (nine out of ten interviewees preferred an online meeting). Further, the data collection was done in Dutch, which improves the validity of the data because Dutch was the mother tongue of all participants (Souza et al., 2017). The conversations were audio recorded under approval of the participant and stored on a secured device. To ensure credibility, the interview guide is evaluated by the researcher – and adjustments were made – after the first interview. For following interviews, the adjusted guide was used. After analysis, conclusions were drawn regarding the research question.

### **Data-Analysis**

Once all the interviews were done, the researcher exactly transcribed them using the audio records and Microsoft Word (this minimises the chance on violation of privacy, because the programme is not online). During transcribing, attention was paid to deleting names and other privacy-sensitive information, to ensure anonymity (Wiles et al., 2008). After transcription, the interviews were inserted into the analysis software programme Nvivo12. Segments of texts were identified that contained meaningful units (Thomas, 2006). This coding process was executed over all text of every interview. The codes were compared and merged under a theme, though no more than twelve themes were created, because of the summarising nature of this method (Burnard et al., 2008). This analysis method is called *thematic content analysis* and is according to the inductive approach of processing qualitative data (Burnard et al., 2008; Thomas, 2006). The method lent for an open-minded, not-biased analysis, which suits the research question best. Literature showed that little is known about the reasoning of teachers, in the process towards their decision to become a school leader (Barton, 2011; Bass, 2006; Tulowitzki et al., 2019). The deductive approach would only increase the prejudices of the outcomes, which is undesirable (Burnard et al., 2008). The themes that arose from the

data were close to literature, despite the inductive strategy. That is why the interview questions more or less formed the themes in data analysis as well.

## **Results**

To be able to understand why teacher do (not) choose for a job as school leader, three themes were discussed during the interviews: Motivation, Job-satisfaction, and Self-efficacy. In this chapter, the results of the interviews are presented using the same themes. All quotes used for explanation and transparency, come from different participants. During the analysis of qualitative data, context is also important. Hence, when the quotation included information about age or needed (years of) experience, the citation reference will include age and years of teaching experience of this participant. Lastly, an exception in quotation references was made for P3 and P10. They performed another teaching function in primary school compared to the other eight participants. P3 worked in special education (in reference, P3.se) and P10 worked as internal coach (in reference, P10.ic).

### **Motivation**

According to the Expectancy-Value Theory, expectations of achievement, together with the value that someone sees in succeeding, form the motivation for a certain case. In this case, teachers were asked about their motivation for their current function, their expectations before their function, and if those expectations have been met. The same questions were asked about the function of school leader, but hypothetically.

#### ***Motivation for Teaching***

When asked what their motivation for becoming a teacher was, every participant's answer focused on the learning of children. Teachers want to help them gain knowledge and improve social-emotional skills: "(...) and to really see that children are performing and growing and developing. For me, that was the reason to go and work in primary education" (P7).

Participants added motivational reasons such as seeing a direct result of their work and see this in children's development after a schoolyear.

Further, participants explained they revive when they can bond with students and therefore invest in a personal relationship with them. Another important factor mentioned, is group management: "And I thought, I would really like to lead a group, to make a class a class" (P8); "(...) and to basically run a group, that's what gives me pleasure and recognition" (P2). Some teachers even explicitly mentioned trying to offer students a safe atmosphere in class and/or in school and trying to create an overall good primary school memory for students.

### ***Expectations for Teaching***

Three participants shared that their core work is as they expected it to be: the contact with children, the actual teaching, and their influence on a child's life. Others brought up the topic of peripheral issues: teachers expected to engage in pure educational tasks rather than to fill their time with additional matters. Some examples of these matters were coaching children that need more attention, meet with colleagues/parents, and administrative tasks.

Yeah, to devote time to things that don't really have anything to do with the essence of education, or do not have a direct influence on educational content, so how you're teaching your children the next day, while that is what you actually would want to invest your time in. (P4)

### ***Motivation for School Leader Function***

Results on the motivation of teachers for becoming a school leader vary. Some participants seemed sure about their motivation and can see themselves leading a school within a certain period. They specified with arguments about their desire for a personal challenge and personal development.

And not specifically focused on the child, which was my motivation at first, (...) but I think of myself as someone who has more to offer. That I could do more. Then, if I think

of what I would like to do in another function within the school, I think I am suitable for the job of school leader. (P3.se)

They also shared arguments as being able to extend their circle of influence with performing overarching tasks and make a difference in their school for children and/or colleagues. Others outlined their doubts about or disinterest in stepping up as school leader. Amongst other reasons, e.g., financial challenges and lack of experience, the distance to the children and actual teaching that participants see with their current leaders was pointed out most: “But sometimes I see that leaders are mainly writing plans, and just become too distanced from the physical education. And I would regret that, because that is the exact reason for me to enter the educational sector”. (P7)

Finally, the argument about family was given to explain demotivation for becoming a school leader. Two participants stated to rather prioritise their family/children over their job and therefore could not apply for a school leaders’ job. The work would be too time consuming.

### ***Expectations for School Leader Function***

Expectations of the participants were divided into three categories: tasks, challenges, and additional matters. The expected tasks of a school leader are structured into overarching tasks, team-related tasks, organisational tasks, and educational tasks. Firstly, participants expect the tasks of a school leader mainly to be transcending the classroom, like setting goals for the school, outsourcing work, maintaining the financial balance, and leading teams. Within the team-related work, participants expect that they, as a school leader, should be in conversation with the staff and include them in the process of achieving goals, but also look after them personally:

I expect a school leader to be occupied with the managing of your staff. Depending on the size of the team, you will have a lot of teachers beneath you, and they have their daily

worries, questions, things. The need for a chit chat, on the one hand that is your role, to be the face, wanting to think along with the staff, I think that is very important and I think that will keep you busy. (P6)

Further, expectations of the organisational part of the job were being responsible for accommodation, speaking to external parties, and arrange all peripheral issues around the actual teaching. Participants discussed educational tasks as well, but often assumed that those tasks must make place for other tasks that get priority, e.g., searching for (new) staff because of the teacher shortage. “What I see in daily practice is that a school leader is currently busy with searching for substitutes. Or think about getting extra space because the student population expends too much (...) which may also push the substantive issues at times” (P9). Finally, the teachers expected a large distance to the educational tasks (e.g., classroom teaching) for a school leader:

But I get that a lot of people don't feel like being school leader, because you will not be busy with that. I mean, you learned to be a teacher, that is what you choose to do so, I mean, it is not a logical step to become a school leader, because the work is just very different. (P9)

This last point is also mentioned as an assumed challenge in the school leader profession.

Another expected challenge is that of the different opinions between board/foundation and school leader/teachers: “Does the boards' vision suit your vision? My previous school leader was burned up because she had very different ideas from the board and you might want things, but then the organisation is just unwieldly, and nothing is possible” (P10.ic).

Assumed additional matters included the consequences of bigger issues, such as the teacher shortage and the Covid-19 measurements.

### ***Goals in School Leader Function***

The value attached to achieving a success, is, according to EVT, of great influence on motivation. To discover if teachers value the outcome of a school leader's success, participants answered a question about the goals they would set as leader and how they estimate their chance of achieving those goals. Three main goals occurred throughout the interviews. Firstly, deciding on the school targets and focus together. Secondly, creating scope for individual child development. Thirdly, keeping the teacher teams satisfied.

#### **Expected Achievement.**

Although six teachers believed they can achieve these goals, four stated to miss experience and therefore need time to achieve their goals: "I'm young, so I think that, because I already have my ideas, I think that if I develop myself further, I expect to have the capacity to accomplish it in the team" (P6, age 24). Besides time, teachers also mentioned achievement depends on the current state of the school they would lead and the team they would coach.

#### **Job Satisfaction**

Satisfaction within the teaching job, might influence teachers' motivation for switching to a school leader's job. In the search for opinions about the current role teachers fulfil in their school, different topics occurred. The positive and negative job circumstances varied in every interview and are presented separately. These results are followed by the findings about teachers' emotional connection to the job.

#### ***School Context***

Positive factors of the teachers' job are separated into teaching, students, colleagues, facilities, schoolwide factors, and salary. Some participants indicated to like the influence they can have on the educational part of the job, e.g., thinking along in the development of

their schools' education or professionalisation, as well as experiencing the freedom of deciding about lesson content for teachers.

Four participants name their nice students as an important factor for their job satisfaction and six participants say this about their team in general. Specifically, a supporting, cooperative and safe environment within the team is appreciated:

I think we [team] are motivated and help each other. If something is going on, there is not a culture of silence or denial. It's more like, we can all think about this, what would I do or how can I help? I think that's really positive. (P3.se)

Some teachers explained that their school does not facilitate a laptop or phone for work use, but they did not experience this as disadvantage in their daily work. Looking function-wide, teachers shared cases of previous school leaders or current school boards, that contributed to teachers' job satisfaction. Further, although no one thought the teacher salary was high, three participants shared a grateful mindset towards it. A fourth added that, although the salary is enough, it should be higher: "I think it's a good thing that the attention for it [salary] raises now and that it will increase. But I do not complain, because my salary is not bad" (P4).

Negative factors of the teachers' job are separated into teaching, facilities, schoolwide factors, and salary. The shared issue for these teachers turned out to be the peripheral issues that come with the job. One participant explained that the work pressure, although doable, is high because of those additional matters.

Focussing on facilities, three participants shared they miss a separate space within the building, whether this is for a break with colleagues, for private conversations with students, or for pumping breastmilk. Teachers also complained about overdue building maintenance. Few references were made to the hypes that occur in education and the consequences these have on the work (pressure) in class.

I mean, we get a lot on our plate in education, we must, when there is a new gender movement in society, then it should particularly be learned in primary school. (...) If we talk about sex education, which can vary widely, and there are all sorts of children, families, parents, the school should just do that. A lot is being put on the plate of schools. I think that's a shame. (P6)

Also, the need for and lack of professionalisation rose from three interviews. Lastly, the differences in salary between primary and secondary education should be solved, according to three teachers. "(...) but I think the reward is way too low. That is a cliché of the teacher, but I think it is unbelievable that it is not made equal to secondary education" (P6).

### ***Emotional Commitment***

Another aspect of job satisfaction is emotional commitment. When asked if teachers are personally involved in their work, every participant answered 'yes': "And very involved with my students and yes. I like it when my students are going home with a good feeling and make the step towards secondary school at the end of the school year, satisfied" (P7); "(...) so I notice that this year I'm involved less, but the moment I teach a class more often and I have that connection [with the students], then I'm very committed. I am quite occupied with it" (P4). Three participants even spoke of being too committed to their job and wanted to let go of the feeling of responsibility more often: "Though, I have also learned that this is not up to me, this is up to the child itself, so over time I learned to give that commitment another place when it is not possible anymore" (P1). Furthermore, three participants explicitly mentioned the line between work and private life: "(...) even if you're in bed and text back a parent or have a parental meeting in the evening because that parent needs it, in that matter you take it home. You're not really away from work" (P3.se).

### **Self-Efficacy**

When a teacher is confident about possessing the right skills for a function of school leader, the motivation for this job can increase. Therefore, three questions focused on whether the participants believed in their own (learning) skills and achievements.

### ***Believe in Skills***

The interviewed teachers shared the believe of having the skills to be a school leader. Communication skills (e.g., with parents), social skills (e.g., within the teacher team), organisational skills (e.g., ordering school materials), and leadership skills (e.g., process management) were often mentioned as skills that they already developed, as well as prioritising goals and methods within the school. “(...) to be able to make considerations of what is good or not on short term or long term, like, what is urgent and what is not, etcetera, yes” (P6, age 24, 2 years of experience).

On the other hand, three teachers added they would need more time, self-development, and especially experience, to be able to use these skills in a leader’s job. “One, then I don’t always have that knowledge, two, I think, as long as you’re developing yourself, on this level, you don’t really have the right to correct someone else” (P4, age 27, 6 years of experience). Two participants mentioned their uncertainty about owning the right skills currently, and one participant was very clear about not owning them.

### ***Believe in Achievement***

Seven out of ten participants stated to be able to achieve things, if the motivation, experience, and faith are there. “I am someone that, if I want something, I will think of how to achieve that. Yes, haha, yes I think that if I want to, I would be able to achieve it” (P1, age 25, 5 years of experience). Within the answers, it was often mentioned that to accomplish something, you need focus, personal dedication, and cooperation with others. Finally, according to few participants, external factors, such as demotivated colleagues, could have influence on succeeding.

### ***Believe in Learning***

A unanimous answer occurred to the question of whether the teacher can learn: “I really had faith in myself to be able to learn new things” (P5, age 40, 8 years of experience). Three participants stated the importance of being open to new things. Two others emphasized internal motivation as requirement for learning.

### **Discussion**

To draw substantial conclusions from the results, they should first be interpreted in the light of this study’s aim and RQ. Reflecting on the aim of this study, the results helped to understand the thoughts, choices, and actions of teachers. With that, the study adds to the exploration of the self-perception of teachers in their current jobs and potential jobs as school leader. Teachers actively elaborated on their considerations and explained why and how they think about (applying for) the function of a school leader. Subsequently, the RQ can be answered with the most important findings of this study: How do teachers feel about becoming a school leader in the future, considering their current job, motivation, job-satisfaction, and self-efficacy?

Altogether, teachers felt motivated for their current job because of the occupation with child development and enjoy their influence on the children and the teaching material. However, they said to get demotivated by the additional tasks the job includes. This made some teachers think about another job (either a school leader’s job or not). On the one hand, they would choose for a school leader’s function out of the need for a personal challenge. On the other hand, they expected to feel a distance to the teaching work or prioritise their families over work, which demotivated them to apply for the leader’s job. All teachers expressed the need for time and work experience to achieve the goals for the school they would potentially lead. Finally, the self-efficacy of participants in terms of skills, achievement and learning could be stated as clearly present for all participants.

## **Earlier Research**

The results from the interviews relate to motivational literature. Some of this literature is previously discussed in the theoretical framework. To discuss the findings accordingly, the results of each construct are interpreted and compared with earlier studies.

### ***Motivation***

Leaper (2011), as he explains EVT, names the expectation of success together with the subjective task value as main motivational factors. The motivation of teachers was mostly based on seeing the development of children. This met their expectations of the job, but the additional tasks were mentioned as unexpected. A similar conclusion was reached by earlier studies, stating that a teacher's job is often experienced as demanding (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009; Morgan & Craith, 2015). Imagining being a school leader, teachers expected to perform overarching tasks and feel responsible for arranging school-related things. They also expected it to be of importance to stay close to the teacher team and keep themselves informed about what is going on. Lastly, they expected to experience a distance to the educational tasks, because other matters get prioritised, such as dealing with teacher shortage within the school.

The goals that teachers would want to achieve as school leader, are keeping a clear focus on a main goal within the school, keeping the teacher team satisfied, and facilitating individual student development. Specifically, this last goal aligns with suggestions of Tulowitzki et al., (2019) and Bass (2006), saying that teachers want to expand their influence on students. According to EVT, these goals would be the subjective task values (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Most teachers foresee being able to achieve those goals but need time to gain experience in teaching or leading first. According to EVT, these would be the expectations of success (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Comparing theory to these results, teachers should overall be motivated to become a school leader: they expect success in achieving their self-

formulated goals (which presumes a high subjective task value). This seems to be true, but under certain conditions of (time for gaining) experience that teachers created.

The motivation to become a school leader differed in origin, just as two of Wigfield's studies confirm with their variants of value (Wigfield, 1994; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Some teachers were motivated because they seek a personal challenge within their career (intrinsic value). Others were sure not to stand up as school leader, because they prioritise the time they can spend with their family over a fulltime job (costs). Some, lastly, expressed doubts about getting the job, because of the distance between the leader's tasks (costs) and the actual teaching they currently perform (attainment value). Worth the mention is that none of the participants appointed utility value as a motivational factor. This could mean that the added value of a school leader's role is assumed and unquestioned, but it could also mean that these teachers do not reflect much on the added value of a school leader's work.

### ***Job Satisfaction***

Regarding job satisfaction, in essence, all participants said they found satisfaction in their current position, mainly due to the work with children. Despite this, some participants shared doubts about switching jobs at some point in the future, based on school context or emotional commitment to their job. Although the influence on children and on the teaching material, together with a cooperative team, are mentioned as positive work circumstances, the additional tasks that come with the job, the lack of professionalisation, and the educational hypes in school were experienced as negative circumstances. A similar pattern of results was obtained in Demirtas (2010) and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009), in which school context were defined with similar various factors. Striking is that teachers mentioned the additional tasks within their teaching job, as well as in an expected school leaders' job.

The difference in salary for primary- and secondary schools was pointed out as well. Whilst analysing the data of current study, the salary of both sectors equalised in CAO

(Collectieve Arbeidsovereenkomst Primair Onderwijs, 2022). This equalisation does not affect the substantial content of the given salary argument yet puts it in perspective of the changes over time in Dutch primary education. The presence of emotional commitment was confirmed by every participant, especially when children or parents need extra help. Some even saw themselves as too committed and explained to seek for a balance in work and private life.

### *Self-efficacy*

Finally, the teachers' self-efficacy turned out to be rather high. Firstly, participants believed they needed more time, self-development and most importantly experience, to perform the skills needed to be a school leader. Secondly, participants again mentioned lack of experience as an important factor that could stand in the way of achieving what they want to achieve as leader. Thirdly, all teachers believed they can learn new things. If Margolis and McCabes' (2006) suggestion about the relation between self-efficacy and motivation is right, all participants are likely to be motivated for attaining the school leader's job. But clearly not every teacher showed this motivation. So even though all teachers believed in their performance ability as a person and school leader, they did not always prefer to perform it.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Especially in times of rising school leader shortage, literature must provide with information about the teacher population and their perspective on this matter. Within Europe, lack of research into motivation to become school leader appeared (Barton, 2011; Bass, 2006; Tulowitzki et al., 2019). This study contributes to literature about Dutch primary teachers and their motivation to step up as school leader. Though EVT suggests the expectation of success and the valuation of these successes can predict motivation, results show that this is not necessarily true for most participants. This is also true for self-efficacy: most teachers were confident about their skills, achievement and learning, but this did not always influence their

motivation for becoming a school leader. The weight of teachers' job satisfaction, however, particularly arose from this study's data (though underestimated in literature). As mentioned before, the connection between teachers' job satisfaction and teachers' motivation to become school leader remains poorly researched. Results of this study do connect the two constructs in this particular context: teachers can be unsatisfied with their job and therefore seek satisfaction in another job. It suggests that both school context and emotional job commitment weigh on motivation. It provides new insights for motivational literature and leads up to arguments for further research into this connection.

### **Limitations**

The goal of this qualitative study was not only to contribute to literature, but also to gain a better understanding of underlying causes of the school leader shortage problem. To achieve this goal, this study is approached open-minded and with a qualitative method. This makes the gathered data specific and not (easily) generalisable. Thus, careful decisions were made to ensure the quality of the data. For example, all interviews were only audio-recorded, to equate the analyses of online and offline interviews. Further, the conditions under which teachers could participate were minimal. Still, this study contains certain limitations.

First of all, most participants fell in the age category of 20-30 and 30-45 (Table 2). The answers more than once included the factor of work experience. This might have to do with the fact that young participants do not have as much work experience as older participants. The fact that relatively young participants took part in this study, could also have to do with the rather low age different and/or less use of social media by older people (Sala et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2016). Assuming that older teachers have more work experience, their motivation to become a school leader could differ from teachers with less experience. Though applying for a school leader's job in the Netherlands does not require a certain number of years of work experience, it does in most countries in Europe (Gamazo, 2013). The argument of teachers

assuming to need more experience before applying, is in line with the more widely accepted argument across Europe. Thus, for Dutch and European research, it could be enriching to gather older participants in the future of research into motivation.

Another limitation of current data collection concerns the participants that responded to the call for an interview. They might already be interested in this subject or feel connected to this topic in some way. Teachers that are not interested in the shortage problem or the job of school leader, are probably not eager to participate in a study as this one. However, their perspective on this problem, is just as important. After all, they have their share in not stepping up as school leader and might contribute to understanding the considerations of this choice.

Lastly, the results of this study entail internal as well as external motivational factors for becoming a school leader. The cause of this lies in the exploring and open nature of this study. But it is hard to determine which factors weigh heavily on teachers' motivation and which have less impact: internal or external factors. Interview questions were mainly based on internal motivation factors in terms of self-perception. Though this is important in considering motivation, the external factors, e.g., peer pressure, can be very important as well (Barton, 2011; Bamberg & Verkuyten, 2021). Having a clear understanding of teachers' value to specific (internal or external) motivational factors will again contribute to understanding their choices.

### **Future Research**

As explained, this study tried to understand the current shortage problem by exploring motivational factors of teachers. Therefore, much more research has to be done in the Netherlands as well as in Europe. Because of the larger scope of this study and the exploring nature, many recommendations are made for forthcoming investigations. It is for example important to discover opinions of teachers in all age categories. Researchers could

point specifically to older teachers in the age of 45-65, because of earlier mentioned influence of age on motivation. Not only would older teachers have life experience, but also experience in education. This could contribute to their knowledge, e.g., about a school leaders' job.

Consequently, they would have a better or more realistic idea of what the function is about.

Future research could examine these expectations amongst older participants and even compare them to the actual school leader's job to see if expectations and reality agree.

Secondly, the results showed a connection between teachers' job satisfaction and their motivation to become a school leader. This connection is minimally researched but turns out important in understanding the underlying processes of the school leader shortage problem. Therefore, future research could focus on this relation particularly to see if more teachers value job satisfaction in their consideration to become school leader. Because job satisfaction includes external factors that influence teachers' satisfaction, future research could separate internal and external motivational factors within this relation, e.g., with statistical, quantitative analysis, and see what teachers value most in their choice for (not) becoming school leaders.

Further, the Dutch CAO for education equalised wages in primary- and secondary school. The salary argument made by teachers, though relevant in their current perception, might change over time. What impact does this salary change have on the perception of teachers on their job satisfaction? Exploring the consequences of this modification could give new insights about teachers' motivation to become school leader.

At last, the impact of restrictions due to Covid-19 were mentioned during interviews. Teachers pointed out the additional tasks they perform as teacher and expect to perform as school leader. Dealing with Covid-19 and its consequences was mentioned as one of the additional tasks of school leaders that push their educational tasks further aside and thus affects teachers' motivation. Governmental decisions concerning this topic change rapidly

over time, which makes the impact of those restrictions unpredictable. When future research explores this shortage problem further, these circumstances should be taken into account.

### **Practical Implications**

The results of this study should be taken into consideration when educating teachers. For example, more attention could be paid to handling the peripheral issues that teachers face in their daily work. Also, the emotional commitment that teachers experience can be discussed during those courses, as some teachers mentioned too much involvement with their students and even experienced negative effects from this. If education can prevent these negative effects, teachers' job satisfaction would increase and so might their school leaders' job satisfaction in the future. After all, teachers expected to perform much additional tasks as school leader as well.

Moreover, the findings of this study have several important implications when searching for potential school leaders to fill a vacancy. It is firstly essential to keep in mind the expectations teachers have of the leaders' job. Teachers may not be eager to apply for the job when they expect too much additional tasks around the main educational tasks (as they explained during interviews). In vacancies, give a clear and honest projection of the tasks that the job includes. Secondly, recruiters for school leaders should take into account the work experience of a teacher. This is mentioned not only as an (expected) necessary factor to achieve goals as a school leader, but also as motivational factor for becoming a school leader. When recruiting school leaders, explore the teachers' experience and how competent they feel accordingly.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Welkom. Bedankt voor deelname aan dit onderzoek! Fijn dat we in gesprek kunnen gaan over uw huidige ervaringen binnen het werkveld van de basisschool. Het interview zal ongeveer 30 minuten duren, afhankelijk van het verloop van het interview. Vooraf wil ik herhalen dat u er op elk moment voor kunt kiezen een vraag niet te beantwoorden. Daarnaast zal ik proberen zo objectief mogelijk te blijven en vragen te stellen wanneer ik iets niet begrijp. De vragen leiden allemaal terug naar de volgende hoofdvraag:

*How do teachers feel about becoming a school leader in the future, considering their current job, motivation, job-satisfaction, and self-efficacy?*

Hoe voelen docenten zich over een potentiële functie als schoolleider, daarbij in acht nemend hun huidige functie, motivatie, functietevredenheid en zelfinschatting?

Als eerste wil ik graag uw huidige functie in kaart brengen. Kunt u zichzelf kort voorstellen a.d.h.v. leeftijd en de taken die u binnen uw functie uitvoert? Hoelang voert u deze functie als zodanig al uit?

Bedankt. Ik ga nu een aantal onderzoeksgelateerde vragen stellen en deze zijn opgedeeld in 3 blokken: motivatie, tevredenheid over een functie en zelfredzaamheid. Omdat ik wil onderzoeken hoe basisschoolleerkrachten tegen de functie van een schoolleider kijken, stel ik soms de vraag twee keer; één keer over uw huidige functie en één keer over de schoolleidersfunctie.

Theory	Construct	Category	Question
<b>Motivation</b> (Expectancy-Value Theory)	Algemeen		Wat is uw motivatie (geweest) voor het vak als docent?
			In hoeverre bent u gemotiveerd om een schoolleider te worden?
	Expectations for achieving/verwachting van slagen		Welke verwachtingen had u van het vak als leraar? In hoeverre zijn deze uitgekomen?
			Welke verwachtingen hebt u van het vak als schoolleider?
	Value to achievements/ Waardeoordeel aan prestaties		Welke dingen zijn voor u belangrijk om als schoolleider te behalen?
			In hoeverre schat u in dat u die verwachtingen waar kunt maken?
<b>Job satisfaction</b>	School context		Hoe denkt u over uw huidige werkomstandigheden? Denk hierbij aan het lesgeven zelf, aan de studenten, collega's, aan aangeboden faciliteiten als werkruimte/laptop/telefoon,

		Teacher	salaris en leidinggevende/bestuur. *
	Emotional commitment/emotionele toezegging		In hoeverre trekt u zich het werk persoonlijk aan? [Indien niet duidelijk: In hoeverre voelt u zich emotioneel betrokken bij uw baan?]
<b>Self-efficacy</b>	Believe in skills	School leader	In hoeverre gelooft u dat u de vaardigheden in huis heeft om een schoolleider te zijn?
	Believe in ability to achieve	School leader	In hoeverre gelooft u dat u kunt bereiken wat u wilt bereiken?
	Believe in ability to learn	School leader	In hoeverre gelooft u dat u in staat bent nieuwe dingen te leren?

\*Het is niet nodig om op elk aspect in te gaan, een algemeen beeld van tevredenheid is voldoende.

Bedankt voor uw deelname. Wilt u het onderzoek ontvangen wanneer dit afgerond is? Dan heb ik hiervoor uw e-mailadres nodig. Dit zal verwijderd worden wanneer het verstuurd is.

## Appendix 2: Information Letter

Beste leerkracht,

In deze brief wordt uw geïnformeerd over het onderzoek dat in het kader van afronding van het onderwijstraject 'Master Thesis Educational Sciences' wordt uitgevoerd.

*Wat is het doel van het onderzoek?*

Het doel van het huidige onderzoek is het in kaart brengen van de overwegingen van basisschoolleerkrachten ten opzichte van de functie als schoolleider. Het huidige schoolleider tekort in Nederland leidt tot vragen over de oorsprong van dit probleem. Er is een verschil te zien in de manier waarop scholen met dit tekort omgaan. Waar sommige scholen een externe vacature uitzetten, nemen andere scholen leerkrachten (uit eigen personeel) aan om de functie van leiderschap op zich te nemen. Maar welke afwegingen maken leerkrachten wanneer ze nadenken over deze functie? Om hier meer inzicht in te krijgen, is dit onderzoek gestart.

*Wat houdt het onderzoek in?*

In dit onderzoek wordt op zoek gegaan naar het perspectief van de leerkracht. Dit wordt gedaan door middel van het afnemen van interviews bij leerkrachten, die overwegen (of hebben overwogen) een functie als schoolleider te gaan vervullen. In deze interviews zullen vragen gesteld worden, over een aantal thema's die volgens de literatuur belangrijk zijn gebleken. Een interview duurt ongeveer 30 minuten en wordt opgenomen (enkel audio, geen visuele opname).

Het is belangrijk dat u zich als geïnterviewde veilig en vrij voelt om naar waarheid te antwoorden. Daarom is het goed om van te voren na te denken in welke context u zich het meest veilig voelt. Dit kan op werklocatie zijn, thuis, etc. Deze beslissing kan invloed hebben op de manier waarop het interview afgenomen wordt: online of offline (face-to-face). Als participant kunt u daarom de voorkeur aangeven om het interview online of offline te laten plaatsvinden.

*Privacy en vertrouwelijkheid*

Voor dit onderzoek worden gegevens van u verzameld, namelijk naam, leeftijd, functie en alle informatie die u versterkt tijdens het interview. De gegevens zullen voor minimaal 10 jaar bewaard worden. Dit is volgens de daartoe bestemde richtlijnen van de VSNU bepaald. Meer informatie over privacy staat op de website van de Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens:

<https://autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/nl/onderwerpen/avg-europese-privacywetgeving>

Alle gegevens worden vertrouwelijk behandeld en anoniem verwerkt. Dit houdt ook in dat de audio opname wordt getranscribeerd (uitgetypt) zonder daarbij persoonlijke gegevens als naam, leeftijd, of andere gegevens te transcriberen die herleidbaar zijn naar de leerkracht. De gegevens worden verder alleen voor onderzoeks- en opleidingsdoeleinden gebruikt. (In dit geval betekent dit, dat de data wordt gebruikt om conclusies te kunnen trekken over het perspectief van leerkrachten op hun huidige functie en eventueel toekomstige functie als

schoolleider.) Als participant heeft u altijd de mogelijkheid om te stoppen met deelname op ieder moment van de deelname.

*Contactpersoon en klachtenfunctionaris*

Als u vragen of opmerkingen over het onderzoek hebt, kunt u contact opnemen met de onderzoeker, Rosette Verboom ([g.r.verboom@students.uu.nl](mailto:g.r.verboom@students.uu.nl)), en/of met de supervisor van dit onderzoek die de onderzoeker begeleidt, dr. Ellen Daniëls ([e.e.daniels@uu.nl](mailto:e.e.daniels@uu.nl)). Wanneer u een officiële klacht wilt indienen over het onderzoek, dan kunt u een mail sturen naar de klachtenfunctionaris via [klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl](mailto:klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl).

Ik hoop u hiermee voldoende geïnformeerd te hebben.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Rosette Verboom

### **Appendix 3: Informed Consent**

Informed consent rondom het onderzoek

*The Courage to Stand Up: A Qualitative Research Into the Perspective of a (Potential) Primary School Leader*

Uitgevoerd door Rosette Verboom, onder supervisie van Ellen Daniëls, namens de Universiteit Utrecht.

#### *Verklaring informed consent*

Ik als participant, heb uitleg gekregen over het onderzoek en (optioneel) mijn vragen over het onderzoek gesteld. Ik heb goed nagedacht over of ik aan het onderzoek wil deelnemen. Ik mag op ieder moment stoppen met deelname aan dit onderzoek als ik dat wil. Ik hoef niet uit te leggen waarom ik wil stoppen. Ik mag weigeren een vraag te beantwoorden. Ik hoef dan niet uit te leggen waarom ik de vraag niet wil beantwoorden.

#### *Verklaring vertrouwelijk behandelen van data*

Ik als onderzoeker, verklaar hierbij dat ik vertrouwelijk om zal gaan met de data die ik als masterstudent Educational Sciences middels het interview verzamel. Ik zal de verzamelde data niet delen met anderen, niet gebruiken voor een ander doeleinde dan mijn studie, noch op enige wijze verspreiden.

Datum:

Handtekening participant:

Handtekening onderzoeker:

