

Teacher Motivation for Professional Development outside School Supervision

A Case Study on Independent English-Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT

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In a knowledge society where education is a valuable product, the interest in quality education is high. This has translated into a trend worldwide to try to enhance teachers' performance through tighter control measures and methods of assessment together with top-bottom professional development. However, research within the Self-Determination theory and more recent neurobiological studies have confirmed the link between autonomy and higher motivation and performance.

The thesis investigated the implications of removing school-conducted quality control on teachers' motivation for pursuing professional development. Specifically, it aimed to identify the driving factors behind their pursuit of professional growth even in the absence of school-led supervision within a cohort of independent English-language teachers and the impact of autonomy on their motivation.

The analysis drew on data from a survey using a modified version of the Work Task Motivation Scale for Teachers, completed by 18 teachers, along with follow-up semi-structured interviews conducted with 4 of them. The findings suggest that the autonomy and flexibility associated with self-employment positively influence teachers' motivation for professional development, which appears to be primarily driven by intrinsic factors.

The findings will be used to suggest strategies to increase and maintain motivation for professional development for independent English-language teachers and schools and will be shared through the commissioner' online platform.

Key words: motivation, professional development, language teaching

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ABBREVIATIONS

TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
ELT	English Language Teaching
CET	Cognitive Evaluation Theory
OIT	Orgasmic Integration Theory
COT	Causality Orientations Theory
WTMST	Work Task Motivation Scale for Teachers
TMPDS	Teacher Motivation for a Professional Development Scale

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In today's knowledge-based society, quality education is increasingly seen as essential for developing human capital, as highlighted in policies like Next Generation EU. The internationalization and privatization of education have introduced market-driven priorities, prompting greater standardization and a focus on efficiency, accountability, and performance (Jones 2013). As the culture of evaluation expands beyond students to include schools and teachers, organizations like the OECD now call for lifelong professional development to help teachers navigate constant social and workplace change.

While such policy-driven initiatives aim to support teacher development, decades of research suggest that the way these initiatives are implemented can have unintended consequences. For decades studies (e.g., Deci et al. 1982) have shown that external pressures can lead teachers to adopt controlling behaviors, reducing student autonomy and negatively impacting learning. Studies rooted in Self-Determination Theory have consistently linked autonomy—both for students and teachers—to greater motivation, engagement, and performance. Neurobiological research (Murayama et al. 2010) echoes these findings, highlighting the motivational benefits of autonomy and choice.

Recognizing the importance of autonomy, this thesis aims to explore its impact on teachers' motivation for professional development, focusing on the unique sector of English-Language Teaching (ELT). The ELT sector offers an interesting context to examine these dynamics. Historically market-oriented, ELT institutions have prioritized innovation and continuous professional development to meet diverse learner needs. With their international student populations and multicultural classrooms, they reflect many of the characteristics now common in mainstream education. As such, ELT can offer valuable insights into how autonomy shapes teacher motivation in evolving educational landscapes.

Research on teacher autonomy has traditionally focused on school environments, where the level of autonomy granted to teachers is often determined by administrative and managerial decisions beyond teachers' direct control. However, in recent years, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing number of ELT professionals have moved toward self-employment, enabled by advancements in digital teaching tools. Many continue to work independently even after schools reopened, reflecting a broader global shift toward freelance and remote work. These independent language teachers, operating without institutional oversight, experience a high level of professional autonomy. They thus represent a unique group for studying what drives ongoing engagement in CPD and whether autonomy supports sustained professional motivation. This research seeks to understand what encourages teachers to participate in professional development and whether experiencing autonomy fosters motivation for professional growth.

1.2 Research questions

This thesis explores how autonomy influences teachers' motivation for professional development, specifically within the field of English-Language Teaching (ELT). It aims to find out if the positive link between autonomy and professional development seen in schools also translates to how independent language teachers operate outside school supervision. Simply put, the goal is to understand what encourages teachers to participate in professional development and whether experiencing autonomy fosters motivation for professional growth.

The main research questions of this thesis are:

How does autonomy affect teacher motivation for professional development in independent English language teachers?

- What impact does intrinsic motivation have on independent English-language teachers' pursuit of professional development opportunities?
- What impact does extrinsic motivation have on independent English-language teachers' pursuit of professional development opportunities?

- How do self-employment conditions influence motivation for continuing professional development (CPD)?

In simple words, the thesis aims to understand what makes teachers want to engage in professional development, recognizing the importance of ongoing professional growth in today's educational landscape and the potential of self-determined motivation in sustaining effort and performance.

The main research question focuses on the unique working conditions of independent teachers, who have more autonomy compared to those in traditional schools. It seeks to understand the relationship between this autonomy and their motivation to pursue Continuing Professional Development (CPD). The first two sub-questions delve into the nature of this motivation, distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic factors as outlined in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework. In fact, although independent teachers theoretically have the freedom to make their own choices, they still operate within a job market with specific client demands and economic pressures, making it unrealistic to assume that external factors do not influence their decisions.

By understanding these motivational factors and the impact of allowing teachers to direct their own CPD sessions, the thesis will develop a list of recommendations to foster and sustain motivation for professional development among independent English-language teachers and schools. These recommendations will be shared through the commissioner's online platform, Success with IELTS.

1.2 Structure of thesis

The research approach in this thesis combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, structured as a two-phase case study. In the first phase, a survey based on an adapted version of Basikin's Teacher Motivation for Professional Development Scale (TMPDS), grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), is used to investigate whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation drives teachers to pursue Continuing Professional Development (CPD); while the

second phase involves semi-structured interviews that explore the relationship between intrinsic motivation and the autonomy provided by self-employment.

This thesis includes a review of the research within the chosen theoretical framework, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which is highly influential in motivation studies. SDT was chosen for its distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic factors and its emphasis on autonomy, a key aspect of self-employment. The literature review first covers literature on motivation and teaching, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT), and then narrows down its scope to address the limited research on independent teachers, providing a definition relevant to this study.

Next, the research methodology section details the survey and interview questions, and the sample of teachers involved. The findings are then analyzed, followed by a discussion, recommendations for independent teachers and schools, consideration of limitations, and suggestions for further research.

1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Motivation

Motivation is the driving force behind individuals' actions and the pursuit of their goals. It encompasses people's lifelong natural tendencies to be curious, explore, grow and to seek out challenges, as well as their desire to master new skills and knowledge, even without external rewards (Ryan & Deci 2000, 68). Over the past four decades, research has extensively explored motivation across various levels—biological, cognitive, and social. From an evolutionary standpoint, motivation is vital in terms of development as it drives organisms to learn new skills and adapt to new and complex environments (Ryan and Deci 2000, 252). Motivation has moreover a fundamental role in shaping one's identity through exposure to new ideas and challenges, differentiation of interests and development of a sense of purpose (Deci and Ryan 1985, 120).

Motivation has also been given increasing attention in the field of education and business as a way of enhancing engagement and performances. More self-determined kinds of motivation in the context of work have been proven to be linked to higher job satisfaction (Blais, Brière, Lachance, Riddle, & Vallerand 1993, 209). In fact, guided by self-determination theory, many empirical and field studies have shown that intrinsic motivation is a key predictor of enhanced learning, performance, creativity, optimal development, and psychological wellness. Recently, there has also been a growing interest in examining the neurobiological substrates of motivation, providing deeper insights into its underlying mechanisms.

1.1.1 Self-determination Theory

One of the most influential frameworks for the study of motivation is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), first postulated by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the 1980s. It states that motivation is catalyzed by the social environment, which plays a crucial role in maintaining, promoting, or undermining self-

motivation. To this end, it examines the psychological needs fundamental to better understand motivation and to design environments that foster people's growth and well-being. (Ryan & Deci 2000, 68).

SDT considers two types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation involves engaging in activities and behaviors driven by social norms and values that are internalized through self-regulation. Intrinsic motivation, on the contrary, is seen as part of human nature, a natural inclination to learn and grow through novelty and challenges. (Deci & Ryan 2017, 14).

Intrinsic motivation, characterized by self-motivation or personal endorsement of an action, has been shown to lead to better performance and creativity compared to external factors, such as rewards and punishments (Ryan & Deci 2000). In addition, contrary to previous studies on the additive nature of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards (Porter and Lawler 1968), Deci (1971, 114) used experimental research to prove how rewards can be detrimental to initially intrinsically-motivated behaviors.

1.1.2 Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is the inherent inclination to pursue and enjoy activities for their own sake regardless of external rewards or consequences (Ryan & Deci 2022, 1). A sub-theory of SDT, Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), was presented by Deci and Ryan (1985) as the study of the social and environmental factors that foster or hinder, not cause, intrinsic motivation. CET therefore focuses on the three fundamental needs of autonomy, competence, and, to a lesser extent, relatedness, examining how their satisfaction or neglect can, respectively, increase or decrease intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci 2000, 68).

In SDT, competence refers to feeling effective and capable. Vallerand and Reid (1984) and other studies confirmed earlier findings by Deci (1975) that perceived competence, supported by positive feedback and adequate levels of challenge, can enhance intrinsic motivation, which has been linked to enhanced creativity, problem-solving skills and learning (e.g., Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford 2014, 19). On

the contrary, negative feedback can hinder the competence need and negatively affect intrinsic motivation and, consequently, performance (Deci & Ryan 2022, 3).

At the same time, competence alone cannot increase intrinsic motivation without the support of autonomy, defined as feeling in control of one's actions (Fisher 1978; Ryan 1982, 852). The belief that our actions are self-determined and the result of personal choice, as opposed to being controlled by external forces, is positively linked to intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 2000). Conversely, extrinsic motivation, whether through rewards or threats, contributes to the perception of an external locus of causality, meaning a lack of control over one's own behavior, thus negatively impacting intrinsic motivation (Deci 1971; Deci, Koestner & Ryan 1999).

Finally, relatedness, which involves feeling connected and safe in one's relationships, also somewhat positively impacts intrinsic motivation (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Ryan & Deci 2000) with unsupportive and detached teachers having in fact been found by Ryan and Grolnick (1986) to decrease students' intrinsic motivation.

CTE does not investigate the causes of intrinsic motivation and its principles do not apply for activities that are not inherently engaging. The motivation to engage in such activities is, therefore, not intrinsic but extrinsic.

Table 1 summarizes the key points of SDT and what factors can positively or negatively affect intrinsic motivation.

TABLE 1. Main takeaways on intrinsic motivation.

Self-determination theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan postulates		
the positive effects of		Research
autonomy;	Feeling in control of one's actions	Fisher 1978; Ryan 1982; Deci & Ryan 1985
competence;	Feeling effective and capable in one's activities	Deci 1975; Vallerand & Reid 1984; Ryan & Deci 2000

and relatedness;	Feeling safe and connected in one's relationships	Ryan & Grolnick 1986; Baumeister & Leary 1995
and the negative effects of		
rewards and threats	Signs of external control over one's actions	Deci 1971; Deci & Ryan 1985; Deci, Koestner & Ryan 1999
over		
intrinsic motivation	A natural human inclination to learn and grow	Deci & Ryan 1985; Ryan & Deci 2000; Ryan & Deci 2008; Deci & Ryan 2022

1.1.3 Extrinsic Motivation

While intrinsic motivation is fundamental and has the most advantages, a large portion of human activities, especially in adulthood, are necessarily driven by other forms of motivation due to social pressures and responsibilities (Ryan & La Guardia 1999). These can range from amotivation, to passive obedience, to internalization and integration of external behaviors and values. When an activity is pursued not for its own sake and enjoyment, but because of external factors, it is driven by extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan 2000). Extrinsic motivation is studied by the Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), another sub-theory of SDT, which categorizes it in 4 types based on their relative degree of autonomy (Deci & Ryan 1985). In fact, contrary to some views, some types of extrinsic motivation can give a sense of choice through endorsement and instrumentalization of the action or behavior (Ryan & Connell 1989; Deci & Ryan 2000).

The least autonomous and most basic form of extrinsic motivation is external regulation. It relies on rewards and negative consequences, and it is therefore seen as imposed from the outside, having an external perceived locus of causality (deCharms 1968; Ryan and Deci 2000).

Another type of extrinsic motivation which is partly internalized, although not completely accepted, is introjected regulation. The locus of causality is still

external although it is driven from a personal desire to avoid feelings failure or boost self-esteem. Both external and introjected regulation fall under controlled motivation because the driving force behind the activity originates from the outside. (Deci & Ryan 1985, 2022).

A more autonomous form of extrinsic motivation is identified regulation, as individuals consciously recognize the importance of a behavior and internalize it by deeming it or its end goal as personally valuable. However, the personal identification with the value of the action remains separated from the self. (Ryan & Deci 2000, 2022).

When the behavior and the values behind it are accepted and assimilated with the self, there is the highest degree of autonomy through integrated regulation. This still differs from intrinsic motivation as the action is moved not just by the enjoyment of the activity but by the belief that it is somehow instrumental to achieve a personal goal. Both identified and integrated regulation have been categorized as autonomous motivation as actions are driven by a desire coming from the inside rather than the outside (Ryan & Deci 2000: 2022). Recent studies within the SDT framework, however, have begun merging identified and integrated regulation into a single category: identified regulation (e.g. Fernet, Senécal, Guay, Marsh, and Dowson 2008).

OIT highlights that the more autonomous extrinsic motivation is, the better is the performance (Ryan, Kuhl & Deci 1997; Ryan & Deci 2000). Ryan and Connell (1989, 756) expanded these findings to the educational field where students were found to be more engaged and invested when driven by more autonomous types of motivation. OIT also recognizes that most behaviors are driven by multiple and interconnected motivations, that, instead of being neatly separated, create a continuum (Ryan & Deci 2000).

Table 2 provides some examples of statements that illustrate different types of extrinsic motivation according to the Work Task Motivation Scale for Teachers (WTMST) (Fernet, Senécal, Guay, Marsh, and Dowson 2008), which is based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT). As detailed in the methodology section, this scale will be adapted and used in the first-phase survey to distinguish between

various forms of teacher motivation for professional development. Therefore, it serves as an ideal source for practical examples to clarify the various types of extrinsic motivation while connecting the underlying theory with the research methods used to investigate the research.

TABLE 2. Statements related to the different types of extrinsic motivation according to the Work Task Motivation Scale for Teachers (Fernet et al. 2008).

Type of extrinsic motivation	Statements from the Work Task Motivation Scale for Teachers (WTMST)
Identified Motivation	Because this task allows me to attain work objectives that I consider important.
Introjected Regulation	Because if I don't carry out this task, I will feel bad.
External Regulation	Because the school obliges me to do it.

2.1.4 Amotivation

The SDT sub-theory called Causality Orientations Theory (COT) explains how individuals interact with their environments and regulate their behaviors based on three orientations, autonomy, controlled and impersonal. These orientations reflect the perceived source of control over one's behaviors and outcomes, that is the locus of causality. (Ryan & Deci 2022, 4). COT analyzes how these orientations influence people's motivations and behaviors.

When there is an autonomy orientation, the perceived locus of causality is internal and individuals act out of interest and value for the activity itself. As discussed earlier, this is the case for intrinsic motivation and, to varying degrees, for the most autonomous types of extrinsic motivation, such as identified and integrated regulation. With a controlled orientation, the locus is external and actions are driven by external forces rather than by choice (deCharms 1986). This is the case with external and introjected regulation.

Finally, when there is an impersonal orientation, the locus of causality is perceived as impersonal, as it could be the case for luck and fate, leading to feelings of a lack of control, a sense of powerlessness, or, in other words, high amotivation. Individuals with an impersonal perceived locus of causality feel they have no control over outcomes or no knowledge of why they are doing something and, therefore, they do not act or act without a clear intent. (Ryan & Deci 2022, 4).

COT suggests that all individuals possess each of these orientations to varying extents, and different environments can highlight or subdue one orientation over the others (Ryan & Deci 2022, 4).

Figure 1 visually summarizes the taxonomy of motivation within the SDT framework as described so far. As one moves from left to right, the different types of motivation exhibit increasing levels of autonomy, a stronger sense of self-determination, and a more internal locus of causality. As mentioned earlier, the greater the satisfaction of the need for autonomy, the better the performance. In this regard, Intrinsic motivation has been identified as the one holding the most benefits in terms of performance, creativity and learning and is therefore the focus of this paper. (Ryan & Deci 1997, 2000, 2022).

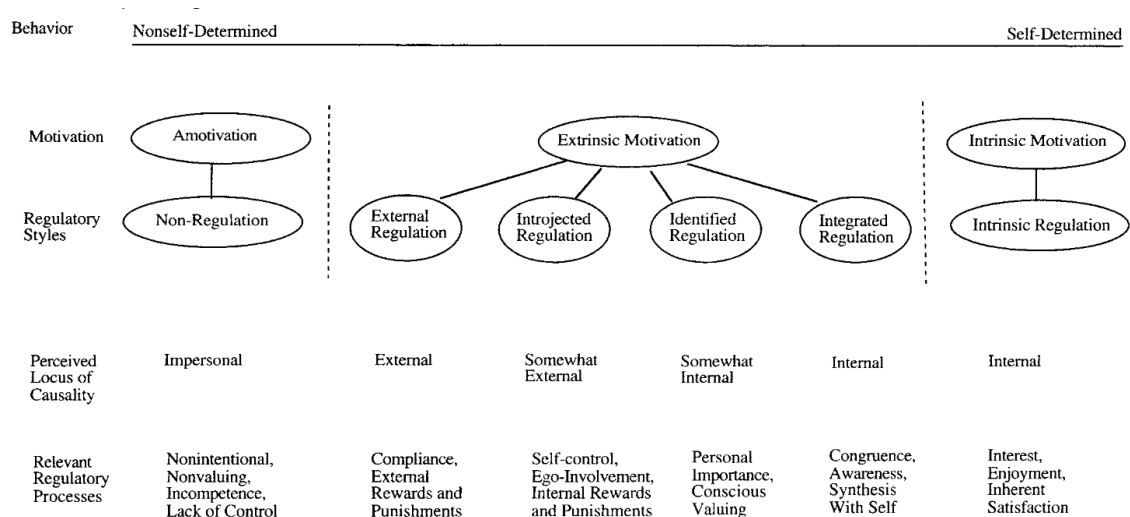


FIGURE 1. MOTIVATION SPECTRUM The Self-Determination Continuum Showing Types of Motivation with Their Regulatory Styles, Loci of Causality, and Corresponding Processes (Deci & Ryan 2000).

1.2 Neuroscience and Intrinsic Motivation

One of the main limitations of SDT was its main reliance on experiential and behavioral methods such as observations and self-reported questionnaires. The recent interest of neuroscience in intrinsic motivation, however, has significantly expanded upon the data previously gathered. Neuroscience has complemented and deepened research by providing new insights into the neural processes underlying intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation, defined as an organismic ability, is an inherent drive to explore and master new skills (Di Domenico & Ryan 2017). Although it has unique characteristics in humans, intrinsic motivation is not solely a human trait. The term intrinsic motivation, although often associated with Deci and Ryan's SDT framework, was coined by the American psychologist Harry Harlow (1950), whose study on primates challenged the belief that behaviors are controlled solely by negative and positive reinforcements (e.g. Skinner 1953). As mentioned earlier, SDT went on to corroborate the findings that rewards and threats hinder intrinsic motivation.

The first studies on the neurobiology of intrinsic motivation were also conducted on animals and drew very similar conclusions. Jaak Pankseep, an affective neuroscientist, sought to move beyond a single-discipline approach to brain processes by integrating behavioral, psychological, and neuroscientific perspectives. His research led to the discovery of the SEEKING system, an innate emotional network in mammals (Panksepp 1998). This system operates continuously, encouraging animals to explore and learn from their environment without a specific goal but out of curiosity, aligning closely with the SDT framework on intrinsic motivation. The SEEKING system contributes to knowledge development and higher mental processes, aiding survival through exploration. In more advanced animals, it fuels a continuous sense of interest and a search for meaning. It involves brain areas that are part of the brain's reward network, and it is deeply linked to dopamine, thus making this internally driven process of learning and engaging a pleasurable one (Panksepp 1998). These findings suggest that human intrinsic motivation is an evolved form of this

ancient mammalian drive, a persistent source of enthusiasm and motivation (Di Domenico & Ryan 2017).

Additionally, neurobiological research conducted on university students supports the SDT claim that external rewards can hinder intrinsic motivation (Murayama et al. 2010). The study showed that the brain's dopamine-related reward system naturally responds to completing challenging tasks, while external rewards can diminish this response over time. In a similar study that introduced autonomy as a variable, Murayama et al. (2015) proved that choice positively affects brain activity during a task by enhancing motivation and activating dopaminergic systems (Murayama et al. 2015). Such results support SDT research in its claim that autonomy fosters intrinsic motivation, thus enhancing performance (Ryan & Deci 2017, 123).

Neuroscience studies have so far provided more insights in intrinsic motivation, confirming some of the key claims of the Self-Determination Theory. These include the existence of an inner drive toward growth and learning, sustained by a sense of autonomy, as well as the detrimental effects of external rewards on intrinsic motivation. While further research is necessary, particularly in developing and testing neurobiological frameworks to derive and prove hypotheses (Di Domenico & Ryan 2017, 5), the extensive 40-year body of studies supporting the fundamental concepts of SDT, along with validation from neuroscience studies, led to the selection of SDT as the theoretical framework for this thesis. Table 3 provides a summary of SDT concepts that have been validated by neuroscience.

TABLE 3. SDT concepts validated by neurobiology.

SDT concepts validated by neurobiological studies		Research
The existence and importance of Intrinsic motivation	an inner and continuous drive towards learning and exploring one's environment based on an ancient built-in emotional network in mammals, which aids survival through exploration	Panksepp 1998; Panksepp & Biven 2012
Positive effects of autonomy on intrinsic motivation	as activating and maintaining brain activity even during failures	Murayama et al. 2010

Negative effects of external rewards on intrinsic motivation	as decreasing activity in one's dopaminergic systems when rewards are removed	Murayama et al. 2015
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2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Given the limited research on independent teachers and - to the author's knowledge - the absence of studies specifically addressing the research questions in this thesis, the literature review will analyze various aspects of these questions to identify overlaps and similarities. The review will first cover literature on motivation and teaching, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT), using the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework and comparing it to other systems. It will then narrow its focus to explore the link between motivation and professional development, as well as the limited research on independent teachers, providing a relevant definition for this study.

2.1 Motivation and Teaching

Since the late 1990s, research on teacher motivation has expanded and diversified, with a significant increase in literature emphasizing its importance for various educational aspects such as student motivation, educational reform, teaching strategies, and teachers' sense of fulfilment (Han & Yin 2016). Interest in teachers' motivation has grown partly due to the increasing teaching shortage reported in the UK, the US, Australia, Asia, and other European countries and the need for teachers to continually adapt and improve their skills to keep up with evolving demands (OECD 2005).

Many studies have concluded that teachers' intrinsic motivation related to teaching is higher than extrinsic motivation (e.g. Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011), which highlights the value of research in this area. However, some differences were noted in developing countries, where extrinsic motivations (salary, job security, and career status) were also found to be important for pre-service teachers (e.g. Chivore 1988). This links to some of the criticism moved against SDT as a Western-centric theory, since it emphasizes autonomy. Cultural relativists argue that autonomy is a concept applicable only to individualistic cultures and not to collectivistic ones like those in East Asia (e.g., Markus & Kitayama 1991). However, Deci, Olafsen & Ryan (2017) see this criticism as a misinterpretation of the notion of autonomy as self-reliance and individuality

rather than as freedom to choose, and self-endorsement of values. Studies (e.g. Deci, Ryan, Gagné, Leone, Usunov & Kornazheva 2001; Nie, Chua, Yeung, Ryan & Chan 2015) conducted in non-capitalist and more collectivist countries, for example, reported that managers' support for autonomy was a universal predictor of employees' performance quality and well-being.

Generally, literature has revealed that teacher motivation could be enriched when teachers have the right to choose teaching materials, programs, and teaching methods, and to determine classroom organization and discipline, highlighting the importance of autonomy on teacher motivation. Already in 1982, research by Deci, Spiegel, Ryan, Koestner, and Kauffman (1982) supported SDT's fundamental claim that choice is essential for teachers' intrinsic motivation, with events providing meaningful feedback and fostering feelings of competence being crucial to enhance and maintain intrinsic motivation for both teachers and students. A study by deCharms (1976) found that enhancing children's intrinsic motivation also improved their learning and attitude towards their studies.

On the other hand, controlling events that pressure teachers towards specific outcomes, such as performance standards, were shown by Deci et al. (1982) to undermine intrinsic motivation, leading teachers to allow for less choice and autonomy. This suggests that the more schools try to control and pressure their teachers, the more teachers will be controlling, thereby undermining students' intrinsic motivation and self-esteem. However, Deci et al. (1982) contend that performance standards are not inherently demotivating or controlling. Rather, it appears that administrators have the choice to communicate these standards in a way that fosters competence and autonomy. Overall, literature within the SDT framework seem not only to highlight the positive impact of teachers' intrinsic motivation on students' learning (e.g. Deci et al. 1982), but also underscores the intrinsic value of teachers' motivation, its close relationship with autonomy and the importance for management to consider such factors for their employees (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan 2017).

Pelletier, Legault, and Séguin-Lévesque (2002) investigated the factors influencing teachers' self-determined motivation using structural equation modeling, an advanced statistical technique to investigate and analyze the

relationships between observed variables and the underlying constructs. They found that pressures from various sources—both above (curriculum demands, colleagues, performance standards, rewards and punishments, salary, parents' expectations) and below (students' perceived motivation)—reduce teachers' self-determined motivation, making them more controlling. While Pelletier et al. (2002, 194) support SDT claim of a link between autonomy-oriented environments and teachers' intrinsic motivation, it also highlights the benefits of considering the work environment as a multidimensional construct with complex relationships between factors. The fact, for example, that motivating factors could differ between developed and developing countries might be the result of the social and economic environment and what values are upheld in a specific community (Han and Yin 2016). Teacher motivation, which as mentioned above has been found to primarily stems from intrinsic values of teaching (Chivore 1988), may be determined and undermined by multiple factors, which are interconnected both directly and indirectly. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), for example, suggest five categories of demotivating factors, including inhibition of teacher autonomy and insufficient self-efficacy as one of them. Autonomy, or the lack thereof, once again appears as an important predictor of teacher motivation.

The need to avoid oversimplification when dealing with motivation is reiterated by both Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011, 10-11) and Han & Yin (2016), who conducted a comprehensive review of 130 studies on teacher motivation from various theoretical perspectives and socio-cultural contexts. Motivation models which utilize a linear cause-effect relationships have failed to provide a comprehensive view of the interplay between related variables in motivation research (Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011). Given that motivation is typically linked to a series of complex cognitive processes, differences between motivation theories may stem from their focus on different stages of the motivation process (Han & Yin 2016). In response to such problem, a longitudinal study by Kubanyiova (2009) introduced the Language Teacher Self Model, which adopts a process-oriented approach to motivation research, which proposes that teachers are motivated by the dissonance between their different language teacher selves, such as their actual and ideal self. However, as studies on a process-oriented approach to motivation remain limited, further research and empirical studies should be conducted, which prevents such method from being used in this thesis.

Moreover, Han and Yin's review indicated that the various social-cognitive motivation theories applied in such studies have not yet reached an agreement on a single approach often due to the intersection of motivational constructs. Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand (2000, 79) argue that such overlap is also present within SDT theory itself with integrated regulation, the most autonomous type of extrinsic motivation, being difficult to differentiate from identified regulation. Integrated motivation is omitted also in Basikin's (2020) Teacher Motivation for a Professional Development Scale (TMPDS), which is used as a foundation for the survey utilized in this thesis. Notably, SDT postulates that both intrinsic motivation and well deeply-ingrained motivation - when people recognize the value and significance of their work - lead to higher levels of work motivation (Deci, Olafsen & Ryan 2017). This aspect and the reasons why it was omitted in the thesis adapted questionnaire will be investigated further in the methodology section.

From a methodology perspective, Han and Yin's (2016) teacher motivation research highlights a predominant use of quantitative methods over qualitative approaches and a great reliance on standardized questionnaires and lists of possible motivating factors, which could hinder a comprehensive examination of the complexity of teacher motivation. The authors call for a more holistic approach and the employment of a variety of methods including interviews and observations to paint a more in-depth picture of teacher motivation. In an attempt to heed such advice, this thesis is employing a mixed approach, combining the objectivity of quantitative research with the deeper understanding provided by qualitative methods.

To summarize, the review of literature on teacher motivation highlights the positive impact of teacher motivation on student motivation as well as teacher performance, well-being and engagement, highlighting the importance of research on the subject and the value of this thesis. It also establishes a positive relationship between perceived autonomy and intrinsic motivation supporting SDT fundamental claim which is at the base of this thesis. Criticism towards SDT was also analyzed and discussed acknowledging the complexity and difficulties of researching motivation. A way forward is proposed by Han and Yin (2016),

who recommends a focus on more qualitative methods for in-depth and comprehensive results. For this reason, the thesis couples a self-report questionnaire with follow-up interviews targeting an international cohort of teachers instead of focusing on one country. Among the motivation models discussed, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) remains the most extensively supported, with studies spanning over a 40-year period. Its ability to address the multidimensionality of motivation as a continuum—rather than separating different kinds of motivation into distinct categories—allows for the study of the interplay between extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, depending on the degree of value internalization (Deci & Ryan 2008). This makes SDT the most reliable theoretical framework for this thesis, which will explore both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

2.2 Motivation and English Language Teaching

Considering the complexities in researching motivation, Han and Yin (2016) suggest considering the variations among teachers in relation to different aspects of the profession, such as levels of education and skills, as well as the unique characteristics of a specific discipline. In the last decade, there has been a growing interest in English language teachers' motivation with 39 out of the 130 studies reviewed by Han and Yin focusing on this group.

Several studies (Pennington and Riley 1991; Kassabgy, Boraie & Schmidt 2001; Erkaya 2012) have concluded that, like teachers in general, English language teachers as a group tend to value intrinsic motivation more than outside rewards. In Kassagby et al. (2001, 217-218), 107 surveyed ESL teachers cited having an inherently engaging job, being treated with respect, performing at their highest potential and having the autonomy to choose how to do their job in the five most important factors to them. These values seem to mirror SDT (Ryan and Deci 2017) concepts of competence, autonomy and relatedness as the foundations for an intrinsically motivating and satisfying job. Erkaya (2012, 58) also highlights how autonomy and the ability to actively participate in administrative and didactic decisions can boost motivation.

Supporting this, Zhang, Noels and Sugita-McEown (2022) analyzed the relationship between the work environment and English language teacher motivation. They found that, alongside student engagement, supportive supervisors who foster the three basic psychological needs—competence, relatedness, and autonomy—are predictors of enhanced self-determination, engagement, and decreased burnout. The study highlights the importance of supervisors including teachers in decision making to foster autonomy. However, it also recommends finding a balance, as excessive independence might be perceived by teachers as poor management (14). The study by Zhang et al. also demonstrates how SDT can provide a useful theoretical framework for researching teacher motivation while offering real-world applications.

Interestingly, despite being conducted in different countries such as Egypt, Hawaii, Canada, and Turkey, the results of the aforementioned studies were similar, suggesting that the importance of motivation and its positive relationship with autonomy apply across cultures. Moreover, aside from Erkaya's (2012) use of unstructured interviews, the other studies utilized surveys and questionnaires, which, as mentioned, is common in research on teacher motivation.

2.3 Motivation and Professional Development

The reviewed literature consistently has drawn similar conclusions, underscoring the significance of teacher motivation, highlighting its positive correlation with autonomy-supportive environments and acknowledging its complexity. This section will now turn its attention to motivation for professional development. Given the scarcity of studies that specifically examine what drives English language teachers and the similarities observed in the motivational factors for teachers in general and ELT teachers, research encompassing educators of all subjects has been incorporated as well.

Studies by McMillan, McConnell, and O'Sullivan (2014) in Ireland, as well as by Gorozidis and Papaioannou (2013) in Greece, have shown that the main motivating factors for teachers' professional development were intrinsic. However, extrinsic factors also played a role. McMillan et al. (2014) identified

these extrinsic factors as related to the school environment, specifically relationships with colleagues and feedback on continuing professional development (CPD) activities. While these factors were influential, they were not enough to sustain ongoing engagement in CPD without intrinsic motivation. The school culture was also found to be important, with expectations from colleagues and management, mandatory CPD, and supportive supervisors playing key roles. Based on their findings, McMillan et al. created a Teacher CPD model which encourages schools and administrations to devise a CPD system that allows for teacher autonomy and aligns with their career aspirations and sense of achievement. This model also addresses teachers' need for relatedness by providing support through the teacher community and the school.

Similarly, Zhang, Admiraal, and Saab (2022) advocate for examining the multidimensionality of teacher motivation to engage in CPD, considering the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic factors. They found that while personal characteristics such as years of experience and self-efficacy impact autonomous motivation for CPD participation, external factors related to the school environment were also crucial. The study in China revealed that supportive management and a challenging environment that provides learning opportunities and enhances teachers' sense of competence positively influence CPD motivation. Conversely, excessive mental and emotional workload has a negative impact. Interestingly, support from colleagues was found to negatively correlate with experienced teachers' motivation, contradicting previous findings. However, it is suggested that experienced teachers might rely more on colleagues' feedback and idea sharing. If we consider professional development as any opportunity to improve as a teacher (Day 1999, 4), whether in a structured or more informal setting, seeking and receiving advice from colleagues can also be classified as CPD. Thus, this aspect will be included in the thesis survey to assess teacher engagement in CPD sessions. According to Zhang et al. (2022), autonomy also played a role but, notably it was found to be more significant for less efficacious teachers than high-efficacious ones.

In 2021, Jakarta implemented a new professional development system aimed at increasing teacher autonomy and achieving the positive outcomes suggested by research. This system allowed teachers to have greater control over shaping their

own professional development paths. Interestingly, a study by Rarasati and Pramana (2023) revealed the challenges of this new-found autonomy as both teachers and principals had developed a top-down mentality regarding professional development, which had traditionally been decided and delivered by outsiders and not aligned with their actual needs. This suggests that school culture and teachers' experience at schools promoting or hindering autonomy might influence their motivation for CPD.

The study by Rarasati and Pramana (2023) also found that the role of principals as facilitators, rather than mere implementers of the government-devised system, was crucial. Principals who shared information and aligned teachers' aspirations with the benefits of the new professional development could create an enabling school environment that fostered autonomy and agency. Additionally, having a community of fellow teachers to provide guidance and support during the transition proved beneficial, highlighting that autonomy works better when accompanied by a supportive community. It can be argued that this community does not necessarily need to be within the school but should be a space where teachers feel safe. Krylova (2024, 221), for example, observed that self-employed tutors engage with professional communities differently than school teachers, forming partnerships with students and parents or networking and joining communities primarily online. This indicates that the concept of autonomy, which independent teachers seem to possess in abundance, does not imply being isolated or detached from others. Rather, it signifies the ability to make choices that align with one's sense of self (Deci & Ryan 2000, 234). Hargreaves, Berry, Lai, Leung, Scott & Stobart (2013) found that when teachers had the autonomy to choose their strategies in professional learning communities, their motivation for learning improved. Sharing ideas with colleagues and observing their practices helped teachers rethink their methods and tailor them to meet students' needs, thus enhancing teaching quality. This highlights the importance of learning from colleagues as part of professional development, whether in formal or informal settings.

While fewer studies specifically address English language teacher motivation for professional development, the available research appears to align with the previously mentioned literature. For instance, Ezel Acar and Erozan (2024)

explored factors that demotivate teachers and impede their autonomous motivation for continuing professional development (CPD). Their findings highlighted that workplace conditions—such as workload and time constraints, school culture, strained relationships, difficulties in internalizing school values — significantly hinder intrinsic motivation. Consequently, Ezel Acar and Erozan call for an increase teacher involvement in CPD planning and regards for their specific needs to improve teacher engagement and motivation.

Csaba (2018) conducted a study on the motivation of corporate English language teachers, all of whom were self-employed or working in hybrid roles. He found that these teachers were highly motivated due to the freedom and flexibility they experienced. The teachers identified professional development, engaging with resources in creative ways, supporting students, and mastering new skills as key factors in maintaining their motivation (Csaba 2018, 37-38). On the other hand, like research on teachers in general, the main demotivating factors were external issues such as burnout and imposed curricula that did not meet their students' needs.

In the context of self-determination theory (SDT), Basikin's (2020) study on English teacher motivation for CPD showed that controlled motivation can evolve into more autonomous motivation through CPD, aiding in the internalization of values. Although the CPD in the study was initially compulsory, with teachers listing extrinsic motivators as high, they also reported high levels of autonomous motivation. Basikin interprets this, along with the overlap of different motivation types among participants, as challenging the SDT continuum as a single continuum. However, some ambiguity seems to arise from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, as the reasons for CPD listed by teachers pointed to different kinds of motivation. This suggests that to obtain clearer results, open-ended questions might be better suited for interviews, where interviewees can elaborate. Additionally, Basikin's research used the Teacher Motivation for Professional Development Scale (TMPDS), an adapted version of Fernet, Senécal, Guay, Marsh, and Dowson's (2008) Work Tasks Motivation Scale for Teachers (WTMST). This adapted scale will serve as the foundation for the questionnaire in this thesis.

In summary, the literature emphasizes the importance of teacher motivation, highlighting that autonomy, a supportive community and the ability to develop a sense of competence are crucial for effective CPD. These elements allow teachers to make choices that align with their sense of self. Research supports the multidimensionality of motivation, showing that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence motivation for professional development (CPD). The school environment, including relationships, feedback, and supportive management, plays a significant role. However, as posited by SDT, intrinsic motivation is key for sustained engagement. While fewer studies focus specifically on English language teachers, the findings align with general teacher motivation research. Factors such as workload, school culture, and relationships impact motivation, underscoring the need for teacher involvement in CPD planning.

2.4 Independent Teachers

The author has identified a lack of research on the motivation for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) among independent teachers, with limited studies available on this group in general. Her research referred to the main search databases, such as Google Scholar, Research Gate, TAMK library, JSTOR, DOAJ, and ERIC through the use of the following keywords: self-employed/independent/freelance teachers and self-employment, motivation and professional development. The definition of an independent teacher remains ambiguous, akin to that of a self-employed worker. Both before and after the pandemic, the European Union has increasingly focused on self-employment, acknowledging the challenges in defining this status. The self-employed constitute a heterogeneous group, categorized into those with employees and the solo self-employed. The latter group often overlaps with economically dependent workers due to the growing diversity of work partnerships and hybrid conditions. In some cases, self-employment serves as a facade for dependent workers who have fewer rights and require lower costs for companies. To address this issue, Eurofound's (2010) 5th edition of the European Working Conditions Survey tried to establish criteria to distinguish authentic self-employed workers, such as having multiple clients and possessing autonomy and the freedom to make independent decisions. (Eurofound 2024).

Recognizing the diversity of self-employed workers and the criteria outlined above, this thesis will regard independent teachers as those self-employed individuals who either operate their own businesses, work for multiple schools, have their own private students or engage in hybrid roles, directly interacting with clients (students) and schools. Given the nature of teaching, self-employed teachers may in fact offer their services to various schools who can provide a venue and the opportunity to teach a larger group in return. The key distinguishing factor from economically dependent workers is autonomy—specifically, economic autonomy as defined by the 2010 Eurofound study criteria, such as having multiple sources of income and the ability to make independent decisions. This includes the ability to choose their professional development (i.e., no mandatory professional development imposed by schools) and the freedom to select schools that align with their personal teaching values. The rationale for this criterion will be elaborated upon in the following paragraph. It is important to note that this thesis focuses solely on teachers, not tutors, and therefore only professionals with a teaching qualification will be included in this study.

In a study by Stephan, Tavares, Carvalho, Ramalho, Santos and Van Veldhoven (2020), self-employment is seen as more self-determined, with higher levels of perceived meaningfulness, autonomy, and well-being compared to dependent employment. For entrepreneurs, work reflects their identity and values (Lysova & Khapova 2019), making their work feel more meaningful and enhancing well-being. This suggests higher intrinsic motivation and the ability to align personal beliefs with behavior due to the autonomy of self-employment. It underscores the importance of autonomy in choosing work conditions that align with personal beliefs and identity. Therefore, self-employed teachers who select schools that support this alignment demonstrate their decision-making autonomy and will be considered for this study. (Stephan et al. 2020).

At the same time, autonomy and motivation, as highlighted by the research above, are influenced by external factors, such as the social and cultural recognition of self-employment. In a study comparing the perception of meaningful work between school teachers and self-employed tutors, Krylova (2024) found that both community and autonomy are crucial in determining how

worthwhile a job is considered. Community emphasizes collective beliefs, while autonomy involves rejecting mainstream values to find meaning in work. According to the study, the feeling of meaningful work depends on how well personal values align with societal values in the job's setting. If values do not match, teachers may seek more independence outside the system, transitioning from the institutional setting to the free market, which values flexibility and academic success to attract more students (Krylova 2024). Self-employment is viewed as a path to greater autonomy, allowing individuals to align their personal values and sense of self with their behavior, thereby fostering a more autonomous work motivation.

In summary, research suggests that self-employment is linked to higher levels of perceived meaningfulness, autonomy, and well-being, underscoring the role of autonomy in creating a sense of meaningful work. Acknowledging the ambiguity of the term self-employment and the traits that enable self-employed individuals to have higher intrinsic motivation, this thesis defines independent teachers as all qualified educators who either run their own businesses, work for multiple schools, have their own private students or hold hybrid roles that involve direct interaction with students and schools. These teachers also enjoy high levels of autonomy, especially in selecting their professional development and collaborating with schools that align with their personal teaching values.

Despite the limited research on the motivation of independent English teachers for professional development and the need to address aspects of the research questions separately, the findings in each area seem to align. The reviewed literature consistently draws similar conclusions, regardless of context and subject teaching areas. It underscores the significance of teacher motivation, highlights its positive correlation with autonomy and competence-supportive environments, and acknowledges its multidimensionality. This is evident in both general studies on teacher motivation and those focusing on English language teachers, motivation for CPD, and independent teachers. Table 4 summarizes the main takeaways from the literature review and their implications for this thesis.

TABLE 4. Literature review main takeaways and implications for thesis.

Literature Review Main Takeaways	Research	Implications for Thesis
Positive impact of teacher motivation on student motivation, performance, well-being, and engagement	Deci et al. 1982; deCharms 1976	Validates the importance of researching motivation and the value of this thesis
Positive relationship between perceived autonomy and intrinsic motivation, valued more by teachers than external rewards	Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011	Supports SDT's fundamental claim, validating research on independent teachers
Complexity and multidimensionality of motivation	Pelletier & al. 2002; Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011; Han & Yin 2016	Validates research questions investigating both intrinsic and extrinsic factors
Majority of studies use quantitative methods, especially self-reported questionnaires	Han & Yin 2016; Basikin 2020	Validates the use of mixed methods, including interviews
Motivation and its positive relationship with autonomy apply across cultures	Pennington and Riley 1991; Kassagby et al. 2001; Erkaya 2012; Zhang et al. 2022	Targets an international cohort of teachers instead of focusing on one country
Autonomy can be enhanced by a feelings of competence and a supportive community, not necessarily within the school, but a safe space; self-employed teachers may rely more on online interactions	Hargreaves et al. 2013; Rarasati & Pramana 2023; Krylova 2024	Suggests examining the role of professional communities for independent teachers
Self-employment linked to higher levels of perceived meaningfulness, autonomy, and well-being, highlighting autonomy's role in creating meaningful work	Lysova & Khapova, 2019; Stephan & al. 2020	Importance of investigating independent teachers

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodological Approach

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, as suggested by the literature review. Han and Yin's (2016) review of teacher motivation studies indicates that previous research has predominantly relied on quantitative methods and standardized questionnaires, potentially limiting a thorough exploration of teacher motivation's complexity. Creswell (2009) emphasizes that a mixed-methods approach is particularly beneficial for tackling complex research issues. By integrating the objectivity of quantitative methods with the in-depth analysis of qualitative methods, a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions can be achieved. Additionally, given the author's background as an independent English language teacher, the questionnaire serves to mitigate potential biases.

Creswell (2009) also notes that the choice of research design is influenced by philosophical assumptions, which shape the strategies of inquiry and the methods of data collection and analysis. Mixed-methods research is grounded in a pragmatic worldview, allowing researchers to draw from both quantitative and qualitative approaches as needed. Pragmatism values both types of data for understanding complex problems, providing the flexibility to select methods, techniques, and procedures that best meet the study's needs, leading to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the research problem. Such approach is therefore the most suitable to investigate motivation as a multidimensional construct. (Creswell 2009).

In this study, sequential mixed-methods procedures are employed. The research begins with a quantitative phase, using surveys to collect broad data. This approach allows for sampling a larger group of participants to identify the different types of motivation driving continuing professional development (CPD) in independent teachers and the extent to which these motivations influence it. Following this, a qualitative phase involving in-depth interviews is conducted to delve deeper into the topic through participants' personal perspectives. As

highlighted by the literature review, independent teachers have not been extensively studied, making them a group that could benefit from a qualitative approach.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

Research inherently involves the collection, analysis, and storage of personal data, which raises significant ethical considerations and positions researchers as data controllers. As noted by Isreal and Hay (2006), researchers must uphold various ethical responsibilities, such as protecting research participants, fostering trust with them, and ensuring the integrity of their research.

Transparency is crucial for fostering trust, particularly when communicating the purpose and central intent of a study (Creswell 2009). As recommended by Sarantakos (2005) researchers must clearly convey this purpose to participants, ensuring they understand the study's goals. It is also vital that researchers specify the sponsorship of the study, in this case, Success with IELTS, as this helps establish trust and credibility, allowing for informed consent. Therefore, a comprehensive consent form, which drew from the information sheet template provided by TAMK, was included at the beginning of the questionnaire, the first step of this research. It outlined key elements such as the identification of the researcher and commissioner, and a clear statement of the research purpose. Additionally, the form assured confidentiality, guaranteed the right to withdraw at any time, and provided contact information for any questions. (Sarantakos 2005)

As ethical research practices demand careful consideration of confidentiality and privacy (Creswell 2009), this thesis questionnaire was completely anonymous, with no personal data such as names, surnames, or email addresses being collected. Participants accessed the questionnaire through a link shared via various platforms such as LinkedIn and sent to various schools worldwide. Some individuals belonging to the author's network were personally contacted and asked to share the link, but since the questionnaire asked for no names, responses were not traceable to individuals. This last approach, known as snowball sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2017), was chosen for two

reasons: the difficulty in accessing independent teachers due to the variability of their employment conditions and their lack of affiliation with a single school, and the risk of not meeting the target sample size, as experienced in previous research on freelance teachers (Emke 2019). However, as Cohen et al. (2017) explain, this practice poses ethical issues as it relies on participants' social network and personal contacts, potentially introducing biases. To mitigate this, as mentioned earlier, the questionnaire was also shared through social media platforms outside the author's immediate network and sent to schools and organizations employing independent teachers. This helped reach teachers in different countries and broaden the sample.

Only participants who voluntarily decided to take part in the second stage of the research, the interview, were asked to provide an email address for contact in the last section of the questionnaire. Before the interview, they were asked to sign an informed consent form. In analyzing and reporting interview results, pseudonyms were used to safeguard identities. To address potential risks related to non-confidentiality, such as the unintended inclusion of sensitive information and to give participants some control over what is shared (Creswell, 2009), transcripts of interviews were sent to participants for revision before being analyzed.

The collection, analysis, and storage of data took place through TAMK-endorsed tools such as O365 Forms for the questionnaire and Atlas.ti for interviews. For transcription, Otter.ai was utilized, and their privacy policy was linked to the participants so that they understood and agreed to the terms before consenting to the interview. Finally, data was deleted once the thesis was published.

3.3 First Phase: The Questionnaire

The first phase of the research involved an online self-administered questionnaire accessible through a link. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), the questionnaire aimed to investigate what types of motivation drive independent language teachers to pursue Continuing Professional Development (CPD). It sought to answer the first two research sub-questions regarding the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on CPD pursuit.

The questionnaire began with a consent form that included the purpose and structure of the study, information about the researcher and the commissioner, and details on how the data would be used, ensuring anonymity and untraceability. It contained 15 items divided into 5 sections. The first section provided participants with the definition of independent English language teachers adopted by this study and ensured that the eligibility criteria were met: being a qualified English language teacher, being self-employed, and having autonomy over CPD choices. Background information was collected in the second section, not to explore correlations between background and motivation, but to provide a clear depiction of the questionnaire population sample. The third section included a single question to assess teachers' perception of their motivation regarding their job. This data was used solely to see if the results mirrored previous literature and confirmed the high motivation of independent teachers.

Section 4 was the central part of the questionnaire. It first assessed how often and what kind of CPD activities independent teachers favored. As mentioned in the literature review, where a supportive community was found conducive to CPD (Rasarati & Pramana 2023) and highlighted how independent educators took part, however in a more limited and different way, in them (Krylova 2024), engaging in a professional community was listed as a professional development activity. As Emke (2019) highlights the professional development opportunities provided by social media, particularly Twitter, consuming social media posts and videos has also been included as a CPD option.

The latter part of Section 4 investigated the relationship between such engagement in CPD and the different types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as outlined by SDT: intrinsic motivation, identified and introjected regulation, and extrinsic motivation. As in recent SDT-based literature (e.g. Fernet et al. 2008), integrated regulation and identified regulation were merged into a single category (identified regulation). This part of the questionnaire included Likert-like statements asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements. To improve validity and ensure consistent responses despite variations in wording, each motivation was measured using two differently worded statements, as shown in table 5.

TABLE 5. Likert-scale statements used to assess types of motivation.

Likert-scale statements	Type of motivation
1. I find professional development activities interesting.	Intrinsic motivation
2. I enjoy learning new things either through colleagues or during workshops.	
3. I can attain important work objectives by staying updated with the most advanced teaching techniques.	Identified regulation
4. Professional development is vital for the academic success of my students.	
5. I would feel disappointed if I didn't engage in professional development and were bad at my job as a result.	Introjected regulation
6. I would feel bad if I didn't take part in any professional development activities.	
7. I enjoy the social recognition from gaining new qualifications.	External regulation
8. Staying professionally updated helps me attract more students.	

The reasoning behind the choice of Likert-like statements was the multidimensionality of motivation, as highlighted by the literature review (e.g., Zhang, Admiraal, and Saab 2022). A ranking system would not have allowed different types of motivation to play an equally influential role, while a choice system would imply that one motivation might exist instead of, rather than together with, another. A Likert scale allowed participants to identify all types of motivation at play when choosing to engage in CPD. The statements used were adapted in wording from previous research, specifically Basikin's Teacher Motivation for Professional Development Scale (TMPDS), an adapted version of Fernet, Senécal, Guay, Marsh, and Dowson's (2008) Work Tasks Motivation Scale for Teachers (WTMST). A comparison table of the two scales created by Basikin (2020) can be found in the appendices (Appendix 1). The questionnaire used in this thesis is also included in the appendices (Appendix 2).

Finally, the last question asked participants interested in taking part in the second phase to provide their email address to be contacted by the author.

3.4 Second Phase: The Interview

Interviews are a central method in qualitative research because of their flexibility and depth. This makes them particularly suitable for exploring complex topics such as teacher motivation, which is why Han and Yin (2016) recommend their use in studies on this subject. According to Cohen et al. (2017), while self-administered questionnaires offer advantages like anonymity and time efficiency — and were therefore used in the first phase of this study — they lack the nuance that interviews can capture. On the other hand, interviews are especially appropriate for investigating the multi-dimensional nature of motivation. Semi-structured interviews, in particular, enable researchers to probe, clarify, and follow up on responses, allowing unexpected insights to emerge. They also facilitate richer data collection by engaging both verbal and non-verbal communication channels, making them invaluable for understanding how individuals frame and connect their ideas, values, and behaviors (Cohen et al. 2017). For these reasons, semi-structured interviews were employed in the second phase of this study. This served both to strengthen the validity of the questionnaire results through methodological triangulation and to address the main research question and the final research sub-question.

According to Cohen et al. (2017), interviews are not merely instruments for extracting information; they are interpersonal encounters situated in the context of everyday life. These encounters lie between objectivity and subjectivity, as both interviewer and interviewee co-construct meaning based on their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. Cohen et al. (2017, 25–26) emphasize that a researcher's subjectivity is inevitably embedded in the research process, thereby blurring the line between objective observation and personal interpretation. This does not, however, undermine the need for rigor. On the contrary, it underscores the importance of transparency, reflexivity, and a commitment to producing credible knowledge throughout the research process— from sampling to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In this study, the

author's background as an independent English language teacher was acknowledged as part of this reflexive approach. While such a background might raise concerns about potential biases, it also provided valuable insider knowledge that informed the creation of interview questions and facilitated a nuanced understanding of participants' contexts.

Despite their value, interviews also present challenges, particularly in terms of time and resource demands. Sampling in qualitative research, unlike in quantitative studies, is not random but purposeful. It is a reflective process aimed at selecting participants who can provide rich, relevant insights into the research problem (Esposito & Evans-Winters 2022, 75). Creswell (2009) supports this approach, emphasizing the need to choose individuals strategically to illuminate the core research questions. As a result, the number of interviewees in this study was significantly smaller than the number of questionnaire respondents—only four participants were invited. The selection aimed to capture as much diversity as possible. Criteria included nationality (teachers from both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries), teaching modality (face-to-face or online), prior familiarity with the author, additional roles (e.g., training or school management), and gender.

Interview-based research requires a multi-stage planning process. Cohen et al. (2017) outline several stages, starting with thematizing (defining the research purpose and theoretical framework—in this case, the Self-Determination Theory) and designing, which involves translating the research questions into the interview questions. Table 6 outlines the process used to develop the interview questions, following Cohen et al.'s (2017) method of systematically considering how each question can elicit useful and relevant information for the researcher.

TABLE 6. Development of the interview questions.

Research Question	What do I want to know about the topic?	Interview question to elicit the information needed
(Provide context)	Understand the participant's background, including their experience, work setting, and teaching situation	1. Can you tell me about your background as an independent English language teacher—for example, how long you've been teaching, where you work, etc..

(Triangulation of questionnaire data)	How do teachers describe their motivation for CPD in their own words, without pre-defined categories?	2. What motivates you personally to engage in professional development as an independent teacher?
How does autonomy affect teacher motivation for professional development in independent English language teachers?	How do teachers perceive their autonomy in their work?	3. Some independent teachers talk about the freedom they have in their work—how would you describe your own experience of independence?
	How does this influence their decision to pursue CPD?	4. How do you think your autonomy influences your motivation to engage in professional development?
How do self-employment conditions influence motivation for continuing professional development (CPD)?	What aspects of self-employment (e.g., flexibility, financial pressure, job security) influence motivation for CPD?	5. In what ways do the conditions of being self-employed (such as financial responsibility, flexibility, or job stability) affect your motivation to engage in CPD?
	What challenges or supports related to self-employment impact ongoing engagement with CPD?	6. What challenges have you experienced as an independent teacher that influence your ability or motivation to pursue professional development?
		7. What advantages have you experienced as an independent teacher that influence your ability or motivation to pursue professional development?

While the questionnaire addressed the first two sub-questions of the study, the interviews were primarily designed to explore the third sub-question: *How do self-employment conditions influence motivation for continuing professional development (CPD)?* (questions 4 and 5). Additionally, the interviews explored the main research question: *How does autonomy affect teacher motivation for professional development among independent English language teachers?* (question 3), with a particular focus on the role of autonomy in CPD motivation. The interview questions also served two supplementary purposes. First, they

helped establish context by gathering background information about the participants, which supported a more accurate interpretation of their responses (question 1). Second, they provided an opportunity for participants to express, in their own words, what motivates them to pursue CPD, thereby helping to validate the questionnaire findings (question 2).

According to Cohen et al. (2017), the next stages involve constructing and conducting the interview by selecting appropriate language, sequencing questions effectively, and building rapport with participants. The questions in this study were open-ended, designed to allow participants to express complex thoughts freely, and to minimize assumptions and ambiguity. Semi-structured interviews were especially fitting as they offered a balance between structured guidance and openness to unanticipated responses. As establishing rapport was also crucial, the first interviewee was someone already known to the author, which helped build a comfortable environment and allowed the researcher to focus on refining interviewing skills. Interviews in this study were conducted via Zoom and video-recorded, which made it possible to revisit not only verbal responses but also non-verbal cues such as tone, pauses, and facial expressions—an important consideration emphasized by Cohen et al. (2017, 506–517).

After the interviews, transcription is the first step in the analysis process. However, as Cohen et al. (2017, 523) note, transcription can decontextualize data from its original setting, which highlights the inherently interpretive nature of qualitative research. To preserve meaning, it is important to consider both spoken and non-verbal elements of communication. The use of Zoom and video recording in this study allowed for detailed review and more accurate interpretation. Interview transcripts were generated using Otter.ai and analyzed using ATLAS.ti. After interviews are carefully transcribed, Creswell (2009) proposes a systematic coding process that begins with reading through all the data to identify initial topics, then grouping them into categories and eventually synthesizing them into broader themes. In this study, preliminary codes were developed based on key constructs from Self-Determination Theory—such as SDT three basic needs and different types of motivation. These codes were refined as new patterns and insights emerged from the data. Coding aimed to be

both exhaustive and mutually exclusive, using in vivo codes where appropriate to reflect participants' own language. (Creswell 2009)

Although qualitative research does not aim for statistical generalization, it can yield insights and develop theories that are meaningful across similar contexts. As such, qualitative studies must still address questions of credibility and validity (Creswell 2009). Strategies include triangulation (cross-checking findings using multiple data sources), member checking (verifying findings with participants), and presenting disconfirming evidence to challenge assumptions. In this study, triangulation was supported through a key interview question asking participants to explain their motivations for engaging in CPD in their own words. This question was not included in the questionnaire because, as discussed in the literature review, Basikin (2020) found that a similar open-ended question led to interpretive difficulties due to insufficient elaboration from respondents. By addressing it in interviews instead, this study ensured richer, more interpretable responses.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Questionnaire participant overview and results

Data were collected from 18 self-employed English language teachers; however, only 16 were included in the final analysis, as two did not meet the requirement criteria due to not being self-employed. Although the number of questionnaire respondents fell short of the recommended minimum of 30 suggested by Cohen et al. (2017, 203), the difficulty in accessing self-employed teachers made this a challenge. Nevertheless, the sample size was comparable to or exceeded that of previous studies—whether interview- or questionnaire-based—focused on self-employed educators (Csaba 2018; Emke 2019; Krylova 2024). Given this, along with the fact that the findings aligned with prior research on teacher motivation and were supplemented by follow-up interviews for deeper insight, the sample size of 16 was considered acceptable.

The respondents represented 11 different countries, all located within the Eurasian continent. Although the questionnaire was distributed globally, most responses appeared to come from the author's professional network and LinkedIn, which may explain the regional concentration near the author's home country, Italy. Table 7 presents the distribution of participants by country of origin and current country of employment. Notably, two-thirds of the participants reported working either fully online or in a hybrid format. This might reflect the broader shift toward online education, which gained legitimacy and popularity during the pandemic as a more flexible and cost-effective alternative to traditional classroom settings. Interestingly, only two of the 16 participants were working in their country of origin.

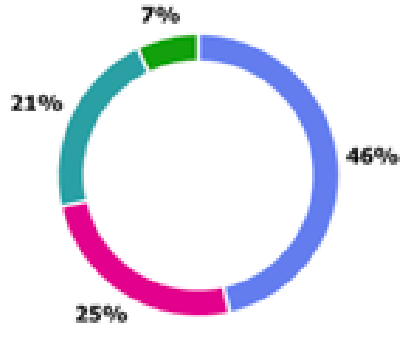
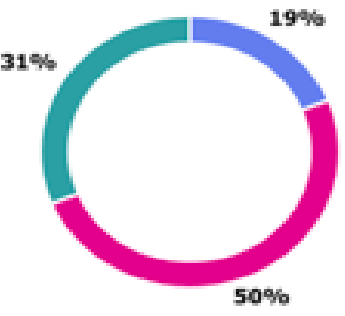
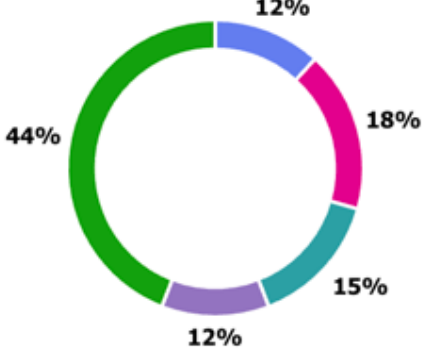
TABLE 7. Distribution of participants by country of origin and current country of employment.

Country of Origin	Number	%	Country of Employment	Number	%
The UK	3	18.75	Online	9	56.25

Ireland	3	18.75	France	2	12.5
Russia	2	12.5	Ireland	1	6.25
Latvia	1	6.25	Azerbaijan	1	6.25
Bulgaria	1	6.25	Russia and online	1	6.25
Kyrgyzstan	1	6.25	Russia	1	6.25
Poland	1	6.25	Online and France	1	6.25
Slovenia	1	6.25			
Ukraine	1	6.25			
India	1	6.25			
Italy	1	6.25			

A more detailed breakdown of the questionnaire respondents is presented in table 8, covering aspects such as educational background and professional experience. As outlined in the methodology section, only qualified teachers were eligible to participate. The most common qualifications among respondents were specialized English language teaching certifications, including CELTA, TEFL, and DELTA. In terms of professional experience, half of the participants reported having between 5 and 15 years of teaching experience. Most of them primarily teach adult learners, a group that may be more receptive to and benefit more from online teaching—an approach favored by the majority of the study sample. Regarding work modalities, 44% of participants reported working in a mixed capacity, combining employment at schools with teaching their own private students. The least common arrangement was working for multiple schools. More popular alternatives involved greater autonomy, such as teaching only private students or running their own teaching business. This suggests that reliance on schools as intermediaries was the least preferred option among the participants.

TABLE 8. Description of the questionnaire population.

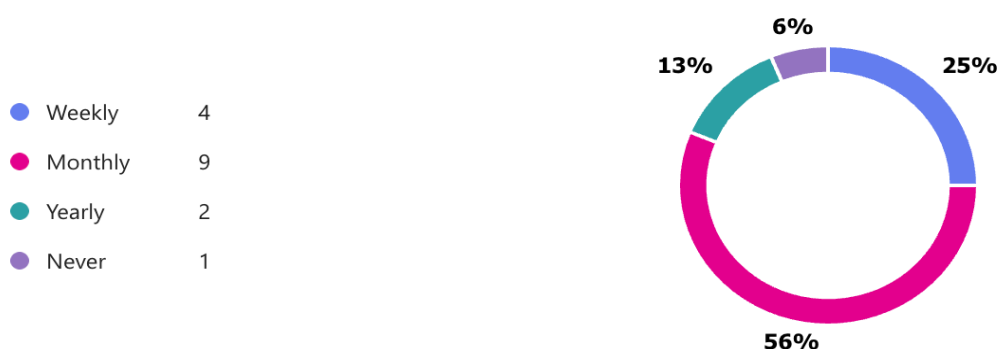
Variables	Categorical Groups	N	%
Teaching Qualification	CELTA/TEFL/DELTA or similar	13	
	Bachelor's degree	7	
	Master's degree	6	
	Doctorate	0	
	Other	2	
Years of Experience	0-5 years	3	
	5-15 years	8	
	15+ years	5	
Age Groups Taught	Kindergarten/Preschool	4	
	Primary	6	
	Middle School	5	
	High School	4	
	Adults	15	
Work Modalities	I own my own business	3	
	I work for different schools	2	
	I teach private students	4	
	I work for both a school and have my own students	7	

Interestingly, the self-employed teachers in this study reported high levels of motivation for teaching. This aligns with findings from Stephan et al. (2020), who

linked self-employment to greater perceived meaningfulness and well-being, and Csaba (2018), whose self-employed participants also showed strong motivation. The average motivation score was 4.31 out of 5, with only one participant rating it below 4 (a score of 3).

Professional development was also rated highly, with an average importance score of 4.5 out of 5. The lowest rating given was 3, selected by two participants. Interestingly, despite their lower ratings, both still reported engaging in continuing professional development (CPD) monthly—the most common frequency among respondents, with 56% indicating monthly engagement. Additionally, 25% engaged in CPD weekly, 13% annually, and only one participant reported never engaging in CPD, despite rating its importance as 5 out of 5. Findings are represented in figure 2.

FIGURE 2. Frequency of participants' engagement in CPD activities.

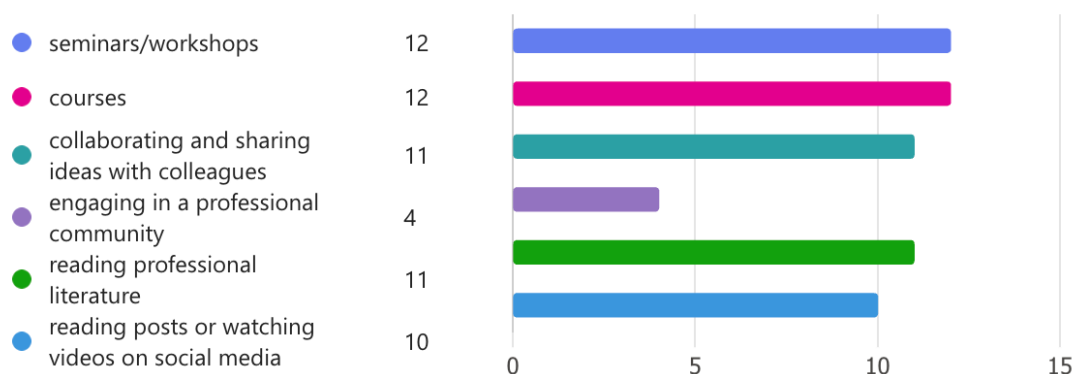


The strong motivation observed for both teaching and professional development aligns with the principles of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 2000) and findings in neuroscience (Panksepp 1998), which highlight that intrinsic motivation—the key driver of continuous learning and growth—thrives when the need for competence is fulfilled. This study findings also echo Csaba's (2018) research, where interviewed language teachers emphasized that ongoing development and professional growth were essential to sustaining their motivation for the profession (p. 37).

As illustrated in figure 3, participants showed relatively balanced preferences across different types of CPD activities, with a slight inclination toward more

structured formats such as seminars, workshops, and formal courses. The results also echo findings from Krylova (2024), who observed limited engagement in professional communities among self-employed tutors—an option that was the least selected in this study as well.

FIGURE 3. Participants' preferences for types of CPD activities.



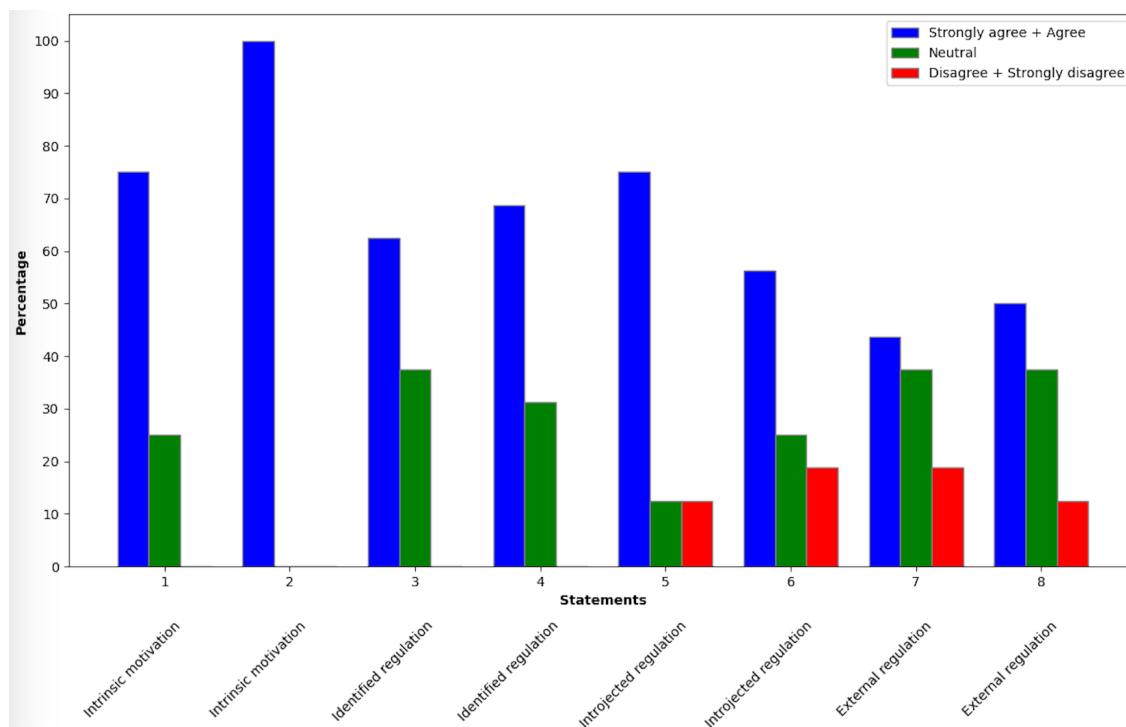
The following part of the questionnaire (question 14) was designed to address the first two sub -questions of the thesis, which examine how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations influence independent English-language teachers in pursuing professional development. As detailed in the methodology section, it included Likert-like statements asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements assessing which motivation was moving them to engage in CPD. The Likert-like statements were crafted to reflect the multidimensional nature of motivation, as supported by the literature (Pelletier et al. 2002; Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011; Han & Yin 2016). The questionnaire findings support this framework, with participants identifying a range of motivational factors driving their engagement in continuing professional development (CPD). Table 9 presents the percentage distribution of responses to each Likert-like statement measuring levels of agreement or disagreement.

TABLE 9. Percentage distribution of responses for each survey Likert-like statement.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Response Option (shortened version)	I find PD activities interesting	I enjoy learning new things	I can attain work objectives by staying updated	PD is vital for student success	I'd feel disappointed if I didn't engage in CPD and were bad at my job as a result	I would feel bad if I didn't take part in CPD	I enjoy social recognition	Staying updated helps attract students
	Intrinsic motivation		Identified regulation		Introjected regulation		External regulation	
Strongly agree	25.0%	43.75%	6.25%	12.5%	31.25%	12.5%	6.25%	12.5%
Agree	50.0%	56.25%	56.25%	56.25%	43.75%	43.75%	37.5%	37.5%
Strongly agree + agree	75.0%	100%	62.5%	68.75%	75%	56.25%	43.75%	50%
Neutral	25.0%	0.0%	37.5%	31.25%	12.5%	25.0%	37.5%	37.5%
Disagree	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.25%	12.50%	18.75%	6.25%
Strongly disagree	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.25%	6.25%	0.0%	6.25%
Disagree + strongly disagree	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.50%	18.75%	18.75%	12.50%

Notably, the results align with previous studies by McMillan, McConnell, and O'Sullivan (2014) in Ireland and Gorozidis and Papaioannou (2013) in Greece, which found that intrinsic motivation was the primary driver of teachers' professional development. In fact, when combining "strongly agree" and "agree" responses as represented in figure 4 where responses are grouped by agreement level, the two statements assessing intrinsic motivation (statement 1 and statement 2) received the highest and second highest levels of agreement—75% and 100%, respectively.

FIGURE 4. Survey response breakdown by agreement level



The difference in agreement between these two statements may be attributed to their different emphases: the first focused on the quality of available training content, while the second highlighted the respondent's intrinsic curiosity. Follow-up interviews helped clarify this discrepancy. One participant, interviewee 4, who strongly agreed with the second statement but felt neutral about the first explained:

"...so it's the contrast between motivation to learn and satisfaction with materials that are presented as helping me to learn."

Further probing revealed that this participant equated professional development primarily with workshops and seminars—the only CPD activity they selected in the questionnaire. However, during the interview, they contrasted traditional CPD with more self-directed approaches, which they found more beneficial:

"I took the view that professional development doesn't have to be delivered. You know that you can, as a teacher, self-develop ... I think it may have been that I was conflating the idea of professional development

with externally developed materials. Because I have a very poor attention span, I look at that (online lectures) and it could have been delivered in 10 minutes together with a kind of aid memoir, and that would have been much more useful, both in terms of learning and of my time.”

While this clarification cannot be generalized, all four other interviewees similarly emphasized the varying quality of CPD available to independent teachers. This supports the interpretation that perceived quality of CPD activities, rather than motivation, may explain discrepancies in responses between the two intrinsic motivation statements. Interestingly, although some respondents felt neutral, none disagreed with either intrinsic motivation statement.

The questionnaire results also reflect findings from Pennington and Riley (1991), Kassabgy, Boraie, and Schmidt (2001), and Erkaya (2012), which suggest that English language teachers, like teachers more broadly, tend to value intrinsic motivation over external rewards. This is demonstrated by the lower level of agreement with statements measuring extrinsic regulation—the most externally driven form of motivation—even when it was framed in terms of market-oriented goals such as attracting more clients (statement 8). This is particularly notable given the common assumption that independent teachers, operating in a competitive market, would prioritize client acquisition.

Statement 5 stands out as an exception. Like statement 2, it received a 75% agreement rate—the second-highest overall. However, it scored 20% higher than the other item measuring introjected regulation (statement 6), which refers to motivation driven by internalized external pressures, such as avoiding guilt or enhancing self-esteem. The only difference was that statement 5 referenced the negative consequences of not engaging in CPD on job performance, possibly hindering participants' need for competence. This discrepancy prompted further investigation by including clarifying questions in the semi-structured interviews.

One interviewee, interviewee 2, who strongly agreed with statement 5, but only agreed with statement 4, was selected for follow-up questions. This participant had expressed neutrality toward all other statements except those indicating intrinsic motivation. Their choices were particularly interesting because they

selected both intrinsic motivation and a form of less internal motivation (introjected regulation), rather than the next logical step on the self-determination continuum—identified regulation. This apparently aligns with Basikin's (2020) study results which questioned the self-determination continuum because of overlaps in participants' reporting of both autonomous and controlled motivations.

The follow-up questions prompted a multifaceted answer, reflecting the complexity of motivation and its connection to the need for competence. When asked why they pursued CPD, the interviewee first cited intrinsic motivation:

"It's (teaching tool) still okay, but I'm bored, so I will have to look for some new ideas. So basically this, this is one of them. Yes. I'm not excited about using some things as well."

When they were asked why they also selected statement 5 and 6, their response seems to support one of the premises of this thesis, that CPD has increasingly been imposed on teachers to increase performance.

"... for many years we've been brainwashed, but it's a good thing, but we've been brainwashed, you know. So even if you didn't think it yourself, this would be something that we've heard, that we hear all the time, that you should develop. So even if I didn't have this internal urge to, I don't know, to find a new game or to find a new article or a new book or something..."

These statements indicate an awareness of external pressure but more as a reminder to an already established internal 'urge' to grow stemming from a need for competence. This inner drive also emerged in additional comments:

"...it feels good also for the teacher, when things work, when you have had a good idea because of the research, or because you have seen it somewhere, and you want to try it with your students as well."

According to Deci and Ryan (1985), when individuals choose to engage in activities, they seek challenges that help them feel competent. This teacher's responses reflect this dynamic. While not generalizable, they suggest that the

high score for statement 5 may be due to its reference to the impact on job quality and personal standards, rather than purely introjected regulation. It also reinforced the idea—supported in the literature—that motivation is multidimensional.

If we interpret the high agreement with statement 5 as not solely indicating introjected motivation, then the next most prominent motivation according to the questionnaire is identified regulation—where actions are aligned with personal values and goals, such as student success and professional growth. Interestingly, as with statements related to intrinsic motivation, none of the respondents disagreed with these statements—unlike the more controlled forms of motivation.

In conclusion, although the sample was limited and findings might not be generalizable, the results align with the literature review findings. They confirm motivation's multidimensional nature, show that more autonomous motivations tend to be stronger than external forms, and suggest these patterns may be consistent across countries. Moreover, they highlight the value of qualitative follow-up, which offers insights not accessible through surveys alone.

4.2 Interview participants' overview and results

As outlined in the methodology section, the interview questions were primarily designed to explore the third sub-question: *how do self-employment conditions influence motivation for continuing professional development (CPD)?* They also addressed the main research question regarding the impact of autonomy on teacher motivation for professional growth, with a particular focus on autonomy's role in CPD motivation. Beyond these core aims, the interviews served two additional purposes. First, they offered contextual background about the participants, aiding in a more nuanced interpretation of their responses. Second, they gave participants the opportunity to express their personal motivations for engaging in CPD and to elaborate on findings from the questionnaire, as discussed in the section on the questionnaire results.

The interview analysis was conducted progressively, allowing for the refinement of questions and the inclusion of follow-up inquiries based on emerging themes. Once analyzed, participants' responses supported the questionnaire findings on the multidimensionality of motivation and the significance of more autonomous forms of motivation. They also highlighted the positive influence of the freedom and flexibility afforded by self-employment in fulfilling the needs for autonomy and competence, thereby enhancing motivation. Responses were coded using preliminary categories derived from key constructs in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), specifically the three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—as well as the types of motivation used in the questionnaire (intrinsic motivation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, and external regulation). As new insights emerged, three additional *in vivo* codes were introduced to capture values consistently present across all participants' transcripts: flexibility, the ability to give feedback, and time as valuable. These *in vivo* codes will be discussed in more detail later. This section begins with a brief overview of the participants' backgrounds and their self-described motivations to support the interpretation of the interviews. It then examines the influence of self-employment conditions and autonomy on motivation for professional development, highlighting overarching themes.

To ensure a diverse and balanced sample, four participants were selected, representing a range of gender, native language, teaching focus, and additional professional responsibilities. During the interviews, it also became evident that each participant brought a unique personality and set of values to the discussion.

Interviewee 1 is an independent English-language teacher with 11 years of experience, five of which have been spent working independently online, teaching a range of age groups and cohosting a podcast on exam preparation. He was the first to request that the interview questions be shared in advance—a practice adopted for all participants, as they had different ways of processing and delivering information, sometimes requiring more time and autonomy than a live interview allows. In his case, the desire to be prepared might have been a revealing indicator of what he values. His interview was the shortest, with responses that were precise, thorough, and to the point. The repeated use of the words “efficient” and “effective” throughout his interview suggests a strong

emphasis on competence—feeling capable and effective—and on time as a valuable resource. This is supported by his explanation for engaging in CPD:

“It works basically because you can have ideas by yourself, but you cannot have them all the time. And it's also worth finding out what other people are doing too, and to save time as well ... it's also sustainable and more efficient than just working by yourself, so you engage with the ideas of other people in order to free up time for doing other things as well. And it's also interesting, because I'm like this might not be true of all independent teachers, but I'm interested in my work. I want it to be good and I want it to be effective and ideally efficient, and this is part of it.”

His view of CPD as a means to improve job performance and save time indicates strong identified regulation as professional development is instrumental to achieve what he values. At the same time, his interest in the activities themselves reflects intrinsic motivation. When further probed, he also acknowledged the role of CPD in enhancing his reputation and business, pointing to external motivation. Overall, his interview supports the idea of motivational multidimensionality, with internal motivations being more prominent, though external ones were also strongly present in his answers to the questionnaire.

Interviewee 2 is an independent English-language teacher with 22 years of experience, primarily teaching young learners and also involved in teacher training and material design. Some of her responses were already discussed in the questionnaire results section, where she described being driven by “an internal urge” for new ideas and feeling “bored” by repetition, even when it remains effective. She also acknowledged having been “brainwashed” by societal expectations to constantly improve. Her interview reinforced intrinsic motivation as enjoyment and pursuit of CPD activities for their own sake as the most dominant force, along with a strong desire to deliver high-quality lessons and create meaningful work:

“...I like to think that I am, well, a good teacher, and I like what I do, so I guess it's for any profession you cannot start making a cake, right? Just hoping for a random, mediocre, something that is baked and not

poisonous, like you want a cake that people, whoever is going to enjoy it..”

Like Interviewee 1, she expressed pride in her work and a strong need for competence, as well as a continuous drive to improve—an impulse reminiscent of Panksepp’s SEEKING system (1998), as described in the theoretical framework.

Interviewee 3 has been working for an online language school since early 2023, teaching mainly business English to adults. She emphasized her intrinsic motivation to learn and adapt:

“I think it’s my personal need to keep learning, and whenever I have a new group and I notice that I am lacking some kind of skill and can learn more about, that motivates me a lot. It’s intrinsic and about wanting to be a good teacher.”

In the questionnaire, she agreed only with statements related to intrinsic motivation and introjected regulation. When asked about the latter, her response suggested both types were present. The feeling of disappointment when missing a CPD opportunity was linked to both a missed chance for learning and external factors, such as cost:

“Well, I feel bad on a psychological level that I’m not taking advantage of an opportunity that’s there for me. I feel like I’m losing out on an opportunity to learn something new and to develop myself. When the CPD is organised by the school and I I won’t need to pay out of pocket.”

She also noted that her current academic studies reduce her motivation for CPD due to time and energy constraints, echoing findings by Acar and Erozan (2024) on how heavy workloads can hinder intrinsic motivation.

Interviewee 4 is a retired lawyer who obtained an English teaching qualification to teach refugees and migrants in England, although he also works with schools:

“I am not typical as an independent English language teacher because being retired I have an independent source of income which gives me a considerable amount of discretionary time which I can use for professional development.”

His case is particularly interesting, as his motivation is free from external pressures such as market demands. Despite having no obligation to engage in CPD, he chooses to do so:

“As an individual I like to do what I do well. I also like to help people and so my motivation to engage in professional development is largely a response to seeing particular needs in my students and the desire to learn to adapt my teaching to better fulfill their learning needs. I'm also a curious person and will occasionally follow a professional development course out of curiosity.”

His responses reflect more autonomous forms of motivation—intrinsic (curiosity) and identified (valuing the outcome of CPD). This aligns with literature suggesting that teachers are often more driven by internal motives than external ones (e.g., McMillan, McConnell, and O’Sullivan 2014).

Overall, the four interviewees demonstrated the multidimensional nature of motivation for CPD, with intrinsic and identified regulation emerging as the most prominent types. While external and introjected motivations were also present, particularly in relation to time, cost, and professional image, the interviews highlighted a shared emphasis on competence, curiosity, and the desire to do meaningful work. Each participant’s unique context—ranging from entrepreneurial independence to retirement—shaped how these motivations were expressed, but all underscored the importance of autonomy and personal values in sustaining professional growth.

As mentioned above, answers were coded using preliminary codes based on key constructs from Self-Determination Theory, along with three additional in vivo codes: flexibility, the ability to give feedback, and time as valuable. These values can be linked to the psychological needs for autonomy and competence, as they

stem from a desire to experience choice and to determine when, where, how, and whether to engage in professional development activities—free from external schedules or authority—and to assess the relevance and usefulness of such activities in enhancing one’s efficacy. When individuals are unable to provide feedback or when their input is disregarded, feelings of powerlessness and lack of control emerge, which in turn diminish motivation (Deci, Spiegel, Ryan, Koestner & Kauffman 1982). Similarly, the perception of time being wasted undermines the need to feel effective and to achieve desired outcomes efficiently. This negative impact of restricted autonomy was clearly articulated by the first interviewee when reflecting on mandatory professional development at a previous institution:

“I was asked to do a three-day course, and that three-day course consisted of me sitting in a room doing nothing but listening to someone read out slides on a PowerPoint. Now that’s not a good use of my time, but I had to do that. There was no option for me to say, I’m not going to do this. And even though I was asked for my feedback and I gave my honest feedback, there is no function for me to check if that was followed up on. And so, because you’re rendered powerless by this process, you know, why should you?”

Other participants echoed this sentiment, describing school-mandated CPD as often irrelevant or misaligned with their professional context. In contrast, they highlighted how self-employment afforded them greater autonomy and flexibility, allowing them to avoid unproductive sessions and focus on areas of genuine interest:

“But then again, for example, you have choice on what you want to do, which area you want to develop in, because this is also something that has been a problem that after so many years, not everything is exciting for me ... because eventually you find yourself sitting in a session, and luckily, there haven’t been many of them, but you find yourself sitting in a session and you think like ‘you are actually properly wasting my time, sir’. Because it’s not good, or it’s not relevant, or it was valid, I don’t know, 10 years ago.

So at least this autonomy gives you an opportunity to choose what you really might find interesting.”

Participants consistently described the flexibility and choice associated with self-employment as enhancing their motivation to engage in CPD, in stark contrast to the rigid structures of formal institutions:

“Because I can choose the topics for development, I’m more motivated to learn and apply the information than I would be if I was just told that I would have to do a particular course.”

However, this autonomy also came with challenges. Participants noted the increased responsibility and accountability, particularly regarding financial investment and time management:

“I’m responsible for this financially and in terms of organization, I’ll opt for things which are free ... but free is not always necessarily good ... You might have to sacrifice professional development in order to teach a class.”

Another limitation of self-employment mentioned by participants was the lack of a structured professional community, which some found demotivating. This aligns with McMillan et al. (2014), who emphasized the importance of relatedness—another SDT need—in fostering motivation for professional development:

“I used to be constantly surrounded by other teachers and being in this environment every day helped me feel more interested and motivated to explore new ideas and do more courses. And now that I work from home and I’m a little bit disconnected, I feel less motivated.”

While autonomy can sometimes result in feelings of isolation or financial constraints, all participants expressed a generally positive view of the autonomy afforded by self-employment and its impact on their motivation for professional growth. This supports Deci and Ryan’s (2000) findings that perceiving one’s actions as self-determined enhances intrinsic motivation, as well as Hargreaves

et al. (2013), who found that autonomy in professional learning communities boosts motivation.

In conclusion, the findings reveal that motivation for continued professional development (CPD) among self-employed educators is deeply multifaceted, shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external factors as described in the literature on the multidimensionality of motivation (Han & Yin 2016; Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011; Zhang, Admiraal, & Saab 2022). While intrinsic and identified motivations emerged as the most dominant—demonstrating participants’ genuine enjoyment and personal valuing of growth—external pressures and internalized expectations also played a role. Autonomy surfaced as a central driver, with the freedom to choose CPD topics and modes significantly enhancing engagement, which echoes findings in previous studies (Erkaya 2012; Csaba 2018). However, this autonomy also introduced challenges, including financial constraints and diminished collegial interaction. The tension between independence and isolation underscores a partial satisfaction of relatedness needs, suggesting that while self-employment can empower educators, it may also limit social motivation factors vital to sustained development as also highlighted by Krylova (2024). Participants expressed a strong desire to fulfill their need for competence (Ryan & Deci 2000) and deliver high-quality teaching, driven by professional pride and a commitment to students. Finally, participants emphasized flexibility, relevance, and efficiency as key motivators, often contrasting these with the rigid, top-down nature of institutionally mandated CPD (McMillan et al. 2014). Table 10 summarizes the overarching themes across the interviews and the related literature.

TABLE 10. Overarching themes across the interviews and related literature.

Theme	Description / Insight	Supporting Evidence / Quotes	Related Literature
Multidimensional Motivation	All interviewees demonstrated a mix of motivation types (intrinsic, identified, introjected, and external). Internal forms were most prominent.	Interviewee 1 valued efficiency (identified), while also enjoying the work (intrinsic). Interviewee 2 described both intrinsic joy and internal pressure, etc..	Han & Yin (2016); Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011); Zhang et al. (2022)
Autonomy as Central	Autonomy—through choice, flexibility, and control—was a key	“Because I can choose the topics... I’m more motivated.” Participants criticized mandatory	Erkaya 2012; Csaba 2018; Basikin;

	driver of CPD motivation. Self-employment enhanced this.	CPD for being irrelevant or disempowering.	Hargreaves et al.(2013)
Competence and Professional Pride	Desire to feel effective, deliver quality lessons, and improve skills was central across cases.	All participants spoke about wanting to be “good teachers” and improve for themselves and their students.	Vallerand and Reid (1984); Ryan and Deci (2000)
Time as Valuable	Time was consistently viewed as a key resource; inefficient CPD was seen as demotivating.	“You are actually properly wasting my time, sir.”	McMillan et al. (2014)
Challenges of Self-Employment	While autonomy was appreciated, it came with financial burdens, lack of structure, and reduced peer interaction.	“You might have to sacrifice professional development in order to teach a class.” “Now that I work from home... I feel less motivated.”	Krylova (2024)
Partial Satisfaction of Relatedness	Some participants missed the sense of community found in institutional settings.	“Being in this (school) environment every day helped me feel more interested and motivated...”	Krylova (2024)

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Answering of research questions

Recognizing the importance of ongoing professional growth in today's educational landscape, this thesis set out to explore how autonomy influences teacher motivation for professional development (CPD) in the context of independent English language teaching. It asked whether the well-documented link between autonomy and motivation in traditional school settings also applies to freelance ELT professionals, who operate with higher levels of independence. The findings confirm that autonomy does positively impact motivation, but in complex and context-dependent ways.

In response to the **main research question**—*How does autonomy affect teacher motivation for professional development in independent English language teachers?*—the study found that autonomy is a key enabler of motivation. Participants consistently highlighted the importance of having control over CPD choices, emphasizing flexibility, relevance, and efficiency as critical motivators. Autonomy allowed them to pursue CPD that felt meaningful and aligned with their professional goals, supporting the idea that self-determination enhances intrinsic motivation, as outlined by studies within the Self-Determination Theory framework (e.g. Deci and Ryan 2000) and, more recently, by neurobiological research (e.g. Murayama et al. 2010).

The **first sub-question**, concerning *the impact of intrinsic motivation*, revealed that intrinsic drivers—such as enjoyment of learning, professional pride, and a desire to improve teaching quality—were the most influential factors in CPD engagement. Both survey and interview data showed that participants felt motivated when CPD contributed to their sense of competence and personal growth. This aligns with research showing that fulfilling intrinsic needs leads to sustained effort and higher performance (Ryan & Deci 2000; Stephan et al. 2020).

The **second sub-question**, regarding the impact of *extrinsic motivation on CPD engagement*, uncovered a more nuanced picture. While some external

influences—such as client expectations or market competitiveness—did shape teachers' decisions, they were rarely the primary motivators. In fact, school mandatory or poorly designed CPD sessions were often viewed negatively, reinforcing that autonomy and perceived relevance are essential for motivation. This suggests that while extrinsic pressures exist, their impact is moderated by the degree of choice and perceived value teachers associate with CPD. Notably, the questionnaire results show that extrinsic motivation is lower than more autonomous forms of motivation—even when CPD is framed in market-driven terms like attracting more clients. This is particularly interesting as it challenges the common belief that independent teachers in competitive markets primarily focus on client acquisition.

The **final sub-question** asked *how self-employment conditions influence motivation*. The findings showed that self-employment offers greater autonomy and, for many, a stronger sense of professional identity. However, it also introduces challenges, including financial constraints and reduced opportunities for peer interaction. While autonomy supported motivation through enhanced flexibility and relevance, the relative absence of relatedness—especially the collegiality found in school environments—was noted as a limitation. This indicates that autonomy and competence needs are often met in freelance contexts, but the need for relatedness may remain partially unsatisfied.

Overall, the study confirms that autonomy fosters motivation for CPD among independent ELT professionals, primarily by supporting intrinsic and identified forms of motivation. However, autonomy alone is not a universal solution. Its benefits are most pronounced when paired with opportunities for meaningful, self-directed growth and when CPD is perceived as relevant, efficient, and aligned with personal teaching values. These insights, grounded in the Self-Determination Theory framework, can inform recommendations for designing CPD opportunities that better serve both independent and school teachers.

5.2 Recommendations for schools

Based on the findings of this study and the broader literature on teacher motivation and professional development (e.g. McMillan et al. 2014), several recommendations emerge for designing CPD opportunities that effectively support both independent and school-based teachers. First, CPD should prioritize autonomy by allowing teachers to make meaningful choices about topics, formats, and pacing. This includes offering flexible options that teachers can adapt to their individual goals and schedules—whether they work independently or within institutions.

Second, CPD must feel relevant and purposeful, directly connected to teachers' day-to-day challenges and professional aspirations. When development opportunities align with personal teaching values and promote competence, they are more likely to foster sustained engagement. One interviewee emphasized that CPD should be delivered by trainers who are actively working in the classroom, who understand the realities teachers face, and who have tested their ideas in practice—not simply promoted on the basis of name recognition.

Third, although independent teachers value autonomy, the study also revealed that many miss the collegial interaction found in school settings. Therefore, CPD design should include opportunities for professional dialogue and community-building, whether through peer feedback, small-group workshops, or online communities of practice.

Finally, it is crucial to involve teachers in the CPD design process itself, to ensure that content reflects their lived experiences and avoids the top-down approaches often criticized in mandatory programs. These insights—rooted in both Self-Determination Theory and real-world educator experiences—will be shared on Success with IELTS to inform more effective and motivating CPD practices across teaching contexts.

5.3 Limitations and future research

While this study provides useful insights into the motivations of independent English language teachers, particularly around autonomy and professional development, several limitations should be acknowledged.

The sample size—18 questionnaire participants and 4 interviewees—was relatively small, which limits the generalizability of the findings. However, the study was exploratory in nature and aimed to generate in-depth understanding rather than statistical representation. The data nonetheless revealed consistent patterns that align with existing literature, offering a foundation for further, larger-scale studies.

Participants were primarily drawn from the researcher's LinkedIn network, which may have introduced a degree of selection bias, favoring those already reflective or actively engaged in CPD. While this limits diversity in perspective, it also ensured that respondents had relevant experience with self-directed professional learning in freelance contexts.

A further challenge lay in the complex and overlapping nature of motivation types, as described in Noels et al. (2000). Differentiating between identified, integrated, and intrinsic motivations can be difficult, especially in real-world settings where motivations often co-occur. This complexity is well recognized within the SDT framework itself and reflects the reality of teacher experience. While this may have made it harder to categorize motivations neatly, the study opted to reflect the nuance rather than oversimplify.

The mixed-methods approach helped mitigate some of these challenges by using interviews to clarify and contextualize quantitative findings. Nevertheless, interpretation of qualitative data remains subject to the researcher's own perspective, which may have influenced how responses were analyzed and framed. Efforts were made to stay close to participants' original meanings, but full objectivity is not possible in this kind of research.

Overall, while the study's scope was limited, it addresses an emerging area of interest—professional development among self-employed language teachers. As more educators explore freelance work, understanding how autonomy influences their motivation becomes increasingly relevant. The findings highlight areas worthy of further investigation and suggest that greater flexibility and relevance in CPD may support long-term engagement and professional growth in this expanding segment of the education sector.

5.4 Use of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were employed at various stages of this research, as outlined below.

As mentioned in the methodology section, interview transcriptions were carried out using Otter.ai. Participants were provided with a link to Otter.ai's privacy policy to ensure they were informed and gave consent before the interview. For qualitative data analysis, Atlas.ti was used to code the interview data. In line with TAMK's data protection guidelines, AI-powered features within the software were not utilized.

Scispace.com was used to find relevant research during the early stages of the writing process.

TAMK's provision of Microsoft Copilot was utilized to refine the document. This included formatting references, checking grammatical errors and repetitions, and ensuring that arguments were logically structured and well-supported.

Each recommendation was thoroughly assessed before being critically adapted or disregarded.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Comparison between TMPDS and WTMST, Basikin 2020, p. 40

Factors	Fernet's WTMST	TMPDS
Intrinsic motivation	Because it is pleasant <i>to carry out this task</i> . Because I find <i>this task</i> interesting to do. Because I like doing this task.	Because it was pleasant to attend this training. Because I <i>found this training</i> interesting to do. Because I liked doing the activities in the training.
Identified regulation	Because it is important for me to carry out this task. Because this task allows me to attain work objectives that I consider important. Because I find this task important for the academic success of my students.	Because <i>this training was</i> important for me to carry out <i>my teaching duties</i> . Because <i>this training allowed</i> me to attain work objectives that I consider important. Because I <i>found this training</i> important for the academic success of my students.
Introjected regulation	Because if I don't carry out this task, I will feel bad. Because I would feel guilty not doing it. To not feel bad if I don't do it.	Because if I <i>did</i> not attend this training, I <i>would</i> feel bad. Because I <i>would</i> feel guilty if I <i>did</i> not attend the training. Because I <i>did</i> not want to feel bad.
External regulation	Because my work demands it. Because the school obliges me to do it. Because I'm paid to do it.	Because my duties demanded me to attend to it. Because my school obliged me to do it. Because I was paid to do it.
Amotivation	I don't know, I don't always see the relevance of carrying out this task. I used to know why I was doing this task, but I don't see the reason anymore. I don't know, sometimes I don't see its purpose.	I <i>did</i> not know. I <i>did</i> not see the relevance of <i>going to this training</i> . I did not know the reasons of doing this. I did not know. I did not understand the purpose of <i>going to the training</i> .

Appendix 2. Survey

Section 1

Eligibility criteria

This study defines independent English language teachers as qualified self-employed English language teachers who either own their own businesses, work for multiple schools, have their own students or engage in hybrid roles, having both private students and working with schools. These teachers also enjoy high levels of autonomy, especially in selecting their professional development and collaborating with schools that align with their personal teaching values. Only respondents who answer "yes" to all three questions will be eligible to participate in this study.

1. Are you a qualified English language teacher? *

Yes

No

2. Are you self-employed? *

Yes

No

3. Do you have the autonomy to decide your own professional development? *

Yes

No

Section 2

Background information

4. What country are you from? *

5. What country do you teach in? (If you teach online, please write 'online') *

6. How many years have you been teaching? *

- 0-5 years
- 5-15 years
- 15+ years

7. What teaching qualification do you hold? You can select more than one answer. *

- CELTA/TEFL/DELTA or similar Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctorate
- Other

8. What age group do you currently teach? You can select more than one option. *

- Kindergarten/Preschool Primary
- Middle school
- High school
- Adults

9. Select one of the following *

- I own my own business.
- I work for different schools.
- I teach private students.
- I work for both a school and have my own students.

Section 3

Motivation

10. How motivated are you about teaching? *

Not at all (1) Extremely motivated (5)

1	2	3	4	5
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Section 4

Professional development

11. How important is professional development to you? *

Not at all important (1) Extremely important (5)

1	2	3	4	5
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12. How often do you engage in professional development activities?*

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Yearly
- Never

13. Select all the professional development activities you usually participate in. *

- seminars/workshops
- courses
- collaborating and sharing ideas with colleagues engaging in a professional community
- reading professional literature
- reading posts or watching videos on social media

14. Please read each statement carefully and indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with it using the provided scale. *

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
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I find professional development activities interesting.

I would feel bad if I didn't take part in any professional development activities.

Staying professionally updated helps me attract more students.

Professional development is vital for the academic success of my students.

I would feel disappointed if I didn't engage in professional development and were bad at my job as a result.

I enjoy the social recognition from gaining new qualifications.

I can attain important work objectives by staying updated with the most advanced teaching techniques.

I enjoy learning new things either through colleagues or during workshops.

Follow-up

15. The second part of the study, which explores, the relationship between intrinsic motivation and the autonomy provided by self-employment, involves individual online interviews. If you're willing to participate, please provide your email address and I may contact you soon.