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Research Article

Understanding the dynamics of study motivation: An in-depth analysis of teachers' perceptions in primary schools

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Research has shown students' study motivation is complex and demanding. It also asserts that teachers' perceptions and attitudes are decisive, complex, and demanding because they need to make many choices about planning and handling lessons and review their fundamental beliefs about study motivation. We aimed to describe teachers' perceptions of students' study motivation. We collected the data from nine focus-group interviews with 26 Swedish teachers in five primary schools. Through reflexive thematic analysis, the following six themes of perceptions emerged: emotions, teachers, teaching, learning environment, family and friends, and health and well-being. Although many teachers assumed students have more intrinsic than extrinsic motivation, they described more extrinsic motivation factors. Changing factors of importance for study motivation are primarily background factors, things needed to feel and function in everyday life, such as good health, friends, and functioning relationships. The study's results make an important contribution to understanding teachers as a starting point for understanding their didactic choices and how these choices can affect students, as well as how teaching could be changed to correspond more closely to students' needs and conditions.

1. Introduction

Teachers consider students' motivation an important part of their teaching (D'Elisa, 2015; Lauermann & Berger, 2021; OECD, 2009). Teachers' beliefs, autonomy, experiences, and knowledge (Berg et al., 2020) influence their classroom planning and implementation of instruction and leadership (Mansfield & Violet, 2010; Rubie-Davis, 2015). They face many daily choices regarding how best to plan and implement lessons so that students are motivated and inspired. Choosing between teaching strategies and at the same time opting for strategies is an inevitable part of being a leader of students' learning (Reeve et al., 2014). Various (e.g., personal, structural, relational, and contextual) factors influence teachers' daily decisions (Thorsten et al., 2021). However, they are also grounded in teachers' general beliefs about teaching, learning (Fives et al., 2015), and teaching practices (Buehl & Beck, 2015). Teachers' strategies to motivate students relate

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to their abilities (Quirk et al., 2010). Teachers' perceptions of students' self-determined motivation influence their choice of action (Lui et al., 2020) and can predict their use of various motivational strategies in the classroom (Hardre et al., 2008).

In complex situations, teachers must make choices about how to teach so that as many students as possible be motivated and at the same time develop socially and knowledge-wise (Thorsten et al., 2021). A challenge is protecting the interests of the group (class) and the individual. Dealing with various dilemmas from a teacher's and a student's perspective is part of a professional approach in which there are no quick and easy solutions (D'Elisa, 2015). Therefore, research on the complexities and challenges of teachers' practice is essential.

The aim of this article is to examine primary school teachers' perceptions of what supports or inhibits students' study motivation. The research questions are:

RQ 1) How do teachers in primary school understand and describe students' study motivation?

RQ 2) How can these perceptions be analyzed using the theoretical concept of accountability?

Research on teachers' perceptions of students' study motivation can enhance educational practices by providing insights, tools, and strategies that help teachers better understand and support their students' motivation, leading to improved learning outcomes and a more engaging educational experience.

2. Previous Research

Because the main concepts of this study are students' study motivation and teachers' perceptions, the overview of previous research will focus on these concepts. Much of the research relates to factors that motivate or demotivate students. There are few explicit definitions in the question. One definition of study motivation is "the ability to attain long- or short-term academic objectives. It also manifests as enthusiasm and a good attitude toward the learning process" (Boström & Bostedt, 2022, p. 26). Students' study motivation, according to these researchers, is the inner drive or desire that compels students to engage in learning activities, complete assignments, and excel academically. According to Hattie (2009), study motivation is one of the central determinants of educational and academic achievement. Many factors can affect students' study motivation, in and outside school (Lohiniva & Isomöttönen, 2021). Variables mentioned in previous research are teachers, teaching methods, learning strategies (Boström & Bostedt, 2022), self-efficacy, sense of belonging, and perception of the curriculum (Tinto, 2015). Bureau et al. (2022) distinguished two kinds of study motivation: autonomous and controlled. The former refers to behavior characterized by enjoyment and/or personal relevance and the latter to behavior prompted by external or internal pressure that hinders academic achievement. Frequently occurring concepts concerning study motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to an individual's natural, internal desire or drive to engage in learning and educational activities. Conversely, extrinsic motivation in study motivation refers to the external factors or rewards that drive a person to engage in learning and educational activities (Blomgren, 2016; Manzano-Sánchez et al., 2021; Woolfolk, 2020). Another settled concept in study motivation is the types of goals: mastery and performance. Mastery goals, also known as learning goals, in the context of students' studies, refer to the educational objectives regarding acquiring knowledge, understanding concepts, and developing competence. When students have mastery goals, they aim to master the subject matter and deepen their understanding of the material rather than merely striving for external rewards or performance comparisons. In contrast to mastery goals, performance goals concern earning high grades, outperforming others, or avoiding failure. These types of goals can coexist to some extent (Woolfolk, 2020).

Teachers endorse student study motivation as an essential part of their teaching (e.g., Hardre et al., 2008; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008; Woolfolk, 2020). Teachers' conceptions of student study motivation cover a wide range of motivational constructs, such as what kind of goals (mastery or performance) guide students' interest, whether students are driven by intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, and whether students are willing to succeed if they put in the necessary effort. Our

understanding of conceptions aligns with Woolfolk's (2020), who described conceptions as mental frameworks that encompass how individuals organize and understand information and go beyond beliefs (specific convictions) in their scope and flexibility. Central in teachers' conceptions are those who focus on professional beliefs regarding education, teaching, and learning (Watt & Richardsson, 2015), such as the most effective methods, classroom management (Fives et al., 2015), the nature of knowledge, and the nature or process of knowing (Erixon & Hansson, 2023). Fives and Buehl (2017) argued that these conceptions influence teachers' decisions and behavior and have multiple perspectives that must be explored. According to Turner et al. (2009), the conceptions seem to "reflect longstanding attitudes, common sense, and their experiences … and it is important to examine their characteristics, their content, and their expression" (p. 1).

In education, motivational constructs refer to variables that influence and describe an individual's motivation, such as level of motivation, goal orientation, and self-efficacy. These constructs help researchers and educators understand and analyze the underlying processes and elements that drive and sustain motivation (D'Elisa, 2015). Essential strategies for supporting students' motivation and learning are, according to Anderman et al. (2011), supporting understanding, building and maintaining rapport, and managing leadership in the classroom. Teachers' perceptions (conscious or unconscious) seem to play a role in how they perceive students' motivation. These perceptions influence how teachers interact with students, provide feedback, and create a classroom environment. One example is expectations: Teachers often form expectations about their students' abilities and potential based on various cues, including past performance, behavior, and appearance. These expectations can become self-fulfilling prophecies. If a teacher expects students to excel, the teacher may offer more support and opportunities, boosting students' motivation and performance. Conversely, low expectations can lead to reduced motivation and achievement. Teachers´ perceptions of students' learning motivation and classroom behavior mediate the relationship between student characteristics and cognitive skills as perceived by the teacher (Brandmiller et al., 2020). Paradoxically, research shows that teacher perceptions of what motivates students are generally not strongly related to the choice of teaching strategies (Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). In the study, teachers' perceptions of student motivation explained very little predictive variance in strategy choice, and chosen strategies were independent of their perceptions of student motivation. Teachers also seem to focus more on supporting students who lack motivation.

Lauermann and Berger (2021) emphasized the importance of the teacher matching motivational strategies to the students' levels: "The degree of (mis)alignment of teacher- and student-reported instructional practices is a key ingredient in understanding the often missing link between teacher motivation and student outcomes" (p. 1). Wiesman (2012) asserted that for teachers to maximize students' academic performance, they must fully understand how to motivate students successfully. Buehl and Beck (2015) also pointed to the incongruence in teachers' beliefs and practices and emphasized the need to "understand the potential relationship between beliefs and practice as well as the possible internal and external factors that may support or hinder this connection" (p. 66). According to Boström and Bostedt (2022), students most often attribute their interest and motivation in school to their interactions with their teachers. Wiesman (2012) also concluded that students' motivation primarily depends on their inner desire to learn or their goals, and it is toward these desires and goals that the teacher must direct their efforts and teaching.

Effective teachers can influence students' growth and satisfaction (build self-efficacy) by encouraging students and making the content meaningful and challenging for their students and supporting students in their environment by building positive relationships (Buehl & Beck, 2015). According to Siegle et al. (2014), teachers with broad and deep subject knowledge can better motivate students. These teachers have the background to differentiate content, deviate from the textbook's structure, and engage in various instruction strategies, such as in-depth discussions, with their students. Current research from Sweden (Boström & Bostedt, 2021, 2022), based on students' voices regarding whether the teacher influences their motivation, has shown, on the

contrary, that students value the teacher's personality more than their competence in relation to being motivated.

An interesting question is whether students' and teachers' perceptions of creating or supporting study motivation match or differ. Schwan (2021) argued that students' perceptions of their motivation and reasons for amotivation distinguish teachers' perceptions from the students': "Teachers may not be employing appropriate interventions in battling amotivation because they may not be sensitive to their students' beliefs for what is causing their amotivation" (p. 76). Boström and Bostedt (2020) showed that teachers and students have similarities in perceptions regarding study motivation but that their perceptions also differ in important aspects. Teachers put more emphasis on life skills, teachers' competencies, and adapted study groups than students do whereas students believe the physical learning environment and teachers' personalities are important. Wiesman (2012) also concluded that there are differences between teachers and students in study motivation. Students' motivation depends on their inner desire to learn or their goals. Teachers believe that students are motivated by the teachers' actions. Additionally, teachers' and students' perceptions of study motivation differed. The teachers emphasized life skills, adapted study groups, and their actions more than the students whereas the students emphasized the teacher's personality (Boström & Bostedt, 2020). Finally, research has shown that teachers also lack an understanding of what causes student motivation, which makes it difficult for them to deal with it (Schwan, 2021).

In summary, research has shown that motivation is an essential aspect of teaching and an effective teacher promotes students' growth and builds their self-efficacy (Buehl & Beck, 2015; D'Elisa, 2015; Hardre et al., 2008; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). However, teaching strategies depend on the teacher's beliefs and concepts regarding what creates motivation, and they do not always correspond to the choice of teaching strategies (Brandmiller et al., 2020; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008). Therefore, an incongruence could be a crucial missing link between teacher motivation and student outcomes (Lauermann & Berger, 2021).

3. Theoretical Overview: Managing Complexity and Building Accountability

Professionals in schools operate in vulnerable situations under cross-pressure (Berg, 2018). The cross-pressure comes from the demands and expectations of various groups regarding teachers' work and can be described in terms of content as increased individualization, increased complexity of issues, less time for each case, and increased standardization of work and increased control. School governance is also complex, exemplified by the tension between the regulation of activities (the law) and teachers' professional ethics. New forms of operation and dominant social governance philosophies in Sweden have increased the tension.

According to the Swedish Education Act (Skollag, 2010), education is "the activity in which teaching is carried out based on specific objectives" (ch. 1, § 3). Teachers in schools have to deal simultaneously with the governing documents' objectives and principals' demands and expectations (questions of objectives, outcomes, and legality) as well as organizational and pedagogical expectations and challenges (questions of organization, content, work process, trust, security, and legitimacy). Teachers' sense of who they are in their profession is based on values, beliefs, and patterns of action and interaction (Lunn et al., 2015). These include teachers' feelings about managing the expectations, opportunities, and challenges that students, parents, and society have regarding education in schools. Belonging to a profession involves professional autonomy, unique knowledge, having some kind of regulation regarding access to the profession, a code of ethics, and social legitimacy, conditions that are all applicable to teachers. However, a profession (a professional group with certain common features) as a concept should be kept separate from having professional skills (doing something professionally; Brante, 2009; Brante et al., 2015). There is also a third essential concept to highlight for school practice: professionalism (a constant striving to be guided in professional practice by what is beneficial to student learning). Professionalism is different from merely belonging to a profession or being professionally skilled. It is not just about

doing things right but also about doing the right things given the situation. It is a way of behaving in professional practice, managing the pressure of the work, and focusing on students' learning. This means that teachers' activities must not only be legitimate (comply with legislation and curricula) but also demonstrate legitimacy in students' and their parents' eyes, that is, strive to see the challenges in students' learning processes and the solutions that exist to handle them. Fullan (2017) called this accountability—fostering a greater sense of ownership of the activity, greater responsibility, and accountability of the right kind. Fullan (2017) argued that external accountability (e.g., ex post compliance checks on school operations via government agencies) needs to be complemented by internal accountability (operational focus and responsibility).

Accountability is an important concept for determining the quality of being professional and acting with professionalism, that is, managing the complexity of cross-pressures (Berg, 2018). Therefore, accountability is important for teachers as a profession. Bergh and Arneback (2016) described this as the need to balance trust management/professional management (pedagogy) and expectation management (law/economics). In relation to the topic of this article, it is about reflecting on the best way to foster study motivation among students. This can be done in two ways: by focusing on intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivational factors. However, it is also important that teachers reflect on their basic motivational beliefs, which can be described and discussed using McGregor's (1960) well-known Theories X and Y. These theories address the question of motivation as well as accountability.

Even though McGregor's (1960) theory was developed to improve motivation in workplaces outside school, it has been and can be used in the school system. Theory X and Theory Y can be applied to classroom environments to discuss whether motivation of student learning correlates with teachers' perceptions. Teachers who act in accordance with Theory X assumptions tend to lean on structure and control and to supervise their students closely. The idea is that external control is necessary for dealing with students' study motivation. Educators acting in accordance with Theory X would agree with statements such as (a) the teacher is responsible for actively sharing their knowledge with the students, (b) students prefer to have the teacher direct their learning and not take on that responsibility themselves, and (c) the teacher must ensure a controlled learning environment to prevent cheating and necessitate student learning. In our case of study motivation, Theory X thereby emphasizes the teacher's superiority in the classroom and the various control mechanisms that can be used to strengthen or support students' study motivation.

Teachers who act in accordance with Theory Y's assumptions do not attempt to structure, control, or closely supervise the students as a way to foster study motivation. Instead, these teachers help their students by allowing them to assume increasing self-control. The aim of Theory Y is to establish an environment in which students can best achieve their personal goals by consulting, participating, and communicating with the individual, the social groups they are a part of (friends, the class), and/or the organization. Educators acting in accordance with Theory Y would agree with statements such as (a) students are naturally predisposed to learn; (b) students experience self-satisfaction when they learn, and this is enough to motivate them to meet their learning goals; (c) traditional classrooms do not enable almost all students' potential; and (d) students have large amounts of creative thinking and innovation that is applied throughout their learning journey. Theory Y thereby emphasizes, in our case of study motivation, the teacher's pedagogical and didactical skills that can be used to strengthen or support students' study motivation.

In this article, we will analyze and discuss teachers' perceptions of students' study motivation using the concept of accountability and the assumptions presented in Theories X and Y.

4. Method

4.1. Methodological Considerations

Based on previous research on teachers' perceptions, we see the teacher's work as a complex system of individuals, groups, activities, and actions. The research group consists of researchers and coresearcher teachers, which means there is sufficient knowledge of the school environment, the culture among teachers, and their complexity (e.g., Terry et al., 2017). Teachers who study their environment can, on the one hand, deliberately focus on relevant questions; on the other hand, there is the risk that their experiences can color the research work. To address this problem, the research group has made the experience-based contextual knowledge visible in discussions and joint analyses to create perspective awareness (Zajda, 2010). To gain more knowledge about how teachers think about students' study motivation, we aimed to create a natural conversation environment and therefore chose focus group interviews. Letting several active teachers talk about their daily activities in a formal situation enables various perspectives and perceptions to be expressed. This method is particularly well suited to studying perceptions and dilemmas that the participants perceive they are facing. Another advantage of the chosen data collection method is that the interaction that takes place in the group and with the researcher allows teachers' tacit and contextualized knowledge to be expressed (Kvale, 2014).

4.2. Sample

The teachers who participated in the study were asked to share in conversations about students' study motivation and reported their interest in doing so. In total, nine focus group interviews were conducted, in which 26 active teachers participated. They worked Grades 3, 6, and 8 in theoretical and practical subjects. They had teaching experience ranging from 6 months to 25 years (see Table 1) and were between 23 and 64 years of age. Men and women participated in the study but with a clear overrepresentation of women (22/26). The sample shows great variety, which can be seen as an asset because it helps capture a broad picture of perceptions and strategies regarding students' study motivation.

Table 1
Informants divided by grade and gender

	Female	Male	Total	Years as teachers
Grade 3	7	1	8	2–22
Grade 6	8	1	9	2–25
Grade 8	7	2	9	0.5–23
N	22	4	26	

In total, the empirical material from the teachers in Grades 3, 6, and 8 consists of 9 hr and 44 min of interview time, with 330 A4 pages of transcribed material (see Table 2). In quotes, elementary school teachers are indicated as E1–E8, middle school teachers as M1–ML9, and high school teachers as H1–H9 to illustrate the distribution of perceptions.

Table 2
Empirical material in time and length

	Time (hours and minutes)	A4 pages
Grade 3	1 hr 55 min	70
Grade 6	2 hr 46 min	71
Grade 8	2 hr 1 min	53
Total	6 hr 44 min	194

4.3. Process

A researcher or a coresearcher teacher conducted the interviews. They lasted between 45 and 60 min and were recorded with a mobile phone while the interviewer took notes. The interviews began with an open-ended question, "What does students' study motivation or resistance mean to you?" on which the participants were allowed to reflect individually before the conversation began. The informant then began by sharing their thoughts, after which the other informants took over and talked about theirs and connected to what was previously highlighted. The goal was to create a lively conversation and a permissive climate in which the informants supported each other moving forward in the conversation (Kvale, 2014). Researchers were compliant in the conversation and, at appropriate times, introduced new or in-depth questions that dealt with various aspects of study motivation (Boström & Bostedt, 2022). The teachers were asked to clarify their thoughts and give explanatory examples. During the interviews, the researcher made sure that everyone was given space to speak and could express themselves freely.

4.4. Ethics

During the entire process, the research group followed research ethics principles (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). The participants were informed about the study and verbally consented to participate. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without reason. To strive for the greatest possible confidentiality, all interviewees have been anonymized and neither the interviewed teachers, their schools, nor their municipalities are named. The material will only be used for research purposes. The interviews were recorded on mobile devices and stored on external hard drives.

4.5. Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Interview data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis [RTA] (Braun & Clarke, 2021). RTA is an approach to analyzing qualitative data to answer research questions about people's experiences, views and perceptions, and representations of a given phenomenon. Reflexivity involves researchers acknowledging their role in the research, specifically as a part of the research process, and acknowledges that their experiences, assumptions, and beliefs will influence the research process. RTA shows qualitative values and focuses on subjective coding from the author, with a focus on bringing about deep reflection to collect relevant data for the study. Codes are understood to represent the researcher's interpretations of patterns of meaning across the dataset. The method of analysis is regarded as a reflection of the researcher's explanatory analysis of the data conducted at the intersection of the dataset, the theoretical assumptions of the analysis, and the researcher's analytical skills (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Braun and Clarke (2019) explained,

> Assumptions and positioning are always part of qualitative research. Reflexive application is crucial to understanding the meaning of these. It is good practice to reflect on identifying what you are assuming and then examine more closely whether these assumptions apply to the current project (p. 595).

In a reflexive thematic analysis, main themes are not created in advance based on processed data; they are created based on the found codes and the creative formulation of subthemes related to the codes. The view is that the main themes are not found in the text but constructed by the authors based on found codes and subthemes. The goal of the thematic analysis is to be more in depth and open but at the same time strive to preserve the meaning of the current study. RTA was chosen because it has more open coding than other forms of thematic analysis that focus more on structured coding and the formation of themes at an earlier stage in data management (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In addition, it facilitated the identification of patterns across our entire data set while also allowing for a theoretically informed interpretation of the data. It also makes it possible to present and convey the results in an easily accessible way, thereby facilitating practical application and strengthening the study's validity (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

RTA is contextualized as a thoroughly qualitative approach with data collection and analysis techniques underpinned by a qualitative philosophy that emphasizes meaning as contextual or situated and reality as multiple. The method reflects a view of qualitative research as creative and reflexive, and the researcher's prior knowledge, subjectivity, and active role are a resource in knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Themes in RTA are contextualized as meaning-based patterns, evident in explicit (semantic) or conceptual (latent) ways. They are the result of significant analytical work in which the researcher explores and develops an understanding and meaning of the data's content. The coding is an organic and iterative process that is not controlled initially. New codes can be developed throughout the coding process.

The analysis included the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2019): (a) familiarizing oneself with the data, (b) generating codes, (c) constructing themes, (d) reviewing potential themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report (see also Terry et al., 2017). Developing themes was an iterative process in which codes were moved in and out of categories until a hierarchy of codes, subthemes, and themes could be determined. The authors coded independently, generating a variety of codes. They met regularly to review and discuss codes. To encode the data at the semantic (explicit) levels, for instance, individual practices that shaped experiences of students' study motivation, the researchers also coded data at the latent (hidden) level. This allowed the researchers to explore how experiences were constructed.

Below is a summary of the teachers' perceptions of students' study motivation as a descriptive text of the various themes, followed by a summary with an analysis by us researchers in which the theories presented are interleaved.

4.6. Rigor

The study's quality was ensured by following the six steps Terry et al. (2017) outlined. Transcriptions were checked with the original file to ensure data accuracy. The three researchers coded data independently and met regularly to discuss their impressions of the data and for reflective interpretations. In these meetings, any bias could be managed, data were examined from multiple perspectives, and an iterative understanding of the empirical material emerged. An interview schedule for all interviews was used during the analysis of the data, which maintained the data's credibility.

The research team consisted of one researcher in didactics [LB], one in school development [GB], and one researcher–administrator [IS] with experience as a teacher and a principal. The researcher–administrator's experience afforded the research team access to the participants. The three researchers' positions and assumptions were constantly and critically considered to ensure that their perspectives did not bias interpretations of the data. Their skills allowed for a broad interpretation of the data material, which was analyzed from multiple perspectives.

5. Results

5.1. Overall Results

The inductive coding resulted in six main themes: emotions, teaching, teacher, learning environments, family and friends, and health and well-being (see Figure 1). We will describe and illustrate each of these themes with quotations.

5.2. Emotions

Study motivation is important for students' learning because motivation involves attitude and feelings, according to the teachers. Pleasure is a central concept when teachers describe students' motivation. Study motivation arises when students find an interest in doing the tasks, and then they become eager, curious, and optimistic. On the other hand, if students do not feel like doing a task, they do not do it, and many students give up quickly. If students think something is boring, they have difficulty seeing the motivation in it. Study motivation is also linked to performance associated with a desire, an interest, and a desire to learn, even if it is difficult.

Figure 1
Thematic Map
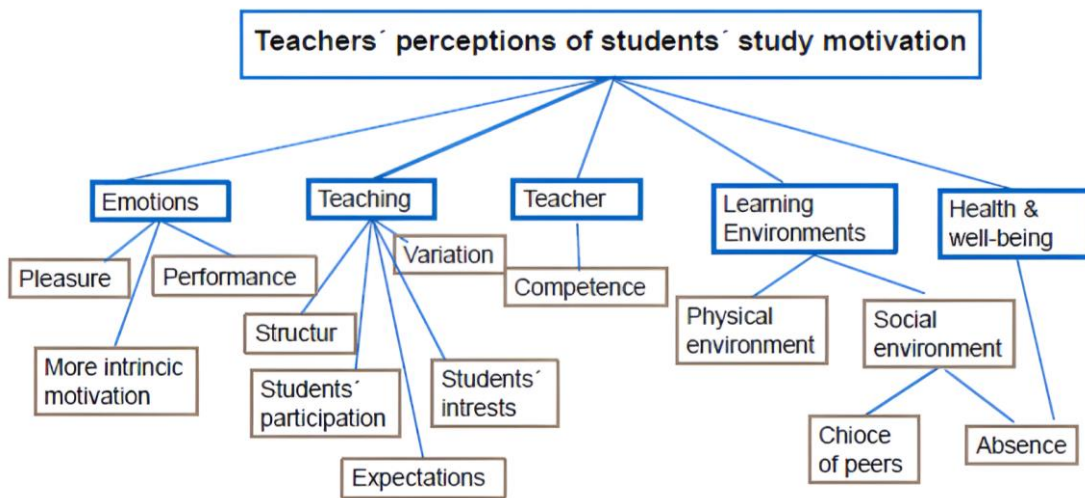
When students understand what and why they are learning, their intrinsic motivation increases, according to the teachers. H2 claimed, "It is … easier to motivate a student who comes with some type of inner motivation and an interest than a student who comes completely without inner motivation, which perhaps differs from subject to subject."

5.3. Teaching

Regarding the teacher's way of setting up the teaching, we found five subthemes in the interviews: structure, variation, students' interest, participation, and expectations.

The structure of each lesson was also emphasized as important. For example, the lesson starts with feedback on what they did last time and then progresses, and the teacher develops the content and summarizes it at the end. The structure includes awareness of the goals of that lesson and that content. This affects the students' feeling of security, which affects motivation. Another influencing factor is the structure of the teaching, which must be clear ("frames with freedom" [E1]). Regarding the structure of the teaching, these informants emphasized teaching, study visits, and practical elements in theoretical subjects as well as thematic work for promotion of motivation.

The next subtheme was variation. According to the teachers, the teacher must know what to convey to the students, be well-read and knowledgeable, make the lesson's content exciting and interesting, and "not stand there and just read from a book" (E2). Sessions must also not be too long.

The teachers also claimed students' interest was important. According to the interviewees, teachers must try to understand students' interests. They must tie things together around what the students find interesting. Then the interest grows a little if the teacher tells students something from reality or connects the lesson's content to something that the students know. One must delve into the students' interests and try to elicit their interest. An example from H7 is "But you like engines; shouldn't you make something similar to an engine?" Another is everyday connection and the students' questions in subjects that become very abstract and easy as well as finding one of the questions they carry with them through a work area.

Another strategy described was expectations. If the teacher has high expectations, the student performs better. This applies to all students, even the low-achieving ones, H6 believed. Additional strategies mentioned are conversations with unmotivated students or leveraging the power of classmates and collaboration between students.

The teachers also stated participation was valuable in the lesson plan "to always get them involved so they can be involved in what we do. Otherwise, it is easy for them to zone out" (H5).

5.4. Teachers

The teachers viewed the teacher's role as indisputable and crucial for students' study motivation because it is their responsibility and they must capture what is important at the moment and work with the learning process. It is important to be happy, positive, and responsive and to see everyone. In addition, teachers must like their subject and teaching. M6 mentioned the importance of "the joy in the subject and the knowledge that one possesses but then also the understanding to create understanding for the students, why one learns." Teachers should also vary their teaching and the structure of the lessons. Which material and teaching aids they choose also affect the students' motivation. The teacher who sees the student and tries to push and support them provides motivation. The teacher who manages to engage and capture the student, creates curiosity to learn, and builds relationships with the students also promotes study motivation. The teacher must also be clear and challenge the students a bit, explained H9:

> The teacher was significant for students' study motivation. The teacher must convey clarity . . . so that the path becomes clearer for the students because if you don't know where you are going, it can be difficult to find the motivation to reach the goal, simply.

The teacher is also seen as a role model who should create curiosity and set up lessons in an exciting and effective way. The participants said that teachers' leadership must be based on honesty, clarity, structure, and dignity for the individuals they meet. The teacher's commitment to and interest in the subject rub off on the group immediately. One teacher extended this reasoning to also apply to more social skills:

> I also think that it is a lot about clarity and relationships because I can experience that sometimes, before you know a student, it can be difficult to arouse that study motivation to find these keys. So it's also about being able, as a teacher, to perhaps be clear in what you do so that it can build an understanding of how we can get ahead for the student so that it is based on both clarities but relationally bound, as well. (H9)

5.5. Learning Environments

Regarding the learning environment's importance for students' motivation, the teachers pointed to two subcategories: the physical and the social. The former was more clearly described, and the latter was intertwined with other themes.

5.5.1 Physical environments

The school must be neat and tidy because this sends signals about caring for the school. The teachers also advocated the importance of more group rooms to divide the class into smaller groups. Environments that are suitable for various kinds of teaching and activities are also important. Even the classroom furniture can, according to the teachers, be motivating. According to all informants, the school's physical environment affects students' motivation. It is important that it be tidy and clean, materials and furniture be intact, and toilets be fresh.

5.5.2. Social environments

Motivation is created in the social learning environment by wanting to be in school. The social environment is two edged; many students come to school because they want to or because of their peers, and others do not come at all. It can also be difficult for a student to find their role in the group, which can become an obstacle to study motivation. When asked about the biggest obstacle to reaching students without study motivation, H3 stated, "The biggest obstacle is that they are not physically there, that we do not get access to them." One obstacle is that students with high absenteeism or those who sit at home miss many teaching sessions and give up easily.

5.5.3 Choice of peers

Classmates have an incredible impact on performance and motivation, according to the interviewed teachers. In this context, group attitudes were described. If friends have decided that a

task is boring, it affects the individual. But students can influence each other positively as well and support each other. According to H2,

> If you have friends who show that it's important and that school is important and that you care about doing your best … then it's clear that then you will be influenced. Then those who may not quite have the same conditions … also want to be motivated whereas on the contrary, if you have a friend who is perhaps a strong leader in the group who thinks that school is totally unimportant and ignores homework, it sets the tone negatively.

Group composition affects a lot positively and negatively. When there are students who "are a bit popular in the group who may not be so motivated to study, it can reflect on the whole group" (E5). When the group is functioning well or collaborating in the class, they enhance study motivation.

5.6. Health and Well-being

Another factor that affects students' motivation to study is their daily routine: food, sleep, and home conditions. Physical health (movement, sleep, and food) affects students' motivation in school. In particular, the importance of movement was emphasized because children sit still too much. The participants considered mental health even more important than physical health for study motivation. If students feel depressed and sad, they spend time thinking about that instead of focusing on what they need to do at school. Physical health significantly affects students' motivation. Physical activity during the school day gives them more energy for schoolwork: "A rested student or a full and satisfied student usually performs better than one who neither eats nor sleeps well. It shows in stamina above all" (M4). With greater stamina or physical ability, students can handle stress better. The teachers warned against letting children play computer games for a long time in the evenings.

5.7. Family and Friends

Attitudes at home, that is, how schoolwork is prioritized, affect students' study motivation, according to the teachers. The home is of great importance for students' study motivation. Parental involvement is reflected in the children's behavior. If parents talk negatively about school, the child does not see the benefit of it, either. Study motivation also requires active parents who make sure that the children do their homework. Positive attitudes and help with homework at home are crucial for students' study motivation. According to M6,

> The student has parents who are motivated and think that school is important…. Learning for life, that's important. It matters a lot … You have had conversations with parents, when you have called home and said that, yes, you need to work on this and that. And then you have received the answer: "Why, then? It's not important, I think." (M6)

The connection between students' performance and motivation and the parents' education level also emerged in the conversations; that is, if they are highly educated, the guardians had an easier time motivating their children. If a student has problems in school but has positive and helpful classmates, they can still have a positive image of the school and go to school to be with their friends:

> If you have friends who show that it is important and that school is important and that you care about performing your best . . . then I'll be influenced. Then those who may not really have the same conditions . . . also want to be motivated whereas, on the contrary, if you have a friend who is perhaps a strong leader in the group who thinks that school is totally unimportant and that I suck at homework and so on and so on, then the tone becomes negative. So it has great significance. (M8)

6. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to gain in-depth knowledge of how primary school teachers perceive students' study motivation. Based on focus group interviews with 26 teachers, a clear and not entirely unexpected picture emerged in view of previous research. Our study deepens and broadens the knowledge about teachers' perceptions. What clearly emerged as important in this

study was the teachers' emphasis on students' study motivation, which was not evident in previous research. That students' emotions play a role in motivation is relatively new knowledge in pedagogy and usually originates from other disciplines, such as neurobiology. Emotions can trigger and maintain intrinsic motivation to study. Teachers realize the connection between students' emotions and motivation is important and worth synchronizing with didactic perspectives (Brandmiller et al., 2020; Hardre & Sullivan, 2008).

Teachers and their teaching are of great if not decisive importance for students' motivation to study. In line with a current study (Boström & Bostedt, 2021) based on teachers' perception of how the teacher influences students' motivation, this also points to the value of the teacher's competence (Siegle et al., 2014). Their concept of motivational teaching based on structure, variety, participation, and students' interests is not new. The question is more about how teachers achieve this and whether it is even possible with today's pressure and stress.

The social environment inside and outside the classroom is important for students' study motivation (Boström & Bostedt, 2020). The teachers clearly focus on the choice of peers in this regard and safety in the school and in the classrooms. Other important factors that influence students' motivation are home and family as well as well-being and health. This emphasis on the link between health and motivation may have emerged due to an increased number of students with mental illness. The conclusion we draw as a whole from the study's results is that the teacher's perceptions reflect the students' entire life situations.

7. Discussion

The purpose of this article was to examine teachers' perceptions of what supports or hinders students' motivation to study. The research questions were how primary school teachers understand and describe students' motivation to study and how these perceptions can be analyzed using the theoretical concept of accountability (Berg, 2018; Bergh & Arneback, 2016), which is highly important for the teaching profession.

This study provides knowledge of teachers' perceptions of students' study motivation. The empirical results show that teachers believe that intrinsic (emotions) and extrinsic (teaching, learning environment, family and friends, health, and well-being) perspectives are needed to understand what influences students' motivation to study. Our results confirm what many other studies have also shown (Blomgren, 2016): The intrinsic–extrinsic dichotomy is too black and white. However, intrinsic explanations often emerge in studies as the dominant determinant of students' motivation to study and derive more from psychology than education (Boström & Bostedt, 2022). Our study shows that intrinsic and extrinsic explanatory factors are needed (Woolfolk, 2020). Extrinsic explanations for students' motivation to study are an important part of the causes. We believe that it is important to discuss these two sides of motivation because the teachers in this study emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivation for learning. Studies (Boström & Bostedt, 2021, 2022) have clarified students' perceptions that extrinsic motivation factors are just as important for their motivation.

Therefore, it becomes important to consider that the decisions that teachers make every day regarding students' motivation to study are influenced by various factors, such as personal, structural, relational, and contextual factors (Thorsten et al., 2021), and are based on their view of knowledge and learning (Buehl & Beck, 2015; Erixon & Hansson, 2023). This shapes teachers' use of various motivational strategies in the classroom (Hardre et al., 2006), and there is room for improvement in teachers' professional development. We agree with Turner et al. (2009) about the importance of teachers having their various expressions (attitudes, leadership, choice of content) reflected in the classroom for didactic awareness and an opportunity to improve teaching.

The empirical results in this article also challenge the notion that teachers with broad and deep subject knowledge are better at promoting student motivation, and it confirms research findings (Boström & Bostedt, 2021, 2022; Siegle et al., 2014) that teachers' personality, teaching methods, the

physical learning environment, and students' social situation (family and friends, health and well-being) are equally important.

The empirical findings also confirm that study motivation is a matter of accountability (Fullan, 2017); that is, teachers need to embrace not only doing things right in teaching but also doing the right things given the situation or the individual student's needs to promote students' study motivation. For example, it is important to understand the circumstances that students live and act in (pleasure and pressure) and that teaching must include competence, variety in teaching, student participation, and student interest. Fullan (2017) called this internal accountability (operational focus and responsibility), that is, a greater sense of ownership of the activities in the classroom, greater responsibility, and accountability of the right kind. One way to respond to accountability is to understand how one's beliefs affect practice and competence development (D'Elisa, 2015; Fives, & Buehl, 2017; Fives et al., 2015). With a deeper awareness of the link between theoretical beliefs and practice (Buehl & Beck, 2015; Erixon & Hansson, 2023) and what motivates students (Brandmiller et al., 2020), the choice of teaching strategies (Lauermann & Berger, 2021) could become more synchronized with students' learning and thus affect their study motivation.

The empirical results therefore mainly but not exclusively support McGregor's (1960) Theory Y, which states that to foster student study motivation, greater self-control, participation, and relationships with the teacher, friends, and parents (positive environment and good communication) are necessary. On the other hand, the results also support Theory X, which argues that classroom structure provided by teachers, competence, and teacher leadership is important. As with the theories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, it is important not to dichotomize the understanding of students' motivation to study by using teacher leadership, competence, and structure as enemies of students' self-control and active participation. As with the concept of accountability, teachers need a deeper understanding of students' study motivation, their conceptions of study motivation, and last but not least, didactical strategies to meet students' needs and improve their professionality. This study also clarified the importance of conceptualizing the concept of study motivation, conducting larger studies, and discussing various aspects that are brought together in study motivation, such as types of goals. Research has shown that many use the term, but there is no real consensus on what it includes.

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