



Early career teachers' beliefs and management of work intensification in Norway and Spain

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Abstract

This article provides a comparative analysis of primary and secondary early career teachers (ECTs) in Norwegian and Spanish schools. We compared ECTs' beliefs on what work intensification involves and the ways they address it at their workplaces across these two different national contexts. The theory of practice architectures is used as an analytical lens to thematically examine data from two qualitative studies that involved semi-structured interviews with 26 Norwegian and 23 Spanish ECTs, plus four Spanish focus groups. The participating ECTs from both countries described tensions linked to the responsibility in work and tensions linked to relational work. The lack of resources in schools had a negative influence on the teachers' work, especially to plan and perform student-active teaching and inclusive education. The ECTs faced tensions in sustaining positive relations for all their students and parents but reached out to their colleagues for support. This article discusses how ECTs in both countries manage work intensification in their practice by using strategies of 'being less responsible', 'lowered work standards', and detachment. The theory of practice architectures helped to widen our understanding of work intensification and how teachers could manage it.

Highlights

- We study early career teachers' work intensification through the lens of the theory of practice architectures.
- We elaborate early career teachers' increased tensions linked to the responsibility in work and tensions linked to relational work.
- Work intensification reduces teachers' ability to promote student-active teaching and inclusive teaching.
- Early career teachers manage work intensification by 'being less responsible', 'lowered work standards' and detachment to stay in the profession.

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Keywords Work intensification · Early career teachers · Theory of practice architectures · Norway · Spain · Primary and secondary school

Introduction

For decades, countries worldwide have implemented neoliberal school policy reforms to improve quality assurance and accountability and promote evidence-based teaching (Ball, 2016). Neo-liberalism in this context can be characterised as a form of complex, interwoven, and conflicting set of practices that reinforce a market-based approach to the public school system, promoting both individualism and the commodification of normative control (Shamir, 2008). Teachers in many countries have reported increased duties and responsibilities caused by these types of reforms (Boeskens & Nusche, 2021; Creagh et al., 2023). The increase in teachers' workloads (Creagh et al., 2023) has been caused by extensive administrative and accountability demands (Erlandson et al., 2020; Stacey et al., 2022) and intensified testing (Loh & Hu, 2014), as well as by additional reporting and reduced support (Stacey et al., 2023).

Workload-related tensions among teachers have been described as work intensification (Apple, 1988; Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009), an increasing trend around the globe that is a major characteristic of neoliberalism (Spicksley, 2022). Work intensification is more than working longer hours and being required to engage in many diverse tasks or administrative work (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 1155). It can be characterised as the 'complexity and demands associated with a particular task or a set of tasks considered a core part of a job' (Creagh et al., 2023, p. 3). This was elaborated by Beck (2017, p. 618), who argued that long hours and work intensification give rise to the 'feeling of being pulled in multiple directions at once due to the competing and contradictory demands at a given point of time'. Work intensification includes both quantitative demands in terms of volume or workload speed requirements, and qualitative demands such as work-related emotional or mental loads and complexities in the form of relational demands (Mauno et al., 2023). In addition, work intensification comprises demands for initiative, decision making, continuous learning, and development (Creagh et al., 2023), as well as for keeping up to date with relevant research (Koski et al., 2023). In sum, work intensification may distract teachers from their 'teaching' role, creating a tension between their administrative tasks and their core responsibilities towards students and their teaching. A recent research review (Creagh et al., 2023) showed evidence of how work intensification negatively influences attrition, health, and well-being among teachers, as well as imposing tensions on them that hinder their management of their students' educational priorities. An empirical quantitative study from Australia (Lawrence et al., 2019) suggested that non-teaching workload created more strain than teaching tasks, whereas organisational support staff within the school moderated teachers' emotional exhaustion and qualitative demands, as shown by research (Beck, 2017; Kelchtermans, 2017; Tang et al., 2022).

Early career teachers (ECTs) also seem to find it more challenging to manage time and handle daily work tasks than they anticipated (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Loh

& Hu, 2014; Stacey, 2019). Work intensification may deter ECTs from staying in teaching and may push them to leave the profession at an early stage (Geiger & Pivovarovova, 2018; Kelchtermans, 2017; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). It has been stated that there is a dearth of studies on work intensification among ECTs (Buchanan et al., 2016; Koski et al., 2023; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Loh & Hu, 2014; Perryman & Calvert, 2020), a research gap that this study seeks to address.

Our aim was to conduct a comparative analysis of primary and secondary ECTs in Norwegian and Spanish schools. We intended to clarify and compare how ECTs in Norway and Spain understand their work structures and navigate them (Kelchtermans, 2017). We compared ECTs' beliefs on what work intensification involves and the ways they address it at their workplaces across these two different national contexts with different teacher training programmes. It was our hypothesis that a detailed understanding of work intensification in other contexts than the much-investigated Anglo-Saxon countries (Creagh et al., 2023) might help us identify both common and potentially divergent themes that cannot be explained by different administrative models and single-country case studies (Lewis, 2013). For example, Norway epitomises a Nordic administrative model that has often been described as having a soft government with decentralised accountability (Gloppen & Novak, 2023), a context where teachers have the highest number of non-teaching hours in the OECD (Boeskens & Nusche, 2021). The Norwegian government introduced more centralised and standardised curricula in combination with more quality control through external testing and evaluation of teachers and schools (Verger et al., 2019). The Napoleonic administrative tradition in southern Europe, which predominates in Spain, is characterised by centralised, hierarchical, and uniform bureaucratic public services that are reluctant to be ruled by performance criteria (Pagès & Prieto, 2020). While some school and teacher accountability measures have been launched, they are still underdeveloped and have often been contested by teachers' unions and social movements (Verger et al., 2019). Teaching and teachers in both Spain and Norway have, in turn, been affected by accountability demands which include, but are not limited to international tests, accountability to parents, and policy demands imposed by the curriculum or the law (Verger et al., 2019). All of this has therefore contributed to work intensification (Verger & Pagès, 2018).

Theoretical framework

We used the theory of practice architectures (TPA) (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) as an analytical lens to examine work intensification. By analysing teachers' beliefs of work intensification through the prism of the TPA we sought to use a new theoretical angle to investigate the phenomenon (Niazi et al., 2023) and capture a wider understanding of it as a practice. The TPA is a practice-based theory, which allowed us to explore different practices among ECTs through their interconnected *sayings*, *doings*, and *relatings* (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2024; Kemmis et al., 2017). In this study, their *sayings* can be found in the participating ECTs' language, way of thinking, and ideas about work intensification, for example, in how they described their work. Their *doings* appear in the actions and activities ECTs performed during

their working hours, for example, in the handling of procedures or in the skills they used in teaching. The ETCs' *relatings* can be identified in the emotions they experienced about their students and the subjects they taught, the power dynamics they were embedded in, and the hierarchies they must navigate. In sum, these *sayings, doings, and relatings* are part of the project of a practice that takes place in sites considered to be social settings (Mahon et al., 2017), in this particular context, in schools.

The TPA explains how these practices and their underlying structures have been shaped by previous generations and feature people who may either reproduce or transform both the sites and the practices that occur within them (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2024). For example, different practices of teachers' work intensification are enabled and constrained by practice architectures (Mahon et al., 2017). These are *cultural-discursive arrangements* including knowledge, language, and discourses brought to the site, for example, in curricula or subject-specific concepts used in schools. *Material-economic arrangements* include different times and resources that enable activities to be undertaken in the site, including schedules, buildings, financial resources, and equipment. Lastly, *social-political arrangements* facilitate relationships among people and includes 'lifeworld' connections, system roles and obligations, such as social norms, hierarchies and power structures in a site (Kemmis et al., 2017; Mahon et al., 2017). The arrangements are in real life interwoven (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2024) and include all the conditions that outline how a particular practice unfolds in a particular site, with a given teacher, their students, their colleagues, and the management (Kemmis et al., 2017). Thus, work intensification practices do not occur in a vacuum but are held in place and shaped by prevalent arrangements, such as quality arrangements, accountability, and evidence-based teaching, both nationally and locally.

Research question

The TPA was used to investigate how ECTs describe and deal with the tensions that have been associated with work intensification in the literature (Creagh et al., 2023). The two research questions posed were:

- 1) According to the Norwegian and Spanish participating ECTs beliefs, what are the most challenging tensions resulting from the intensification that they face in their professional practice?
- 2) How do these Norwegian and Spanish ECTs manage the tensions resulting from work intensification in their schools?

The next section describes the methods applied. This will be followed by the results, which will be discussed using the TPA, before we conclude.

Methods

Research context

Norway

In Norway, students start compulsory primary education (years 1 to 7) on average at 6 years old, after non-compulsory pre-school education. Lower secondary education (years 8 to 10) begins at age 13–14 (Møller, 2016).

In 2017 teacher training was reformed nationwide into a five-year research-based Master's degree in Teacher Education and operationalised into two programmes designed for the Norwegian educational system (one covering years 1 to 7 and the other years 5 to 10). These programmes include subject specialisation in two to four subjects with 30–60 ETCs each, with a total of 300 credits on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Students' learning process is research-based and they write a Master's dissertation on an area related to education studies or to didactics of a subject that is relevant to their professional practice. They are also required to complete at least 60 ECTS credits in Education Studies, covering topics such as didactics, the role of the teacher, inclusive education, and collaboration for professional and school development (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2016a, 2016b). In Norway, the municipalities are responsible for primary and lower secondary schools, including the ECTs' induction period. Municipalities and schools can choose to support new teachers by having an experienced colleague to mentor them during their first year (Kvam et al., 2023).

In Norway, a new curriculum for primary and secondary education has been implemented across the country that focuses on activity-based and deep learning for all students (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). These are *cultural-discursive arrangements* about how teaching and learning is understood and discussed (e.g. through policy). Gloppen and Novak (2023) examined teacher evaluation within Norwegian education policy and found that the OECD was the main contributor to discourses linking quality assurance and 'teacher quality'. The evaluation made it possible 'to hold teachers and school leaders accountable for results' (p.12). Moreover, teacher evaluation enabled the government to control individual teachers and hold them accountable, so these *cultural-discursive arrangements* may have the effect of constraining the individuals within the education system. However, Mausethagen (2013) documented how ECTs in Norway, contrary to more experienced teachers, seemed to have a more positive attitude towards accountability demands placed on them by curriculum guidelines and legal requirements, as well as by parents and headteachers.

The municipalities are responsible for primary and lower secondary schools in Norway and their economy has been weakened, which has led to reduced material resources and support staff in schools (Rød, 2022). Norway has an insufficient number of teachers and some research has claimed that Norwegian teachers have left the profession because of organisational and local contextual factors rather than individual reasons (Tiplic et al., 2015). These material-economic arrangements, in addition

to school facilities, resources in terms of time for managing teachers work, planning, and teaching have implications for the teaching profession.

The Norwegian principle of *adapted education* seeks to integrate traditional ‘special education’ into general education classrooms, where every child receives education that is best suited to their learning needs (Maxwell & Bakke, 2019). This school system for ‘everyone’ has caused the country to become a world leader in terms of social equality, as illustrated by the fact that it has one of the smallest income differences between rich and poor (OECD, 2016, p. 103). Other socio-political arrangements, such as trust between teachers and headteachers, role conflicts, and a tradition of working with other teachers have an impact on the retention of teachers (Tiplic et al., 2015).

Spain

In Spain, students start compulsory primary education at 6 years old after non-compulsory pre-primary education. Lower compulsory secondary education begins at age 12–13 and is expected to last for 4 years.

Spain has implemented a university-based initial teacher training programme leading to an undergraduate degree for pre-primary and primary teachers, and a Master’s Degree for secondary teachers. Entry into state schools requires that this programme be followed by a competitive examination to join the teaching workforce and, subsequently, a probation and induction period without a formal induction programme (Marcelo et al., 2021).

According to Verger and Pagès (2018), an administrative tradition that can be understood as *cultural-discursive* and subject to *socio-political arrangements* prevails in Spain. This emphasises compliance with legal requirements across the board. The regulatory framework currently in force stresses the need to provide a quality education for all and promotes equity and inclusion through personalised learning, among other aspects. Despite there being a confluence between oversupply and partial teacher shortages (for specific subjects and in some geographical areas), many undergraduates want to pursue teacher education in Spain (Gratacós et al., 2017). Teachers have increasingly been affected by material-economic arrangements such as high rates of unemployment, which have been aggravated by the recent financial crises. Some of those currently in work as teachers are likely to face precarious working conditions in the form of short-term contracts and salary cuts (Flores, 2019). Nevertheless, attrition rates are low (Flores, 2019), as most schools are public or publicly-funded, and teaching positions tend to be permanent (Umpstead et al., 2016).

Design

This article presents a study that uses data originally collected in two prior primary qualitative studies to answer new research questions and, therefore can be considered to be a secondary analysis of qualitative data (Heaton, 2008). While the previous studies did not ask participants direct questions (related to their research questions), those participants pointed to tensions relating to work intensification in their responses to the interviews and in the focus groups that were held. Data from new cohorts

(Lindqvist et al., 2014) and contexts may also provide an enhanced understanding of these processes and help influence policies to make the teaching profession more attractive (Heffernan et al., 2022; Stacey et al., 2023).

Data selection and participants

Norwegian study

The present study is part of RELEMAST, a longitudinal research project that conducted interviews with newly qualified primary and lower secondary school teachers from the time of their education and at one, two, three, and five years into their profession. The sample for this article consisted of open-ended semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018) with 16 female and 11 male ECTs from three cohorts, interviewed five years after they had completed a pilot five-year research-based Master's programme from 2010 to 2017 at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. Ten participants had completed the years 1 to 7 programme, while 17 had completed the years 5 to 10 programme; five years later they were teaching year cohorts in line with their education. This pilot shares the same main characteristics as the new national five-year Master's education programme. The informants later worked in such schools for five years after completing their education. The average age of these participants was 32 years old. In the interviews we asked the ECTs openly about their challenges, opportunities, motivation, and potential reasons for quitting their teaching job. They volunteered to participate in these interviews after receiving a written invitation together with a description of the study, which was sent to all 117 student teachers at the university when they finished their education. The self-selected gender distribution was representative of the programme's students (60% female and 40% male). They worked in primary and secondary schools all over Norway.

The study followed the ethical standards approved by The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) (2019) and was approved by NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data (project number 795217).

Spanish study

The Spanish DePrInEd study used a sample of 27 ECTs with undergraduate degrees (mostly pre-primary and primary school teachers) and 24 ECTs with graduate degrees (secondary school teachers and some primary school teachers). After completing their pre-service education, they had been in the profession for one to six years (Mean: 2.8 years; SD: 2 years) and their average age was 28 years old. The participants were recruited from primary and secondary schools throughout Spain for the broader study through national unions, personal networks, and social media, following receipt of an email invitation. Thirty-seven participants were female and 14 were male. Data were first collected from four focus groups with five or six participants each in order to explore the aspects of interest by drawing on a range of views. To examine such aspects in a more comprehensive and detailed manner and from a more personal perspective, twenty-three semi-structured interviews with participants selected from focus groups were then conducted (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018; Pat-

ton, 2015). The focus groups and interviews contained questions on the participants' former and current views on the teaching profession in general and on their specific careers. The focus groups were conducted first to explore and understand the aspects of interest by drawing on a range of views, while the interviews were conducted later to examine these aspects in a more comprehensive and detailed manner and from a more personal perspective (Patton, 2015). The study, including the information sheet and informed consent form used, was approved by the Ethics Commission of the University of Murcia (approval identification code: 2087/2018).

In both studies the interviews lasted around 30–60 min and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Thematic analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was employed for data analysis, drawing on the six-phase model proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was a recursive process, where the authors continually moved back and forth through the phases (Braun & Clarke, 2021). RTA matches our research question, as it is theoretically flexible and recognises that the analysis would be affected by the researchers' background and engagement with theory, data and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The phases of the analysis are described below.

Phase 1: Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes

To begin with, the first authors from Norway and Spain read their entire transcripts independently without coding them. The authors became familiar with the texts and took notes during the reading process, in which the participants' time-related tensions became apparent.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

The first and second author generated independent data-driven (inductive) codes using NVivo and ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software about how the ECTs had experienced their work in the different studies. Whole text sequences that captured the content of the data were coded. The codes were both descriptive and interpretative and captured different topics in relation to the interview guide. They indicated that the ECTs described different tensions that they needed to handle in their work.

Phase 3: Generating initial cross-country themes from coded and collated data

The first and second author then discussed the initial codes. Afterwards, a separate secondary analysis of the Norwegian and Spanish material was conducted. This was followed by a review of the material by reading the initial codes and then re-coding them to focus more specifically on the work tensions described by the ECTs. The first and second author discussed the findings and attempted to identify themes that captured several codes. For example, initial themes were found that included:

- General time- and resource-related tensions.
- Tensions related to inclusive and special education.
- Struggling efforts in planning and doing activity-based teaching.

Phase 4: Developing and reviewing cross-country themes

The next step involved conducting a deductively-oriented analysis of the material from each context. We used the concepts from the TPA to capture cross-country themes about how the different descriptions of work-related tensions were recognised through their *sayings*, *doings*, or *relatings* and how this relates to practice architectures (*cultural-discursive*, *material-economic*, and *socio-political* arrangements). This kind of initial theoretical coding is appropriate in the early phase of a study with a view to understanding how a practice unfolds (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2024, pp. 57–60). Table 1 shows examples of *sayings*, *doings*, and *relatings* identified in the ECTs excerpts from both contexts and connect them to the practice architectures as suggested by (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2024):

Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

In this stage the first and second author identified two themes: *Tensions linked to the responsibility in work and tensions linked to relational work*. The authors then re-read the codes and themes to verify the themes. Based upon the arguments by Mahon et al. (2017) and Grootenboer and Edwards-Groves (2024) themes consisting of several practices that captured *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* were found.

Phase 6: Writing the report

In the last phase, the authors provided sufficient evidence for each of the themes in each of their contexts using quotes and data. To validate the findings, the authors critically re-read and commented on each other's findings to strengthen inter-rater reliability of the analytical work (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In the **results** section below, codes are used to identify quotations from Norwegian and Spanish teachers. Each Norwegian participant is identified as T1, T2, and so on, while each Spanish participant is identified by an acronym made up of the participants' initials. Primary school teachers and secondary school teachers are identified using, respectively, 'primary' and 'secondary'; and quotations from focus groups and interviews are identified using 'FG' and 'I', respectively.

Table 1 Examples of *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* and practice architectures

Examples of sayings	Examples of cultural-discursive arrangements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heavy workload – generally too much to do; - Long working days; - Highly complex work to be done; 	<p>Enabling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sense of vocation; - above all, the importance teachers give to education. <p>Constraining:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In political documents: Demands for active and creative learning/teaching for all students; - Inclusive education; - Education (in general) and the teaching profession (in particular) are undervalued in the school environment (Spain); - Distance between the actual circumstances and needs of schools and the applicable educational policies and regulations (Spain).
<p>Examples of <i>doings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased tasks related to teaching, reporting and other demands for all students; - Diversity among students and parents, highly mixed classes; - Student-centred work; - ‘Education’, rather than just ‘teaching’ (blurring the boundaries with what actors in other fields do). 	<p>Examples of <i>material-economic arrangements</i></p> <p>Constraining:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resources for activity-based teaching; - Resources for school development; - Reporting, testing and documenting work for all students; - Learners who are very different from each other and often have highly complex needs; - Demanding curriculum and associated administrative tasks; - Shortage of teachers and other specialised education personnel.
<p>Examples of <i>relatings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow-up work with students, parents, teachers and management; - Insufficient involvement of students and parents; conflicts and confrontation with them (Spain). - Communication with and collaboration between colleagues (Spain). 	<p>Examples of <i>social-political arrangements</i></p> <p>Enabling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical and emotional support from other like-minded and/or more experienced colleagues or management. <p>Constraining:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited time to handle relationships between students, parents and home-school partnering; - Inclusive and adaptive education (Norway). - Students with affective and relational challenges; sometimes they are overly influenced by the use of digital media (Spain); - Parents with heavy workloads who lack the necessary skills to fulfil their responsibilities regarding their children’s upbringing and education and neglect these responsibilities; at the same time, they show little interest in school education, give little support to teachers and have reservations about them (Spain). - educational provision for diversity and inclusion (Spain).

Results

Norwegian results

Tensions linked to the responsibility ECTs have in their work

The ECTs identified the tensions linked to time management as the main negative factor that affected their motivation to stay in the profession, although they remained motivated by the prospect of contributing to their students’ development. All the ECTs presented challenges they faced when managing their students, designing their tasks, and prioritising their time, as described by T43:

There will be too many tasks for you to do, and there are too few resources in the classroom; there are too many demands, there is too little time, there are some individual children who basically place such high demands that this comes at the expense of all the other kids, that's for sure (T43, primary, I).

T43 stated that it is impossible to complete all the tasks involved in the job properly. Such way of thinking or *sayings* indicate that the ECTs had to navigate and negotiate the complexity of their tasks and find solutions (*doings*) they personally could manage. The ECTs explained further that their main tensions constraining their practice were linked to classroom management, inclusive education, organisational development, and active teaching. The participants claimed that they were compelled to navigate tensions concerning resources and ethics (*material-economic arrangements*), due to insufficient planning time and resources, as stated by T36:

When I was studying, I got tired of all the teachers who complained about time and resources, but that's it. I think that [time] is the main challenge... What you really want to do, such as planning and evaluation and creating good teaching plans, is often done at the end of the day or after you have sent the children home. Because everything must be recorded, documents and forms must be filled in and there are meetings here and there (T36, primary, I).

Several participants described a mismatch between their own tasks and the kind of support they received at their school to plan and facilitate learning for students with additional needs, as illustrated in the statement made by T12:

Precisely that planning phase, I think, can often be tough, both in terms of the topics we work on within a subject and of what you can achieve in relation to competence goals, and.... suddenly you're in a class with a great plan and then something goes wrong, so you must leave with a student, stand for an hour, and talk about something (T12, primary, I).

The quote reveals challenges in management (*doings*) and engaging in positive *relatings* to diverse student groups, as demanded in *cultural-discursive* and *socio-political* arrangements about curriculum and adaptive education. Here the ECTs also described the problematic issues arising when dealing with different types of reporting required, as claimed by T32:

Then it can be demotivating [to deal] with documentation, paperwork, poor systems... When you sit down to write an annual report and reports for special education, sitting down, cutting and pasting a document, I feel that the time could have been better spent (T32, primary, I).

T32 noted that those *doings* that take the form of paperwork are not always seen as beneficial and productive for students' learning and questioned whether their time could have been used better. This participant also reported that other activities at school take time away from subject teaching and make it difficult for ECTs to have

sufficient basis for doing the necessary paperwork, such as marking each student. The Norwegian ECTs were motivated (*sayings*) to pursue research-based approaches and active teaching in line with cultural-discursive arrangements such as the new curriculum reform, but they claimed that such planning and initiating (*doings*) were difficult because of workload-related tensions. Some ECTs highlighted the ability to develop or share their teaching burden with their team or closest colleagues (*relatings*), as this could also contribute to stronger emotional support over time, ease planning, and help to build a valuable resource that could contain different assignments and teaching approaches to be reused. Further, T11 noted that teachers themselves must individually take responsibility to reduce the time that they devote to their work.

But make sure that you prioritise your free time... Especially with the education and the expertise we have, there is also the matter of assessing the workload, especially at the start, and seeking guidance, sharing responsibility... Rely on those you have around you (T11, secondary, I).

Similarly to the beliefs expressed by T11, these ECTs reported that not all tasks could be completed satisfactorily or properly, and that they found themselves forced to reduce their working hours in order to stay in the profession. However, it was difficult for them to lower the number of tasks to be done on an individual basis and they saw themselves compelled to compromise the quality of their work and the time used. This could lead them to lower the standards of their practice or fail to attain excellence in their work, as illustrated in a quotation from an interview with T32:

So, by thinking that what I do is good enough, now I put it away and let it be as it is. If you are a perfectionist, it is very difficult to be a teacher. You don't get paid overtime either. You get paid to do the tasks you've been given, and then it's up to you how much you put into it. But taking care of yourself is important in order to be able to take care of others (T32, primary, I).

Ten of the ECTs were therefore considering leaving the profession due to excessive time demands.

Tensions linked to relational work

ECTs need to engage and have *relatings* with students and their parents, as well as with staff from various professions, including their colleagues and school management, special education practitioners, public health nurses, and psychologists. The Norwegian Education Act includes *socio-political* arrangements whereby teachers may be responsible for handling tasks (*doings*) related to practical, administrative, and social pedagogical tasks that apply to their class or basic group and the students within it, as well as for collaborating with their families (*cultural-discursive* arrangements) (Education Act, 2023 § 8–2). The ECTs described (*sayings*) how relational work may be demanding and they found the role of being contact teachers highly time consuming, as stated by T12.

And then I feel I don't have enough time for some kids, and that, I think time, it's always there. Talk to the students, talk to their parents, plan, teach, no matter what we do, some things take a long time (T12, primary, I).

The above illustrates that the allocation of time and space (*doings*) constrains how these *relatings* occur in practice. In cases where the relational work involves students who need additional attention in the form of inclusive or adapted education, the 45-minute slot allocated to each class is not enough. In schools with limited support staff, teachers have less help in class management tasks (*material-economic arrangements*). Having larger classes means that more time is required for tasks (*doings*) that involve liaising between the school and the students' home environment (*relatings*). However, a few ECTs had some extra time available to address the relational aspects of their work, as quoted below:

So periodically, I have several classes a week spent on just conversation and conflict management and a little bit of psychological work (laughter, humour)... A little bit like being a social worker/teacher in my own class, because there was a need for it (T32, primary, I).

The quote reveals that when the ECTs take time for relational work, this may benefit both them and their students. Aiming for positive relations may be an indirect argument why some Norwegian ECTs wanted to work with the same class over time with a view to strengthening relational work. However, in the daily management of relationships, some ECTs did not want the connection to be too strong or ever-present, as noted by T3:

And maybe even be aware of how much you let your students in, right? Are you going to let them all the way into your innermost heart or are you going to stop a little sooner... I did that with the first class I had... But really, they were kind of too much on my mind, all the time (T3, primary, I).

There are limitations as to how much relational work ECTs can do, and in practice they must take a step back and detach themselves. This implies that they must reduce the amount of time spent dealing with relationships.

Spanish results

Tensions linked to the responsibility ECTs have in their work

Some ECTs reported that they used to believe that the job was relatively easy before they entered the profession. A considerable number of participants referred to the heavy workload they bear, although the level of difficulty of their tasks was noted as the most prominent issue. Consequently, the Spanish ECTs often reported (*sayings*) that they were 'overworked', 'overwhelmed', 'burnt-out', or 'frustrated'. The complexity of their work (*doings*) also entailed heterogeneous tasks to be completed which were interconnected and could not be separated from one another; this

gave rise to broad areas of action and demanded substantial efforts. One participant summed it up as follows:

I think that in recent times teachers have been carrying a heavy burden, a heavy workload is given to them in many areas that have little to do with their actual teaching work (AA, secondary, I).

Numerous Spanish ECTs identified *sayings* constraining their professional practice, mainly found outside the teaching profession. They often felt that the work done was considered unimportant by those to whom it was addressed, by students themselves, society at large, families, and the education authorities (*socio-political arrangements*). According to one participant:

...teachers aren't important anymore.... Few people are aware that it is really us who push children (future adults) forward. So, in that sense, [it's] very difficult. (PGP, secondary, I).

The quote indicates that the way in which the teaching profession is conceived in *cultural-discursive arrangements* in terms of legal standards and policy documents is not reflected in the *sayings* about the profession as understood by teachers. This is illustrated by the continuous changes implemented in education regulations in Spain, which are perceived as a further obstacle. Most of the participants reported that the importance of teaching, and the feeling of responsibility related to performing their tasks, all serve to address the difficulties encountered in this job. One participant explained it in this way:

Ultimately it is very important work, because without teachers there would be no doctors or anything else, so in the end it is very much needed by everyone (EMR, secondary, FG).

Some of the participating teachers believed that having a sense of vocation is crucial for teachers to continuing to engage in the profession, due to the major challenges involved. For these participants, being vocational teachers enabled them to do something they 'liked' or 'enjoyed', despite the difficulties involved. Likewise, having a calling to do work that is regarded as important helped these teachers to address the challenges to be faced, both daily and throughout their entire career.

These participants tended to differentiate between 'teaching' and 'education' (*sayings*). Teaching was perceived as a more limited task associated with transmitting knowledge or supporting its acquisition, whereas education was portrayed as a broader task (*doings*). Based on their opinions, the numerous activities required of them increasingly extended beyond the scope of teaching per se, as were part of the wider field of education, including taking personal emotional care of students (*relatings*). One participant summed it up as follows:

In the end [teachers] play a bit of a role in everything, don't they? [They act] as psychologists, as teachers, sometimes even as parents... I do see that teachers have many responsibilities (EMR, secondary, FG).

Moreover, according to the ECTs, these extended-scope activities (*social-political arrangements*) require a high degree of commitment. This applied especially to so-called 'tutors' (a role similar to that of Norwegian contact teachers), whereby many Spanish ECTs are responsible for the pastoral care of one group of students. However, their involvement was not driven by being held accountable for processes or results and being required to document them, but rather, from a sense of responsibility for the students under their care and the tasks they believed had been entrusted to them, as illustrated by the following quote:

I know that it is not an obligation, but something that I care about and that I want to do to help my students (SGC, secondary, FG).

A considerable number of ECTs felt that teaching needed to be student-centred rather than content-centred or teacher-centred (*sayings*):

I believe that nowadays we are seeking to put students at the centre of their learning, so that they can engage in a series of processes rather than acquire specific content and learn several tools that allow them to discover for themselves what content they find most interesting (DPB, secondary, FG).

These Spanish ECTs wanted to involve their students in their learning process and make use of new teaching strategies such as project-based learning and resources (including new technologies). In general, they thought quality teaching should adapt to students, even to the extent of becoming tailored to their personal needs. As a result, they advocated for the continuous introduction of changes and even innovations (*doings*). Many participants emphasised that the increasing diversity and the large number of students in each class (*socio-political and material-economic arrangements*) made it very difficult for them to reach these goals, as evidenced by this quote:

There is a lot of diversity. I would love to be able to get to know all my students and try to give them everything, but it is true that I don't do it and I feel bad about it, but in fact, the student/teacher ratio doesn't make it possible (CMJ, secondary, I).

This quote is illustrative of the problems related to addressing student diversity (*doings*); highly differentiated, complex needs, such as emotional shortcomings, social marginalisation, or special educational needs, must be met (*material-economic and social-political arrangements*). In addition, there is a general low level of involvement among students in schools. Furthermore, these students' needs must be catered for according to a curriculum that is remarkably demanding, detailed, and seen as being inflexible (*cultural-discursive arrangements*). This makes it difficult

to ensure that teaching is suitable for many insufficiently engaged learners who have such different needs. In addition, curriculum and other requirements place increasing demands on teachers in terms of administrative tasks and paperwork, which interfere with what they consider to be genuine teacher activities (*sayings*). Participants also perceived a shortage of resources, especially in terms of time and of an insufficient availability of teachers and other educational professionals to provide support in the implementation of teaching activities (*material-economic arrangements*). Finally, participants tended to perceive themselves as being inadequately prepared to carry out so many complex activities under the circumstances, despite considerable initial and ongoing training.

Some ECTs stated that they (*sayings*) strived to do everything they were supposed to and become as engaged as possible. However, there were participants who recognised that the situation would lead some teachers to choose alternative courses of action early on to minimise the difficulties involved (*doings*), such as closely following a textbook, making few changes in their practice, and limiting their work to what is strictly prescriptive. Such practices may lead to lower standards or to a failure to achieve excellence in their work.

The participating ECTs indicated that the time and task-generated tensions sometimes led them not only to do less than they were supposed to do (*doings*), but also to be less involved than they should be (*relatings*). Moreover, some felt they had learnt to act this way during their short teaching careers. Even though the ECTs were responsible professionals, their responsibility might be undermined, as they saw themselves attempting to navigate tasks that they were not capable of carrying out satisfactorily due to workload pressures. The Spanish teachers reported that they had lost their motivation but stayed in the profession due to the general unemployment situation in Spain. For instance, they sometimes explained that they ended up teaching ‘out of necessity’, because they were not able to pursue their preferred jobs or better working conditions. None of the participating Spanish ECTs were considering leaving the profession.

Tensions linked to relational work

The Spanish participants often mentioned that teachers in general build multiple relationships with other actors which are an integral part of their duties (*sayings*). For example, a considerable number of them defined that the nature of their work was linked to ‘supporting’ their students (*doings/relatings*). Interacting with students was initially appealing to some of these teachers:

I realise that, although I love teaching my subjects, I like the social part of being a teacher much more.... I love interacting with them [my students], I love talking to them about things in life (PGP, secondary, I).

In carrying out their role of tutors, a greater number of closer relationships needed to be established with the students in their tutor group and with other teachers and their families; consequently, there was a greater degree of involvement in this network of relationships. While building relationships with other actors was a necessity in

performing their work (*doings/relatings*), in practice this was almost impossible. Further, relationships with students and their parents were often characterised (*sayings*) by tensions or conflicts; although these were not widespread, they were reported to occur quite frequently and to a significant extent as illustrated by the following: ‘In the classes I have had,... students are generally more agitated’ (ASM.secondary.I). This affected work outcomes. In the case of both students and parents, these tensions or conflicts resulted from students and parents being insufficiently involved in and committed to the education being provided by their teachers, and affected all levels of education (*material-economic and social-political arrangements*). They also derived from beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that challenged teachers and their work (*cultural-discursive arrangements*). Participants highlighted the emotional and relational shortcomings that students had when interacting at school and the excessive influence that the use of new technologies (e.g. social media) had on them. For example, the teacher quoted above reported: ‘Nowadays, I have students who believe what social media say more than what I tell them in class’ (PGP, secondary, I). A participant noted the connection between this type of conflict-ridden relationships and the relationships with families:

Increasingly, both personally and among other people in my school, we find ourselves fighting some parents who believe their children’s version of the story above all else.... I think this is a very difficult profession, in that sense... But also because, increasingly, pupils have little faith in or hope about what teachers can do (PGP, secondary, I).

Participants also noted parents’ heavy workloads and lack of time; their limited resources and lack of skills to fulfil their responsibilities in terms of education within the family setting; their neglect of these responsibilities; their lack of interest in and even indifference towards school education; the scarcity of support for teachers; and their reservations about and mistrust of teachers and their work (*cultural-discursive and socio-political arrangements*). It is important to bear in mind that, as was noted for *relatings*, while these conditions are not widespread, they occur in sufficient number and to a significant degree, which has notable effects on work processes and outcomes.

Likewise, the Spanish ECTs were in favour of building collaborative relationships between colleagues, mainly because of the technical support that this can provide (e.g. offering possible solutions to problematic situations with learners or giving directions for administrative tasks) and of the emotional support they can mutually give (e.g. by empathising or giving encouragement). When providing this support, the experience gained by teachers helping each other and the affinity felt among them (for example, sharing a similar understanding of education) were considered particularly important (*doings*). Sometimes the ECTs also appreciated the support provided by other education professionals, mainly guidance counsellors and school leaders.

Under these circumstances, the participants explained that, on some occasions, they must reduce their relational tasks and their level of commitment to them, which leads to a detached attitude, as acknowledged by some participants:

I used to bring everything home, everything was in my head: this child's problem, that other child's problem, and another's,... Until eighteen months ago I realised that I had to stop doing that, otherwise it takes a toll on my health (SGG, primary, FG).

Discussion

This section sums up and discusses the findings related to the first research question about the Norwegian and Spanish ECTs' beliefs about their most challenging tensions resulting from the intensification they face in their professional practice.

We found more similarities than differences between participants. ECTs in both countries held positive beliefs on *cultural-discursive arrangements* such as policies and regulations that promote activity-based teaching, diversity, and inclusive education in their classrooms, but they expressed tensions due to the numerous tasks they are required to do (*material-economic arrangements*), as reported in other studies and contexts (Beck, 2017; Creagh et al., 2023; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). The Spanish ECTs reported that, even though their work as teachers is complex, as also documented by (Beck, 2017), it is undervalued by parents, children, and society in general, a problem ECTs also reported in Australia (Buchanan et al., 2016). The Spanish ECTs criticised the gap between their needs in school and the actual policies and regulations implemented to support them (*material-economic* and *socio-political arrangements*). The Norwegian ECTs did not clearly express such feelings (*sayings*) of being undervalued or top-down regulated, which may be related to their new five-year teacher education and their new curriculum. However, they were not asked about this specifically, and there were growing *cultural-discursive arrangements* where teachers in Norway in general express *sayings* that they were less valued combined with the teacher shortage crisis (Tiplic et al., 2015). Most Spanish ECTs claimed that having a strong sense of vocation and the importance of teaching for overall education gave them the high level of commitment required to accomplish so many challenging tasks at work, a trend that Spicksley (2022) found among school leaders. The ECTs from both countries expressed that they were motivated by the contribution they felt they could make to their students' development, as found in other research (Heffernan et al., 2022; Perryman & Calvert, 2020).

The ECTs in both countries described how lack of time and resources (*material-economic arrangements*) leads to challenges in planning and implementing (*doings*) the new and complex curriculum demands related to active teaching and inclusive education (*cultural-discursive and socio-political arrangements*) as has also been documented in the UK (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). The Spanish ECTs made a difference between strictly teaching tasks and wider tasks involved in following up issues with their students; the Norwegian teachers also found teaching itself to be more manageable than other tasks. In sum, the *material-economic arrangements* in schools increase the individual tensions in terms of *doings*, as ECTs are required to successfully complete their tasks. The Spanish ECTs claimed that their work is constrained by many under-motivated, heterogeneous students with highly complex needs, and such trends were also described by some Norwegian ECTs. Thus, all the new reforms

promoting active teaching in Norway and Spain (as well as the assessment and testing that has been documented in other studies to promote intensification for teachers in general), were found to add to the increasing demands felt by teachers (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). The ECTs who worked in schools that lacked specifically trained teachers or other specialised education staff found this situation more constraining (*material-economic arrangements*). While the Spanish ECTs reported that the preparation from their teacher training was insufficient, the Norwegian ECTs felt prepared to initiate activity-based teaching, as previously found (Jakhelln et al., 2019), but believed that they lacked knowledge about inclusive education, a well-known dilemma in Norway (Maxwell & Bakke, 2019).

The ECTs in both countries revealed *socio-political arrangements* that constrained their *relatings* in teaching and their ability to liaise with students and their parents. These findings have been echoed by ECTs in Australia (Buchanan et al., 2016) and experienced teachers in other countries (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). The Norwegian ECTs reported that they had too little time for relational work, while some faced challenges about understanding, managing and drafting reports within the inclusive support system. In Spain, the ECTs noted constraints relating to insufficient involvement of students and parents, as well as conflicts and confrontation with them. The tensions were intensified by some students' affective and relational shortcomings, sometimes overly influenced by the use of digital media. In addition, they argued that their students' parents often had heavy workloads and lacked the necessary skills to fulfil their responsibilities regarding their children's upbringing and education, and sometimes neglected these responsibilities; some also showed little interest in school education, gave little support to teachers and had reservations about them. However, *relatings* were also enabling, as the ECTs from both countries highlighted that collaboration with colleagues was useful and necessary for managing the tensions related to time and activity-based teaching management, as found in recent research (Beck, 2017; Kelchtermans, 2017; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Spicksley, 2022; Tang et al., 2022).

How ECTs manage work intensification

This section addresses and elaborates the second research question about how the participating Norwegian and Spanish ECTs manage the tensions arising from work intensification. The tensions experienced with these ECTs are linked to individual responsibilities within the existing arrangements that may in fact contribute to their increasing workload. Our results add to previous research in the sense that teachers are ultimately required to do work that takes them away from teaching (Lawrence et al., 2019) or leads them to complete their tasks to a lower standard (Stacey et al., 2022). We found that ECTs experience work intensification in their practice and need to manage it (Beck, 2017); some of their coping mechanisms or strategies include 'being less responsible', 'lowered work standards', and detachment in order to stay in the profession. The manifestations of the three practices can be further analysed through the *sayings*, *doings*, and *relatings* from the TPA (Mahon et al., 2017).

Being less responsible involves ECTs deliberately neglecting responsibilities that are unmanageable for them due to work intensification. This might mean prioritising

ing administrative tasks, that include testing and writing individual student reports, over their core responsibilities (such as activity-based teaching), or focusing on educational practices that are easily measurable and assessed, and therefore, less work intensive. Through the lens of TPA, this may encompass supporting or challenging discourses of performativity (*sayings*), modifying teaching methods (*doings*), and negotiating their professional identity and relationships (*relatings*).

Lower work standard entails ECTs adjusting or lowering their professional expectations to stay in the profession, most likely as a coping mechanism due to work intensification. This may manifest as a discourse that revolves around surviving rather than providing quality education (*sayings*), using ready-made lesson plans, less sophisticated assignments, and/or simpler assessments (*doings*), and shifting the relational focus towards transactional knowledge exchange rather than aiming for impactful educational *relatings* with students and colleagues.

Detachment might result in a language that rationalises reduced investment in the relational aspects of teaching (*sayings*). This may lead to ECTs engaging less (*doings*), which might affect how they relate to their students, potentially making relationships more pragmatic and less meaningful (*relatings*). Detachment might also involve redefining or distancing themselves and weakening their relationships within the educational system, as top-down demands entail that they sometimes feel alienated from policy and management. And it might lead to a negotiation of their identity as teachers and of how they relate to their students, their parents, or their colleagues. *Sayings* often contain a discourse linked to ‘self-care’.

In sum, the strategies of ‘being less responsible’, ‘lowered work standards’, and ‘detachment’ may contribute to a form of negative adaptation to stay in the profession, rather than encouraging ECTs to focus on their personal and professional development. The ECTs reflected upon tasks to promote and improve education but found limitations in the arrangements that are put in place for such work. The results reveal that ECTs are indirectly critical of administrative demands and how that shape their work, as found in previous studies (Erlandson et al., 2020; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Spicksley, 2022). The ECTs adjust to demands in terms of evaluation, tests, and projects, but in their experience, this takes time away from their teaching work. In practice, the findings also reveal an oxymoron, as demands that should promote activity-based teaching actually divert time away from ECTs’ planning and pursuit of teaching, as also found in the review study by Creagh et al. (2023).

This analysis confirms that ECTs found tensions related to work intensification to be a threat for their continuing career as teachers, in line with previous research (Buchanan et al., 2016; Koski et al., 2023; Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Loh & Hu, 2014; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Even though the participating ECTs claimed that they have too much to do, they still tried to navigate and accomplish most of their work tasks, as also found by Perryman and Calvert (2020). It seems that they have internalised and accepted the demands placed on them from for example parents, curriculum, and laws and that these guide their work, as supported by research from Mausethagen (2013). To survive as teachers, they must decide what the most important things are, as noted by Tang et al. (2022). Work intensification led to declining motivation among ECTs to stay in the profession both in Norway and Spain, which was also recently found in Sweden (Lindqvist et al., 2014) Australia (Heffernan et

al., 2022; Stacey et al., 2022), and the UK (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). The fact that 10 of the 26 participating Norwegian ECTs were considering leaving the profession because of work intensification indicates a change from previous research that claimed Norwegian ECTs leave teaching because of local contextual factors or management (Tiplic et al., 2015). The findings illustrate that some teachers from Norway with a five-year Master's education are faced with the need to adjust their own aspirations and motivations to stay in the profession even after only five years of service. In sum, these findings reveal that there is a real problem connected with possible challenges for teacher attrition (Geiger & Pivovarov, 2018; Heffernan et al., 2022) as ECTs feel and express disengagement with the core purpose of teaching, in line with other studies (Stacey, 2019).

TPA theory and work intensification

The TPA theory contributed to this research through concepts that capture different work intensification practices in sites which were recognised as interrelated *sayings*, *doings*, and *relatings* (Kemmis et al., 2017). The theory also helped us ascertain how (cultural-discursive, material-economic, and socio-political) arrangements either constrain or enable the ECTs' actions. For example, our results show that cultural-discursive arrangements place many demands on teachers that are problematic to address in their work. However, by using the TPA as an analytical lens (Grootenboer & Edwards-Groves, 2024), it has also contributed to reveal how the ECTs navigate the arrangements and manage intensification in their work.

Limitations

A detailed description of each case was provided to enable other researchers to use the results in similar contexts, described by Stake and Trumbull (1982) as naturalistic generalisation. Interviewing ECTs after they had been between one and six years in the teaching profession is a strength; whereas challenges in their early years may be addressed on an individual basis, the characteristics of work intensification can be expected to be a structural problem. We found more similarities than differences between the Norwegian and Spanish results, which may be attributed to the interview approach lacking contextual observations for describing practices (Desimone, 2009). The interview data may also include misinterpretations or lack accuracy in terms of revealing differences.

Implications for research

There is a need to further address the working conditions of ECTs, and to investigate the potential cumulative effects of the strategies of 'being less responsible', 'lowered work standards' and 'detachment', to understand how they might interconnect and even exacerbate each other, leading to a potential compounded impact on teacher well-being and student outcomes.

Practical implications

The results from using the TPA framework may help us identify ways of reducing work intensification among teachers, related to *cultural-discursive, material-economic and socio-political arrangements*. Acknowledging ECTs' work intensification also has consequences for management work regarding how to give support (Perryman & Calvert, 2020) and constraining the time available to implement top-down or bottom-up development projects. Teacher education, regardless of length, as well as national and/or local induction systems need to address how ECTs could handle work intensification, as it is a central part of teachers' work (Buchanan et al., 2016; Creagh et al., 2023).

Conclusion

By using the TPA theory, we investigated ECTs' beliefs on work intensification. ECTs in both countries respond to and manage work intensification in practice by strategies of 'being less responsible', 'lowered work standards' and 'detachment'. The TPA can help to widen the current understanding of work intensification and how teachers could manage it.

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Declarations

Declaration of conflicting interests The author(s) declare they have no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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