A critical analysis of teacher capability, opportunity and motivation for evidence-based practice

EdD Doctorate in Education

Institute of Education

Andrei Stanescu

September 2025

Abstract

Secondary school teachers in England are increasingly expected to engage with evidence-based practice (EBP), yet little is known about how they navigate this expectation within a high-stakes, low-trust policy environment. Existing research often frames the challenge as a research–practice gap but tends to overlook the systemic conditions that shape teachers' everyday opportunities to use evidence. This thesis addresses this gap by examining the constraints teachers face, deepening understanding of how they conceptualise, access and apply evidence, and the extent to which current policy structures enable or hinder authentic evidence use.

The thesis critically analyses teachers' engagement with EBP and posits an 'accountability paradox': mechanisms designed to raise standards erode professional autonomy and create barriers to meaningful evidence use. Using the COM-B model (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation–Behaviour) as the analytical frame, the study explores how these factors interact to shape teachers' adoption of EBP.

Situated in a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, the research reports a reflexive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with ten teachers across two schools. The Critical Incident Technique grounds accounts in lived episodes, and COM-B is applied as a deductive overlay on inductively generated themes.

Findings show teachers operate a 'tripartite epistemology', blending formal research, professional experience and local context in response to a technocratic–managerial model that risks de-professionalising practice. Motivation is shaped by reflective processes, automatic impulses and a foundational 'vocational aspiration' that helps explain how early mastery experiences yield a 'confidence dividend'. The study also identifies a cycle in which lack of opportunity, principally time, erodes capability and, in turn, diminishes intrinsic motivation, producing a 'policy paradox'. The thesis advances the case for the 'primacy of opportunity', arguing that progress towards an evidence-informed profession depends on improving the systemic conditions of teachers' work.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thank you to my wife. You were the one who first floated the idea of a doctorate and you somehow kept the household running when deadlines, sleepless newborn nights that evolved into toddler-group sprints all collided at once. Between juggling chaos and hosting 10 p.m. 'office hours', you re-read more drafts than either of us can count, rallied a sympathetic peer-support squad to assure me that weekly existential crises are perfectly normal and, right at the outset, pointed me toward the theoretical lens that now holds this thesis together.

To our son: thank you for tolerating a dad whose mind was often away with the academic fairies. Your well-timed giggles while asking me to be your horse kept the show on the road.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to every participant who donated their precious time to share honest thoughts in the hope of nudging education forward; this thesis quite literally has your voices on every page and I strive to do them justice.

The supervisory dream team deserves special mention. Prof Rebecca Harris, relentless motivator, initiative-bringer and first-class navigator, thank you for steering me round every sharp bend, for deploying the most surgical of suggestions and for invariably following them with 'but you can do whatever you want, the choice is yours', a phrase that somehow felt both liberating and mildly terrifying. Dr Caroline Foulkes, thank you for hauling me back to earth whenever my science brain floated off.

Any remaining errors are, of course, entirely mine; the good bits belong to the wonderful people above.

Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Andrei Stanescu

Table of contents

List of figures

List of tables

Abbreviations

AI   Artificial Intelligence

ALBs   Arm's Length Bodies

CIT   Critical Incident Technique

CPD   Continuing Professional Development

EBP   Evidence-Based Practice

ECF   Early Career Framework

ECT   Early Career Teacher

ECTE   Early Career Teacher Entitlement

EEF   Education Endowment Foundation

EFSA   Education and Skills Funding Agency

GCSE   General Certificate of Secondary Education

ITT   Initial Teacher Training

ITTECF   Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework

MAT   Multi Academy Trust

NPQ   National Professional Qualifications

Ofsted   The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

PLC   Professional Learning Communities

RTA   Reflexive Thematic Analysis

SLT   Senior Leadership Team

TRA   Teaching Regulation Agency

Glossary

Key term / concept	Concise definition	Primary theme
Technocratic-managerial model	A model of professionalism that views teaching as a technical activity to be standardised and controlled through external, hierarchical systems.	Theme 1, 4
Democratic-relational model	A model of professionalism defended by teachers, rooted in collegial trust, collaboration, professional autonomy and context-sensitive judgment.	Theme 1, 4
Tripartite epistemology	The knowledge system used by teachers, which synthesises three strands: formal research, professional experience and local context.	Theme 1
Contextual fit	The primary criterion used by teachers to judge the value of evidence; its perceived relevance and applicability to their specific classroom reality.	Theme 1
Epistemic disenfranchisement	The sense that one's own professional knowledge and expertise are not formally valued or recognised by the dominant system.	Theme 1
Authenticity test	A rational vetting process used by teachers to assess the credibility of evidence based on the messenger's perceived professional reality and the message's practicality.	Theme 1
Vocational aspiration	A proposed refinement of the COM-B model: the stable, identity-linked professional goals and moral commitments that energise and direct practice over the long term.	Theme 2
Confidence dividend	The psychological, social and professional reassurance gained from knowing a practice is backed by evidence, which lowers the risk of innovation.	Theme 2
Cycle of disengagement	The process by which a lack of opportunity (time) erodes professional capability (skills), which in turn destroys intrinsic motivation.	Theme 3
Policy paradox	The structural contradiction in the English education system where one arm of policy builds teacher capability while another destroys the opportunity to use it.	Theme 4
Mediating agents	The role of school leaders who either 'buffer' staff from or 'bridge' them to the contradictory pressures of the national policy environment.	Theme 4

| Professional double bind | The untenable situation where teachers are commanded to be adaptive professionals but are systematically denied the resources (time) to do so, leading to burnout or disengagement. | Integrative Discussion |

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Context

This thesis tackles the persistent and well-documented gap between the production of educational research and its meaningful application in classroom practice (Coburn et al., 2013; Korthagen, 2007). It argues that this gap is not a simple problem of knowledge transfer but is instead a symptom of a profound systemic dysfunction at the heart of contemporary teacher professionalism in England. The central theoretical argument of this work is that this dysfunction stems from an 'accountability paradox': the observation that complex systems of accountability and control, introduced with the stated aim of improving quality and restoring public trust, frequently produce the opposite effect by eroding professional autonomy, fostering a culture of performativity and incentivising counterproductive behaviour (O'Neill, 2002).

The urgency of this work lies in the human cost of this paradox, which manifests most visibly in a teacher retention crisis that has pushed the workforce to a breaking point. Recent data show that exit rates remain high and vacancies are six times the pre-pandemic level (McLean & Worth, 2025). As a result, only 60% of teachers expect to stay in the profession in three years, a decrease from 75% before the COVID-19 pandemic (Allen et al., 2025). An unsustainable workload, cited by 90% of those considering leaving, is the primary driver of this exodus (McLean & Worth, 2025).

This thesis contends that the teacher retention crisis and the failure to embed EBP are not separate issues, but are co-symptoms of the same underlying pathology. The accountability paradox creates a high-stakes, low-trust professional environment, which in turn fosters what Ball (2003) terms a 'culture of performativity'. Within this culture, professional agency is re-channelled away from authentic, student-focused improvement and towards strategic compliance. This has two critical consequences. First, it creates the 'unimaginable stress' and burnout that drives teachers from the profession (National Education Union, 2024b). Second, it means that new initiatives, including those grounded in robust evidence, are judged not on their potential to improve learning but on their utility for satisfying the demands of the inspection regime (Perryman et al., 2017). The staffing crisis is therefore the most visible symptom of a system that compels teachers to construct 'fabrications' of their practice to survive an ordeal that harms their mental health and undermines the 'teacher's soul' (Ball, 2003, p. 218).

It is within this context that the current government's reforms must be understood. From November 2025, for instance, Ofsted will replace traditional single-word judgements (Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement, Inadequate) with multi-faceted 'report cards' intended to reduce pressure and provide a fairer picture of school performance (Ofsted, 2025a). However, many educators doubt this will ease the burden (National Association of Head Teachers, 2025). With up to eleven graded

categories, many fear the reforms will merely reshape the paradox, increasing bureaucracy and prompting new forms of performativity as schools try to meet more criteria (Ademokun, 2025). This entrenched cynicism, termed here the 'authenticity test', is a rational response from a profession weary of constant initiatives (Fullan, 2011).

Within this dysfunctional context, key challenges, such as the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, defined by the DfE as those from low-income backgrounds or in the care system, persist. For secondary pupils, the gap is the widest since 2011: disadvantaged students are almost two years behind their peers at GCSE (Education Policy Institute, 2024). The call for EBP is fundamentally a call to tackle these inequities more effectively. Yet if teachers are disempowered and overburdened in a system that values compliance over inquiry, the promise of EBP remains out of reach.

1.2 Researcher background

My professional background is as a secondary science teacher and middle leader in England. Over several years working in different schools, I have held roles focused on developing teaching and learning within science departments, supporting early career teachers and contributing to wider initiatives aimed at improving classroom practice. These responsibilities required me to work closely with colleagues across a range of career stages and subject teams, providing a first-hand view of how teachers navigate the daily pressures of the profession, including workload, behaviour and the demands of accountability.

Working across multiple schools has given me sustained insight into how policy and professional expectations are interpreted in practice. I have observed considerable variation in how evidence-informed approaches are introduced and taken up by teachers and in how time, autonomy and departmental cultures shape that process. Through mentoring, coaching and leading professional development activities, I became increasingly aware of the tension between the rhetoric of evidence use and the realities of implementing new practices in busy, high-pressure environments.

These experiences prompted my interest in examining evidence-informed practice through both a systemic and psychological lens. I repeatedly encountered situations where teachers were open to engaging with research, yet constrained by the limited opportunity to do so meaningfully. This raised questions about why promising initiatives often struggled to embed, despite good intentions and strong professional motivation. It was this recurring pattern, observed in different roles and contexts, that led me to undertake this research and shaped the focus of the study.

1.3 Conceptual framework

This thesis employs the COM-B model as both a conceptual and an analytical framework for examining teacher engagement with EBP. Conceptually, COM-B provides a coherent model of

behaviour as the interaction of three necessary conditions: capability (the psychological and physical capacity to act), opportunity (the social and physical environment that enables action) and motivation (the reflective and automatic processes that drive it) (Michie et al., 2011). Analytically, it is used here as a diagnostic lens to synthesise systemic and psychological dynamics within the professional environment.

The contribution of this thesis lies in applying COM-B as a diagnostic tool for the professional environment, rather than as a checklist of individual attributes. In this way, it highlights how the accountability paradox restricts opportunity (by narrowing autonomy and eroding trust) and shapes motivation (by encouraging compliance over intrinsic professional purposes). This emphasis shifts attention beyond the development of teacher capability through training, towards the systemic conditions that constrain or enable engagement with evidence.

Two psychological concepts further inform this framework. The first is the confidence dividend: the increase in professional self-efficacy that follows a successful mastery experience with a new practice (Bandura, 1977). This effect can create a positive cycle, in which early success strengthens teachers' sense of capability and fosters further engagement with evidence. The confidence dividend also helps explain how some forms of professional development are able to sustain long-term impact, while others contribute to evidence fatigue and disengagement.

The second concept is the authenticity test: a heuristic through which teachers assess the credibility of evidence, often privileging trust and classroom experience over methodological rigour (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). This reflects the realities of decision-making in low-trust environments, where relational credibility often determines whether evidence is taken up in practice.

By integrating these perspectives through COM-B, this thesis proposes a framework that connects systemic constraints with individual psychological processes. The authenticity test and the confidence dividend are situated within COM-B's motivation component; they are not stand-alone frameworks but conceptual tools that capture how teachers' trust and self-efficacy shape evidence use in practice. Taken together, the analysis suggests that, in the English context, opportunity is the critical gatekeeper: unless conditions of time, trust and autonomy are addressed, initiatives focused only on capability or motivation are unlikely to achieve sustained impact.

1.4   Research aim and questions

This thesis aims to analyse the systemic and psychological factors that govern secondary school teachers' engagement with EBP in England. Using the COM-B framework as a diagnostic lens, it seeks to identify the specific barriers and enablers to evidence-informed practice that exist within the contemporary policy environment, with a view to providing insights that can inform more effective educational policies and professional development programmes.

To achieve this aim, the research will address the following questions:

1. How do secondary school teachers in England understand and perceive EBP within the framework of current educational policies?

2. What factors influence secondary school teachers' understanding and implementation of EBP in their practice?

3. How can teachers' perceptions and experiences inform future educational policies and professional development programmes to better support the implementation of EBP?

1.5   Thesis outline

This thesis is structured across six chapters.

Chapter 1, the current chapter, has introduced the core problem of the thesis: the persistent gap between the aspiration for and reality of EBP in English schools. It has established the accountability paradox as the central cause of this problem, introduced the COM-B model as its primary analytical framework and presented the specific research questions that guide this enquiry.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review, that develops the thesis's theoretical framework in three parts. First, it provides a macro-level analysis of the professional opportunity landscape, arguing that the accountability paradox creates a low-trust, performative culture that constrains teacher autonomy. Second, it presents a micro-level examination of the psychological drivers of motivation and capability, introducing the 'authenticity test' and 'confidence dividend' as key heuristics that mediate engagement with evidence. Finally, it uses the complete COM-B model to synthesise these systemic and individual factors into the coherent analytical framework that guides the empirical investigation.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology. It details the qualitative approach taken to gain in-depth insights into teachers' experiences and perceptions and describes the use of semi-structured interviews enriched with the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to collect data. The chapter also details the two-phased data analysis procedure, which combines an inductive reflexive thematic analysis with a deductive overlay using the COM-B model.

Chapter 4 presents the thematic analysis of the interview data, identifying a systemic 'policy paradox' and a resulting 'cycle of disengagement', while also proposing 'Vocational Aspiration' as a key driver of teacher motivation.

Chapter 5 then synthesises these discrete findings into a coherent, explanatory model, developing the thesis's central argument that opportunity functions as the primary mediating factor within a

hierarchical COM-B framework and uses the study's findings to critically refine the model for a professional context.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarising the key insights and contributions of the research. It offers recommendations for policy and practice, addresses the thesis's limitations and suggests areas for future research to further explore the complexities of EBP implementation in education.

Having established the context, rationale and structure of the research, the following chapter will now turn to a critical review of the existing literature surrounding teacher professionalism, professional development and the use of evidence-based practice in education.

1.6   Chapter summary

Chapter 1 situates the thesis in the turbulent landscape of English secondary education following the 2024 general election. While the new government promises to 'break down the barriers to opportunity', teacher recruitment and retention have reached crisis point and school budgets are tightening. Against this backdrop the chapter introduces an 'accountability paradox': reforms intended to guarantee quality, most visibly Ofsted's high-stakes inspections, simultaneously erode professional autonomy, drive performativity and threaten teacher well-being.

The chapter argues that upcoming policy changes, notably the replacement of Ofsted's single-word grades with multi-category 'report cards' from November 2025 and a refreshed Early Career Teacher Entitlement, will succeed only if they engage meaningfully with teachers' motivation and professional culture. To examine this, the thesis refines the COM-B model by adding two elements, professional identity and attitude, thereby offering a more sensitive lens for analysing teacher behaviour in low-trust environments. It also introduces two key psychological heuristics that teachers employ when appraising new initiatives: an 'authenticity test', born of policy fatigue and the need for a 'confidence dividend' to sustain engagement with EBP.

Having established its conceptual stance, Chapter 1 sets out the study's aim: to explore how English secondary teachers understand and implement EBP amid current policy pressures. Three research questions guide the enquiry, focusing on teachers' perceptions of EBP, the factors shaping its enactment and the implications for future policy and professional learning. Finally, the chapter outlines the structure of the thesis. Chapter 2 provides a critical literature review on professionalism, professional development and EBP; Chapter 3 details the qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers; Chapter 4 presents the thematic analysis of the findings, identifying a systemic 'policy paradox' and a resulting 'cycle of disengagement'; Chapter 5 provides an integrative discussion that synthesises these findings into a coherent model, arguing that opportunity is the primary mediating factor for EBP engagement; and Chapter 6 offers conclusions, policy recommendations and directions for further research. Together, these chapters build a

diagnostic framework for understanding the opportunities, and limits, of reform in contemporary English schooling.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter establishes the critical theoretical foundation for this thesis by developing a comprehensive, multi-layered model to understand the complex factors governing English secondary school teachers' engagement with EBP. It will argue that this engagement is not a simple technical process of knowledge transfer but a deeply social and psychological behaviour, profoundly shaped by the dynamic interplay between individual professionals and the systemic context in which they operate. The central problem this review addresses is the persistent and well-documented gap between the production of educational research and its meaningful application in classroom practice (Coburn et al., 2013; Hargreaves, 1996; Korthagen, 2007). The analysis moves beyond simplistic models of evidence uptake, which often resort to blaming teachers for their perceived resistance or researchers for their ineffective dissemination, to propose a more nuanced explanation grounded in the complex realities of contemporary teacher professionalism (Caplan, 1979; Kennedy, 1997; Knight, 2009).

This chapter adopts the COM-B model as its core analytical framework. Developed by Michie et al. (2011), the COM-B model is a comprehensive framework for understanding behaviour that posits three necessary conditions must be met for any behaviour to occur: the individual must have the psychological and physical capability, the social and physical opportunity and the reflective and automatic motivation. The unique strength of this model lies in its ability to integrate a professional's internal, psychological world, their knowledge and skills (capability) and their beliefs and emotional responses (motivation), with the external, systemic factors that enable or constrain their actions (opportunity). This holistic integration is precisely what is required to deconstruct the complex reality of EBP adoption in schools, moving analysis beyond isolated factors to a dynamic, interactive system.

The argument of this review is developed across three sequential parts. The first part (Section 2.1) provides a macro-level analysis of the contested landscape of teacher professionalism in the United Kingdom. It focuses on the systemic pressures that shape the professional opportunity landscape for teachers, introducing the 'accountability paradox' as the central structural challenge that constrains professional practice and fosters a climate of mistrust. The second part (Section 2.2) narrows the focus to a micro-level examination of the psychological and social dynamics that govern the adoption of EBP. This section explores the key drivers of teacher motivation and the development of professional capability, introducing the concepts of the 'authenticity test' and the 'confidence dividend' as crucial heuristics that mediate a teacher's decision to engage with evidence. Finally, the third part (Section 2.3) provides a comprehensive synthesis, using the complete COM-B framework to integrate the systemic and individual factors identified in the preceding sections. This analysis culminates in a coherent, multi-faceted model of teacher engagement with EBP, which provides the essential theoretical grounding and analytical lens for the empirical investigation that follows in this thesis.

2.1   Teacher professionalism in an age of accountability

To understand why and how teachers engage with research, one must first comprehend the professional environment in which they work. This section argues that contemporary teacher professionalism in England is enacted within a high-stakes, low-trust context defined by a profound structural contradiction – an 'accountability paradox' (O'Neill, 2002) as it plays out in English secondary schooling. This paradox, it will be argued, fundamentally constrains teachers' opportunity to engage in authentic professional practice and perversely re-channels their motivation towards compliance and performativity.

2.1.1   The shifting nature of professionalism in education

Despite its importance in educational discourse, 'professionalism' is not a static or universally agreed-upon concept. Scholars have described it as a 'shifting phenomenon' (Whitty, 2006, p. 32) and an 'artificial construct with ever-changing and always-contested definitions' (Crook, 2008, p. 23), which is continually redefined by historical context, prevailing policy orthodoxies and competing societal interests. A dominant theme within the literature is the extent to which teacher professionalism is shaped by external forces rather than emerging organically from within the profession itself. Other work notes that it is often an 'externally imposed, articulated perception' (Evans, 2008, p. 4), prescribed by specialists and enforced by authorities through the performance measures that have governed education policy for decades. This external control is a central feature of professionalisation, the historical and political journey by which an occupation, such as teaching, becomes formally recognised as a profession with established standards, qualifications and a distinct body of knowledge. This shift is not merely theoretical; it reflects a substantive evolution in the very nature of the teacher's role. The twentieth-century model of the teacher as a subject-matter expert who simply imparts knowledge (Lortie, 2008) has been superseded by a far more complex and demanding conception of professional practice. Today's teacher is expected to be a multi-faceted practitioner: an analyst, skilled in interpreting complex student data to diagnose learning needs (Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2021); a reflective practitioner, engaging in refining their methods (Schön, 1992); and an applied psychologist, with a working knowledge of child development, cognitive science and student well-being (Darling-Hammond, 2006). This evolution from a simple didactic role to a complex, evidence-informed and adaptive one lies at the heart of modern professional standards. However, it also creates new arenas for the tensions of accountability and performativity to play out.

Historically viewed as a semi-profession (Etzioni, 1969), teaching in England has undergone an intensive process of state-led professionalisation. This has been achieved through the implementation of comprehensive national frameworks that define the standards and content of professional practice, such as the Teacher Standards, the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) a national framework that combines initial teacher education and a two-year induction period for

beginning teachers in England (Ovenden-Hope & Kirkpatrick, 2024). By explicitly embedding engagement with research and evidence-informed methods within these frameworks, the state has formally recognised EBP as a core component of teachers' professional practice (Department for Education, 2019a, 2019b).

However, this top-down, state-driven process of professionalisation exists in a state of tension with a teacher's individual and internalised sense of professionalism. To capture this distinction, Evans (2008, p. 8) distinguishes professionalism (the collective prescription of a profession) from professionality, a term Hoyle (1974) introduced to denote the individual teacher's knowledge base, skills and professional judgements, which may range from 'restricted' to 'extended' orientations. Teachers with a high sense of professionality are intrinsically motivated to engage with EBP not because a standard mandates it, but because they hold a deep-seated commitment to enhancing their practice for the benefit of their students (Kennedy, 2014). Similarly, the role of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) becomes contested. For the teacher with a high sense of 'professionality', CPD is a means of achieving mastery and staying abreast of developments in their field (Day & Gu, 2010). Yet, within the top-down model of 'professionalisation', CPD is often reduced to a delivery mechanism for state-sanctioned initiatives (Kennedy, 2005). It becomes less about empowering professional judgment and more about ensuring fidelity to prescribed frameworks, thereby functioning as another tool to standardise practice and limit autonomy rather than expand it.

This creates a fundamental tension at the heart of modern teacher professionalism. The systemic pressures associated with professionalisation, particularly those related to standardised testing and accountability, can actively limit the scope for professional judgment and critical reflection, the very qualities that a high sense of professionality seeks to foster (Ball, 2003; Connell, 2013). This conflict between external control and internal commitment sets the stage for a more detailed examination of teacher autonomy and agency. These two concepts are central to understanding how professionalism is experienced and enacted in the constrained environment of contemporary schools.

2.1.2   Teacher professionalism in practice

To analyse how professionalism is experienced in practice, particularly within the constrained context described above, it is crucial to employ precise terms. While often used interchangeably, teacher autonomy and teacher agency are distinct concepts. A precise distinction is vital: autonomy is the condition teachers possess, while agency is the action they enact within that condition.

Autonomy, in this sense, refers to the objective degree of freedom and responsibility a teacher has in their professional role, the 'scope for action' available to them (Ingersoll, 2003, pp. 210–212). This condition is primarily determined by the system in which they work. School policies, curriculum mandates, national inspection frameworks and funding regulations all combine to define the

boundaries of a teacher's professional autonomy. A school system can be designed to grant varying levels of autonomy. The Finnish educational context, for example, is frequently cited as a model of high professionalism precisely because its system is designed to grant high levels of teacher autonomy, trusting practitioners to make complex pedagogical decisions based on their professional expertise (Sahlberg, 2015).

Agency, by contrast, is the capacity of teachers to 'act purposefully' within the condition of their autonomy (Priestley et al., 2015, pp. 134–135). It is the professional action they take, informed by their reading of what is possible and by their educational values and goals. Crucially, Priestley et al. (2015, p. 20) characterise agency ecologically, as something achieved through the dynamic interplay of personal attributes with the cultural and structural resources available in a given setting, rather than as a fixed inner trait. This ecological perspective dovetails neatly with the COM-B framework that underpins this thesis, because it connects the individual dimensions of capability and motivation with the environmental dimension of opportunity. Agency is thus a universal capacity, yet its enactment is uneven because it hinges on the conditions in which teachers work. Leijen et al. (2020) refine this ecological lens by arguing that teacher agency crystallises only when three strands interweave: professional competence, the repertoire of knowledge, skills and beliefs a teacher can draw on; the structural and cultural context, the material, organisational and socio-cultural resources that shape what is doable; and professional purpose, the future-oriented moral and educational commitments that give direction to action. They further contend that structured reflection operates as the engine that strengthens each strand. When teachers articulate their tacit theories of action, competence is sharpened; when they scrutinise day-to-day practice in dialogue with peers, they become more adept at reading and, where possible, reshaping their context; and when they engage in critical reflection that questions taken-for-granted assumptions and power relations, their professional purpose is refreshed and re-anchored in broader democratic and social-justice ideals. In other words, reflection provides the mechanism through which the latent capacity to act is converted into purposeful professional action.

The pay-off from this refined model depends heavily on the wider autonomy landscape. In high-autonomy systems the three strands are mutually reinforcing: time, trust and collegial support make reflection a meaningful activity, structural affordances give teachers room to innovate and collaborate and competence grows through experimentation with adaptive pedagogy. By contrast, in low-autonomy systems agency is typically funnelled into compliance with externally prescribed curricula, performance targets and surveillance regimes. Research on the English performative policy environment shows beginning teachers wrestling with a tension between their desire for autonomy and the demands of accountability, often forming 'post-performative' professional identities that tolerate but rarely transcend managerial constraints (Wilkins, 2011). Here, professional purpose is partly pre-defined by metrics, reflection risks becoming instrumental rather than critical and opportunity is

curtailed, leaving only fragments of agency oriented towards satisfying inspection rubrics rather than fostering deep learning.

This distinction between autonomy as condition and agency as enactment, now elaborated through the three-strand, reflection-driven model, provides a precise lens through which to examine the accountability paradox at the heart of contemporary teacher professionalism. It also suggests a practical leverage point for policy and professional-learning design: expanding meaningful opportunities for theory-of-action, practical and critical reflection can convert latent capacity into visible, value-aligned agency, even, though more laboriously, in tightly controlled, low-autonomy settings.

2.1.3   The accountability paradox

The most significant structural challenge to authentic teacher professionalism in the English context is what has been termed the 'accountability paradox'. First articulated in a broader societal context by O'Neill (2002, pp. 51–52) in her BBC Reith Lectures, the paradox observes that complex systems of accountability and control, which are often introduced with the stated aim of improving quality and restoring public trust, frequently produce the opposite effect by eroding trust and incentivising counterproductive professional behaviour. These mechanisms, designed to improve systems, can actually threaten them by discouraging the very qualities that support reasonable and professional conduct (O'Neill, 2002).

This distinction between autonomy (condition) and agency (an enactment) reveals the mechanism of the accountability paradox. This mechanism unfolds through a distinct causal chain. First, systemic policies such as prescriptive curricula (e.g. ITTECF) and high-stakes inspection regimes (e.g. Ofsted) directly attack and reduce teacher autonomy. They shrink the objective 'scope for action' by standardising what is taught, how it is taught and how it is measured, thereby constraining a key component of professional opportunity.

Second, this reduction in the condition of autonomy does not, however, extinguish teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015). Teachers remain active agents who must navigate their professional environment and make purposeful choices to survive and succeed within it. Instead, the constraints on autonomy re-channel their agency (Priestley et al., 2015). Faced with intense pressure to meet externally imposed performance targets, teachers may enact their agency in ways that are rational for survival within the system but are deeply counterproductive to its stated educational goals (Campbell, 1979). For example, they may narrow the curriculum to focus only on tested material, adopt rote-learning pedagogies to 'teach to the test', or engage in strategic compliance and 'malpractice' to satisfy inspection frameworks (Au & Apple, 2007; Ball, 2003; Larvin, 2021).

Therefore, the core of the accountability paradox is not merely the erosion of professionalism (Ball, 2003). It is the perverse incentivisation of professionals to use their inherent agency in ways that actively undermine the very quality and depth of learning the accountability system purports to improve (Perryman et al., 2017). This dynamic has profound and direct implications for a teacher's engagement with EBP. When professional agency is re-channelled towards compliance and performance, the primary consideration for adopting a new practice is no longer 'Is this best for my students' learning?' but 'Will this help us meet our targets and satisfy inspectors?' (Perryman et al., 2017). This reframing helps explain the persistent gap between research and practice, as EBP may be ignored, rejected, or superficially adopted if it does not align with the narrow, instrumental demands of the accountability system (Biesta, 2007; Larvin, 2021; Perryman et al., 2017). Having established this central paradox, the analysis will now deconstruct its two primary components: the formal structures of governance that form its architecture and the culture of performativity it creates.

2.1.4 The architecture of governance and the culture of performativity

The accountability paradox does not operate in a vacuum; it is given force through a two-part mechanism. The first part is the formal architecture of external governance that constrains professional autonomy. This architecture in the English education system is constructed through the formal mechanisms of external governance, primarily designed and enforced by Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs), quasi-autonomous public agencies that implement government policy while operating at a formal distance from central government.

These organisations are the agents who create the rules of the system, directly shaping the 'condition' of teacher autonomy. The most noteworthy of these is The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). While its stated aim is to ensure and improve quality, its high-stakes inspection framework functions as the primary mechanism for constraining professional autonomy and incentivising risk-averse behaviour (Perryman et al., 2023, 2025). There is widespread evidence that the inspection process drives a culture of compliance rather than innovation, undermining schools' ability to tailor teaching to their pupils' needs (Colman, 2021; Perryman et al., 2023). This formal architecture is reinforced by other ALBs; the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) controls entry to the profession and professional standards, while the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) controls the flow of resources, further defining the boundaries of professional action (Teacher Regulation Agency, 2022). The cumulative effect of this architecture, of inspections, public league tables and funding stipulations, is the creation of a high-pressure, high-surveillance environment where a teacher's rational focus is often forced to shift away from the complex, long-term process of student learning and towards the immediate, measurable demands of the accountability framework (Brady, 2021). The second part of the mechanism, through which this formal architecture realises its actual impact, is the professional culture it creates: a culture of performativity. First

theorised in a postmodern context by Lyotard and Van Den Abbeele (1984) and extensively applied to education by Ball (2003; 2016), performativity is a mode of regulation that 'employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of incentive, control, attrition and change' (Ball, 2003, p. 216). It is a culture where complex educational processes are reduced to simple, quantifiable data and where a professional's worth becomes synonymous with their ability to produce measurable results (Perryman et al., 2025).

This performative culture fundamentally reshapes what it means to be a teacher. It shifts professional identity away from that of an educator and towards that of a 'performer', whose primary role is to demonstrate effectiveness against external metrics (Skinner et al., 2021) This, in turn, directly impacts teaching practices. The curriculum narrows to focus on what is tested and pedagogy becomes geared towards optimising test performance rather than fostering deep, critical understanding (McPherson et al., 2023). The ultimate consequence is that this culture erects significant barriers to meaningful engagement with EBP. Within a performative culture, the primary criterion for adopting a new strategy is not its potential to enhance student learning, but its utility for improving scores and satisfying inspection criteria (Perryman, 2006). Evidence that supports more holistic, less easily measured pedagogical approaches is often sidelined in favour of practices that promise short-term, quantifiable gains (Biesta, 2009)

2.1.5 Navigating the paradox with identity and ethics

If the accountability paradox re-channels professional agency towards performativity, a teacher's response is not automatic. It is mediated by the internal resources they draw upon to navigate this constrained and ethically fraught environment. In this thesis, these internal resources are conceptualised through the metaphor of a professional 'compass'. This compass has two core components: professional identity and ethical commitments. These are not abstract ideals, but the active, internal forces that determine whether a teacher's agency is directed towards pragmatic compliance or towards authentic, student-focused practice, even in the face of immense external pressure.

A teacher's identity is not static; it is continually shaped by their experiences, interactions and the broader educational context, with recent research confirming its significant influence on professional practices and attitudes (Chaaban et al., 2021; Zhang & Wang, 2022). A teacher who identifies strongly as a lifelong learner, a subject specialist, or an 'activist professional' (Sachs, 2000, 2003) rooted in principles of equity is more likely to possess the resilience to critically evaluate and resist top-down mandates that conflict with their understanding of good practice (Ellis & Conyard, 2024; Priestley et al., 2015). Conversely, an identity rooted in compliance or traditionalism can make a teacher more susceptible to the pressures of performativity (Müller & Cook, 2024). Research also highlights the additional challenges faced by teachers from under-represented groups, for whom a lack of visibility

and role models can limit their sense of agency and ability to construct their professional identities authentically (Woodfine & Warner, 2023). This identity, therefore, directly influences a teacher's engagement with EBP; it is the lens through which the relevance and value of new evidence are judged before any practical application is even considered.

In this context, ethical practice is conceived as the active process of navigating the inherent dilemmas that arise when systemic pressures incentivise pedagogically or morally questionable actions (Heikkilä et al., 2023; Müller & Cook, 2024) . Codes of professional ethics consistently place responsibilities to the student, the profession and the community at their core, establishing key waypoints on the professional map (Müller & Cook, 2024).

A foundational ethical imperative is the commitment to equity and inclusion, which involves meeting the diverse learning needs of all students and providing equitable access to learning, with particular attention given to those from marginalised groups (Müller & Cook, 2024; Woodfine & Warner, 2023). This principle often conflicts directly with the standardised, 'one-size-fits-all' curricula and programmes that are frequently mandated by accountability systems (National Education Union, 2023). An ethical practitioner must therefore navigate this tension by adapting or challenging practices that risk disadvantaging certain students. This tension is particularly acute when considering the professional necessity of understanding developmental psychology. An ethical commitment to the holistic well-being of students demands that a teacher's pedagogy be developmentally appropriate. However, the relentless pressure for measurable results can compel teachers to adopt practices, such as excessive test preparation or developmentally inappropriate rote learning, that may secure short-term performance gains at the expense of long-term conceptual understanding and student well-being (National Education Union, 2023). This forces an ethical compromise, where the teacher's professional knowledge of how children learn is actively sidelined by the system's demand for a particular kind of score.

Furthermore, ethical professionalism demands a rigorous adherence to evidential integrity. This entails a critical appraisal of the evidence supporting any new initiative and a steadfast commitment to presenting facts without distortion (Education Endowment Foundation, 2024). A significant dilemma arises when a teacher is pressured to adopt a popular but poorly evidenced pedagogical strategy in order to meet performance metrics (Sturrock, 2024). Navigating this challenge requires the professional integrity to prioritise robust evidence over superficial innovation and to maintain honesty when accounting for student progress (Barshay, 2025).

Perhaps the most acute dilemma, however, involves balancing the holistic well-being of students against the system's often narrow focus on measurable academic outcomes (Department for Education, 2021; Perryman et al., 2023). Although research suggests that well-being and performance are not mutually exclusive and can be mutually reinforcing, the intense pressure of accountability systems can

force a false choice upon educators (Education Support, 2023). This conflict between policy demands for efficiency and narrowly defined outcomes and teachers' ethical commitment to the common good can have a major impact on professional identity and wellbeing (Müller & Cook, 2024). The ethical teacher must therefore constantly navigate the tension between a pedagogy designed for deep, engaged learning and one tailored purely for test performance.

Ultimately, professional identity provides the 'why' and ethics provide the 'how' of a teacher's response to the accountability paradox. A strong professional identity provides the motivation to seek out and engage with EBP, while a robust ethical framework ensures this engagement is responsible, critical and focused on the best interests of all students. These internal resources serve as the final buffer against the external forces that shape the professional landscape.

2.1.6   International perspectives

The accountability-driven model prevalent in England is not a universal or inevitable approach to educational improvement. A brief international comparison highlights the specific policy choices that have shaped the English system and illustrates successful alternative pathways to fostering professionalism and EBP. In Finland, for example, the system is built on a foundation of high trust and professional autonomy (Eurydice Finland, n.d.). With minimal standardised testing, teachers are empowered to exercise their professional judgment (Finish National Agency for Education, n.d.). This high-autonomy condition is underpinned by rigorous, research-oriented teacher education, with teachers in primary, lower secondary and general upper secondary required to hold a master's degree, which equips all teachers with a master's degree and the skills to critically engage with research as part of their daily practice (Chung, 2023). With minimal standardised testing, teachers are empowered to exercise their professional judgment (Sahlberg, 2015). This high-autonomy condition is underpinned by rigorous, research-oriented teacher education, which equips all teachers with a master's degree and the skills to critically engage with research as part of their daily practice (Sahlberg, 2011, 2015). An alternative path is demonstrated by Japan, where professionalism is characterised by deep collaboration through 'lesson study'. This model embeds EBP into the fabric of teachers' work, as they collectively investigate problems, apply evidence-based solutions and refine lessons in a continuous cycle of inquiry (Lewis et al., 2006). Here, improvement is driven by a ground-up collaborative approach to professionalism rather than top-down accountability. In Singapore, strong governmental direction is combined with significant investment in professional development, framing teachers as 'nation builders' who are systematically supported to innovate and apply research (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). These examples demonstrate that high-performing education systems can be built on foundations other than the specific model of high-stakes, managerial accountability seen in England. The common threads in these successful systems are not external pressure and

performativity, but rather a deep investment in teacher expertise, professional trust and collaborative cultures.

2.1.7   Section summary

In summary, this section has explored the contested nature of teacher professionalism. It began by distinguishing between autonomy as the condition for professional action and agency as its enactment. It then argued that these are constrained by a profound structural contradiction: the 'accountability paradox'. This paradox operates through a formal architecture of external governance, which, in turn, creates a pervasive culture of performativity. The result is a system that, while designed to improve standards, instead erodes trust and perversely re-channels professional agency towards counterproductive, compliance-oriented behaviours.

Recent evidence lays bare the human cost of this paradox. The Teacher Wellbeing Index 2023 found that an overwhelming majority of school teachers (75%) and senior leaders (82%) report that the high-stakes nature of Ofsted inspections negatively impacts their mental health and well-being (Education Support, 2023). Other research describes the experience as an 'unimaginable stress' and a 'horrible, horrific ordeal', creating a climate of 'constant red alert' that contributes to chronic stress and burnout (National Education Union, 2024). This is situated within a wider crisis of teacher wellbeing, with unsustainable workloads driven by accountability pressures cited as a key reason for teachers leaving the profession (Brady, 2021; McLean & Worth, 2025). Within this culture of fear, as Ball (2003) argues, performativity becomes a survival strategy. Teachers feel compelled to construct 'fabrications', inauthentic versions of their practice designed to satisfy the inspectorate, leading to a profound sense of inner conflict, an 'assault on the teacher's soul' (Ball, 2003).

This high-stakes, low-trust environment is the critical context in which all professional learning must be understood. It does more than practically constrain a teacher's time; it fundamentally alters their psychological orientation towards new knowledge. When professional judgment is under constant threat, the default response to a new initiative, even one labelled 'evidence-based', becomes one of defensive risk assessment, rather than open-minded curiosity. The erosion of autonomy is therefore not merely a logistical barrier but a psychological one, priming professionals for mistrust. Having established the challenging external landscape that shapes teachers' professional lives and constrains their opportunity, the review must now 'zoom in' to examine the cognitive and social processes through which individual teachers navigate this terrain. The following section will explore the specific psychological and social filters, such as trust, credibility and professional self-efficacy, that become paramount when professional judgment is under siege and which ultimately determine whether evidence is dismissed, adopted, or adapted in the classroom.

2.2   Navigating the research-practice gap

Having established the high-stakes, low-trust professional landscape that constrains teachers' opportunity to engage authentically with their practice, this review now narrows its focus. It transitions from a macro-level analysis of systemic pressures to a micro-level examination of the cognitive and social dynamics that influence how individual teachers engage with EBP. While COM-B provides the overarching conceptual and analytical framework for this thesis, this section develops two heuristics, the 'authenticity test' and the 'confidence dividend', which refine the motivation component of COM-B by capturing the roles of trust, credibility and professional self-efficacy in teachers' decision-making. Finally, the section examines the professional learning mechanisms that align with these psychological dynamics.

2.2.1   Defining evidence-based practice

In contemporary educational discourse the word evidence is invested with enormous rhetorical force, yet the concept itself remains stubbornly slippery (Nutley et al., 2007). Writers deploy it in at least three overlapping ways. First, the term can denote published research findings, randomised controlled trials, quasi-experimental studies, meta-analyses, that claim causal power or, at minimum, a reliable association. Second, it is often treated as shorthand for the programmes and routines that have been subjected to such scrutiny, so that Reciprocal Teaching or Direct Instruction becomes 'the evidence' rather than the object of evidence. Third, classroom professionals routinely apply the label to the local indicators they collect for diagnostic or evaluative purposes: assessment scores, attendance patterns, pupil-voice interviews and behaviour logs (Cordingley, 2008). These three senses do not merely differ in emphasis; they rest on distinct epistemological foundations and serve contrasting professional purposes.

The slippage between them generates the tension that runs through the wider EBP movement. When policymakers cite 'the evidence' to defend a national literacy strategy they are almost always invoking evidence-as-finding (Department for Education, 2015). When teachers insist, they already use evidence in their planning they typically have evidence-as-local-indicator in mind. Meanwhile, the commercial-education complex collapses the distinction altogether, marketing an intervention as if the product itself were indistinguishable from the research that once validated it (Ball, 2012; Hogan et al., 2018). The apparently neutral appeal to 'what works' therefore masks a contest over whose knowledge counts and to what ends.

Throughout this thesis, therefore, the word evidence is used as an umbrella term encompassing (a) peer-reviewed research findings that meet accepted standards of rigour, randomised controlled trials, quasi-experiments, meta-analyses; (b) the interventions and routines that have been evaluated by such studies; and (c) the local, practitioner-generated indicators teachers collect to diagnose need and monitor impact (Cordingley, 2008; Earl & Katz, 2002; Nelson & O'Beirne, 2014). When analytic precision is required, I will signal which strand is foregrounded by referring to research evidence,

intervention evidence, or practice-based evidence. This tripartite framing follows work that treats evidence-informed practice as an ecosystem in which findings, techniques and contextual data remain mutually constitutive rather than hierarchically ordered (Brown & Rogers, 2014; Davies, 1999). Adopting this inclusive yet discriminating usage guards against category error and keeps the political stakes of claims about 'what works' firmly in view.

The EBP movement, born in medicine during the early 1990s, sought to displace tradition and intuition with findings of demonstrable causal power (Sackett et al., 1996). In English education its rise was catalysed by New Labour's modernisation agenda after 1997 and by Hargreaves' call for a research-based teaching profession (Hargreaves, 1996). That lineage privileges evidence-as-finding, preferably quantitative, generalisable and expressed in effect sizes, and has given rise to institutions such as the Education Endowment Foundation. Its Teaching and Learning Toolkit ranks interventions according to magnitude of effect and security of evidence, reinforcing a medicalised hierarchy (Higgins et al., 2016).

Yet importing such a model into the moral and relational space of the classroom has always been contentious. Critics argue that a narrow focus on evidence-as-finding encourages a technocratic vision in which teachers are reduced to delivery agents of pre-validated interventions (Armstrong, 2020; Biesta, 2007). Conversely, everyday classroom evidence is easily dismissed as anecdote if it lacks the status of peer-review journals (Cordingley, 2008). What appears to be a technical debate about methods is therefore also a struggle over professional autonomy and democratic authority.

These tensions are examined further in Table 1, which contrasts a hierarchical view of evidence, placing published research at the apex, with a pragmatic view that blends external research with practitioner judgement and local indicators. In this thesis, this tension is conceptualised as the 'paradox of evidence' in education, a term used here to describe the gap between how evidence is formally valued and how it is practically used.. The hierarchical model, with its emphasis on 'what works', risks de-professionalising teachers by reducing them to technicians delivering pre-validated interventions (Bjerke et al., 2025). This technocratic approach can also create a 'democratic deficit' by sidelining crucial questions about the aims and values of education itself (Biesta, 2025; Bjerke et al., 2025). Understanding how teachers navigate this paradox is central to this thesis's first research question, which explores how they understand and perceive EBP within current policy frameworks.

Table 1

Comparing the traditional/hierarchical and the pragmatic/contextual models

Dimension	Traditional / hierarchical model	Pragmatic / contextual model
Primary view of evidence	'What works?' - Seeks generalisable certainty. Privileges a hierarchy of evidence (e.g. RCTs, meta-analyses) (Sackett et al., 1996).	'What is useful here?' - Focuses on the utility of evidence in a specific context (Biesta, 2007).
Role of context	Context is a variable to be controlled or a barrier to generalisability.	Context is primary. Evidence must be judged for its applicability to the specific learners, culture and resources (Nelson & O'Beirne, 2014).
Role of practitioner judgment	Can be seen as secondary to, or even replaced by, rigorous research evidence.	Is a cornerstone of the process. The practitioner's expertise is essential for interpreting and applying evidence (Kennedy, 2014).
Goal of evidence use	Fidelity of implementation; applying a proven intervention correctly.	Productive use; empowering educators to make informed, context-sensitive judgments.
Associated concepts	Evidence-Based, top-down, protocol-driven, generalisability, 'pipeline' model (Davies, 1999).	Evidence-informed, bottom-up, professional judgment, contextualisation, 'useful' evidence (Brown & Rogers, 2014).

This shift from 'what works?' to 'what is useful here?' is more than a methodological preference; it represents a profound philosophical and political critique of how the EBP movement has been interpreted in education. As Biesta (2007, pp. 20–21) argues, the push for a generalisable science of educational research risks creating a 'democratic deficit' by sidelining crucial questions about the aims and values of education itself. He terms this the 'learnification' of education, a process in which the complex moral and social purposes of schooling are reduced to the efficient production of measurable learning outcomes (Biesta, 2015, p. 76). In this technocratic model, the teacher's role is implicitly recast from that of an autonomous, ethical professional to that of a technician delivering a pre-validated intervention (Biesta, 2012).

From this perspective, teacher scepticism towards top-down EBP mandates can be interpreted not merely as a resistance to evidence, but as a rational and ethical defence of their professional judgment and a rejection of the de-professionalising logic that underpins a purely instrumentalist view of their practice. This understanding of evidence as something that must be contextually useful and professionally affirming provides the necessary foundation for exploring the specific psychological filters that teachers apply when encountering new research.

2.2.2   The 'authenticity test'

The persistent gap between research and practice is not merely a failure of dissemination, but a complex social and psychological phenomenon. To understand why some evidence is embraced while other, often more robust, evidence is ignored, we must understand the mental shortcuts, or heuristics, that teachers use to assess new information in a time-poor, high-pressure environment. This section develops the concept of the 'authenticity test' to illuminate the crucial role of trust and source credibility in a teacher's decision to engage with evidence.

When a teacher encounters a new piece of research or a proposed strategy, their decision to engage is profoundly influenced by the credibility of its source (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). This involves two distinct forms of judgment. The first is a methodological credibility test, which is a technical appraisal of the research design itself: 'Is the sample size adequate?' or 'Does the study have a control group?'. This requires a degree of research literacy. More fundamentally, however, teachers apply what this analysis terms the 'authenticity test': a heuristic that judges the source of the evidence, not the evidence itself (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

This test is a social-psychological judgment, grounded in the core components of perceived credibility: competence, trustworthiness and caring (Lipsky, 1980; McCroskey & Teven, 1999). In teaching, a practical 'authenticity test' often operates, where recent and relevant classroom experience is treated as the primary proxy for a source's trustworthiness and competence. Sources with such experience are more likely to be trusted, particularly within high-trust ties, while those without are more easily dismissed (Berebitsky & Andrews-Larson, 2017; Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Díaz-Gibson et al., 2017; Spillane et al., 2012). This heuristic helps to explain the widely observed 'ivory tower' and 'smart but evil' phenomena (Care & Kim, 2018; Haney, 2024; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Mirvis et al., 2021; Rosman & Merk, 2021). Academics presenting methodologically robust research may fail the authenticity test if they are perceived as lacking an authentic, empathetic understanding of classroom realities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Right to Read Project, 2019), which aligns with findings that teachers are highly sceptical of CPD not directly applicable to their practice (Allen et al., 2025). Conversely, practitioner-bloggers or experienced colleagues may see their ideas readily adopted, even with a weaker formal evidence base, because they are viewed as authentic and trustworthy (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Daly, 2012). If authenticity is not perceived, the evidence

presented is often dismissed out of hand and the more technical methodological credibility test is never even applied (Patterson et al., 2007; Rosman & Merk, 2021; Wheeless, 1974). This is not an irrational response, but rather a rational and efficient coping mechanism within a low-trust system.

It is a way of establishing relational trust, which has been shown to be the essential currency of knowledge exchange and collective improvement in schools (Díaz-Gibson et al., 2017). This trust is also a key component of staff wellbeing and work fulfilment (Cann et al., 2021). This is where the role of knowledge brokers becomes critical. Knowledge brokers are typically school-based practitioners, such as research leads or instructional coaches, who act as trusted 'boundary-spanners' between the worlds of research and practice (Brown & Flood, 2020). Their primary function is not simply to disseminate information, but to use their established relational trust, their authenticity, to endorse, translate and contextualise research for their colleagues (Malin et al., 2019). By doing so, they help new ideas and practices pass the 'authenticity test', making them appear credible, relevant and immediately usable to their peers.

2.2.3   The 'confidence dividend' and self-efficacy

Beyond the initial filter of trust, sustained engagement with EBP is driven by its psychological impact on the teacher. To capture this, this thesis introduces the term 'confidence dividend' for the intrinsic reward of mastery, a tangible boost in professional self-efficacy that teachers experience after successfully implementing an EBP. This concept provides a crucial link between the cognitive act of using evidence and the motivational engine of professional action. Its power is best understood by contrasting the cycle, which this work calls 'evidence fatigue', with the virtuous cycle it can create (Guskey, 2002).

Evidence fatigue is a state of professional cynicism and burnout born from a history of failed, top-down and often disconnected policy initiatives (Fullan, 2011). It is a cycle where mandated changes that fail to produce results lead to lower self-efficacy, which in turn leads to greater resistance, cynicism and disengagement from future change efforts. This cynicism is a key symptom of burnout, manifesting as a loss of connection with students and a general indifference towards the profession (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The 'confidence dividend' is the engine of the virtuous cycle that breaks this fatigue. The process is as follows and it is grounded firmly in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977). First, a teacher, often guided by a trusted knowledge broker or coach, engages with a well-supported and contextually relevant EBP and experiences an initial success in their classroom. In the language of Bandura's theory, this provides a 'mastery experience', which he identified as the source for building a robust sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). This successful accomplishment directly informs the teacher of their capability.

This mastery experience can yield what Bandura (1977) would predict, and what this thesis terms, a 'confidence dividend': a measurable uplift in teachers' professional self-efficacy and in their conviction that they can enhance pupil learning. Higher self-efficacy, in turn, drives motivation, persistence and a willingness to experiment with EBPs, with recent research confirming the strong positive association between teaching self-efficacy and work engagement (Han & Wang, 2021; Li et al., 2023).

England's Early Career Framework (ECF) provided a compelling case study of this dynamic. Evaluations show that the programme successfully boosts ECTs' self-efficacy, with participants feeling more confident and better able to enact effective practice (Chung, 2023; Institute for Employment Studies (IES) & BMG Research, 2022; Walker et al., 2024). Yet the same evidence base exposes design weaknesses that risk blunting that dividend. A key challenge is the significant increase in workload for both ECTs and their mentors (Chung, 2023; Walker, 2024). Furthermore, many participants report that ECF content is repetitive of their initial teacher training and that its generic nature does not always align with their specific subject or phase needs (Institute for Employment Studies (IES) & BMG Research, 2022; Walker et al., 2024). This combination of high workload and perceived lack of relevance can erode teachers' sense of genuine mastery, muting self-efficacy gains and perpetuating the very evidence fatigue the framework was designed to counter. The Department for Education has acknowledged these shortcomings, with a revised Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) planned from September 2025, intended to eliminate duplication and improve flexibility (Department for Education, 2024a; Institute for Employment Studies (IES) & BMG Research, 2022). Whether these adjustments restore the programme's capacity to generate a robust confidence dividend remains an open empirical question.

2.2.4 Building trust and efficacy

If the 'authenticity test' and the 'confidence dividend' are the key psychological gates to EBP adoption, then effective professional learning and development (PLD) models are the mechanisms designed to open them. The most effective forms of PLD move beyond one-off courses or passive information delivery. Instead, they provide job-embedded, collaborative and sustained support that is explicitly designed to build both the trust and the efficacy necessary for teachers to engage meaningfully with new evidence. Personalised, one-to-one support, delivered through instructional coaching and mentoring, is fundamental to building the initial trust required for a teacher to risk trialling a new practice. These models directly address the 'authenticity test'. A coach or mentor, by definition, is a trusted colleague whose endorsement of an EBP makes it immediately more credible. Research confirms that the positive, trusting relationship built with a coach is a key factor in encouraging teachers to try new practices (Elfarargy et al., 2022). They perform multiple functions: they can model a new strategy in the teacher's own classroom, offer context-specific feedback, provide psychological safety for experimentation and help the teacher reflect on their practice (Knight, 2007). This

personalised, job-embedded approach has been shown to improve teachers' instructional practices and significantly boost their self-efficacy (Elfarargy et al., 2022; Poulou et al., 2019). It is crucial for helping the teacher secure an initial 'mastery experience,' which is the first and most critical step in generating the 'confidence dividend'. While individual coaching is effective, its effects are amplified when they are scaled to the group level through the establishment of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). PLCs are collaborative teams of teachers who work together interdependently to improve their practice through a continuous cycle of collective inquiry (DuFour, 2004). They are the engine rooms for professional learning within a school, creating a culture where evidence is regularly discussed, debated, collectively tested and adapted to the local context. Recent studies confirm that schools with strong PLCs see improvements in student achievement, as teachers collaboratively analyse data and share effective strategies (Liu & Yin, 2024). Within a PLC, the 'confidence dividend' generated by one teacher's success can be shared and celebrated, building the collective efficacy of the group, a shared belief in their joint ability to positively impact student learning (Goddard et al., 2000). This collaborative environment normalises evidence-informed practice, provides social persuasion, reduces teacher isolation and sustains momentum for improvement over the long term (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Liu & Yin, 2024). These dynamics, together with the roles of trust and efficacy, will be located explicitly within the COM-B framework in the following section.

2.2.5   Section summary

This section has examined the micro-level dynamics of EBP adoption, arguing that the gap between research and practice is a rational and predictable outcome of the professional conditions in which teachers work. It began by highlighting the 'paradox of evidence', shifting the central question of evidence use from a top-down, hierarchical 'what works?' to a more pragmatic, practitioner-focused 'what is useful here?'. This contextual approach, which values professional judgment, provides the necessary lens for understanding how evidence is truly perceived and used in schools.

Within this framework, the section introduced two key psychological heuristics that govern engagement. The first, the 'authenticity test', posits that teachers instinctively evaluate the source of evidence based on perceived classroom experience and relational trust. This social-psychological filter often prioritises the insights of trusted colleagues over abstract findings from unfamiliar academics, a rational strategy in a low-trust environment. The second, the 'confidence dividend', describes the boost in professional self-efficacy that occurs when a teacher successfully implements an evidence-informed practice. This psychological return, grounded in the concept of mastery experience, is a crucial motivator that counteracts 'evidence fatigue' and fuels a virtuous cycle of further engagement (Bandura, 1997).

Finally, the section identified the practical mechanisms designed to navigate these psychological factors. Models such as coaching, mentoring and PLCs, supported by the crucial work of school-based

knowledge brokers, create an ecosystem of trust and support. These structures help new ideas pass the authenticity test and enable teachers to secure the initial successes needed to generate the confidence dividend.

Having now examined both the macro-level systemic pressures that shape opportunity (Section 2.1) and the micro-level psychological and social dynamics that drive motivation and build capability (Section 2.2), the review will proceed to its final part. The following section will use the COM-B model to synthesise these disparate factors into a single, coherent analytical framework.

2.3 A COM-B analysis of the professional environment

The review thus far has identified a complex web of interacting forces that shape teacher engagement with EBP. To synthesise how these disparate factors, systemic and individual, external and internal, combine to produce observable behaviour, a holistic model is required. These dynamics are therefore brought together within the COM-B framework, which serves as the thesis's overarching conceptual and analytical lens. This synthesis integrates the systemic constraints described in Section 2.1 with the psychological heuristics introduced in Section 2.2, positioning them within COM-B's interdependent domains of capability, opportunity and motivation (Michie et al., 2011; Pilat & Krastev).

Since its development, the model's utility has been recognised beyond public health and it is increasingly used to analyse and influence professional behaviour in a range of organisational settings (Sidor, 2024). More recently, the COM-B model has begun to be applied within educational research, often to understand student behaviours or to frame professional development for teachers (Khalilollahi et al., 2023). However, this thesis employs the framework in a more critical and systemic capacity. Rather than simply using COM-B to map the attributes of individual teachers, this analysis uses it as a diagnostic tool to expose the dysfunctions of the professional system itself. It will argue that the 'accountability paradox' described in Section 2.1 functions as a systemic force that actively damages teachers' opportunity (by eroding autonomy and fostering a low-trust culture) and perverts their motivation (by replacing intrinsic professional drives with automatic responses of fear and compliance). This thesis, therefore, makes a novel contribution by demonstrating how the COM-B model can illuminate not just why an individual teacher might struggle to engage with EBP, but why the system itself is architected to produce the very research-practice gap it purports to solve. The model's strength lies in its ability to show that without addressing the profound constraints on professional opportunity and motivation, any interventions targeting teacher capability alone are destined for limited success.

For greater precision, this analysis uses the model's established sub-components. The first of these, capability, is understood to encompass both psychological capability, which refers to the requisite knowledge, comprehension and reasoning skills and physical capability, which pertains to

the physical skills and stamina needed to enact a practice. The second component, opportunity, is similarly divided into social opportunity, relating to the cultural norms, peer influences and social cues that make a behaviour possible and physical opportunity, which concerns the time, resources and environmental factors that enable that behaviour. Finally, the third component, motivation, is differentiated into reflective motivation, comprising the conscious goals, beliefs and values that guide intentions and automatic motivation, which involves the emotions, habits and impulses that drive behaviour more directly.

This section now uses this comprehensive framework to synthesise the factors identified throughout this review, culminating in a coherent model of teacher engagement with EBP.

2.3.1 Motivation (M)

The decision to seek out, adopt and sustain the use of evidence in the classroom is energised by the motivation component of the COM-B model. This is not a single entity, but a product of two interacting systems: the conscious, goal-oriented reflective system and the more immediate, emotional automatic system.

The heuristics introduced in Section 2.2 map directly onto these domains. The authenticity test reflects reflective motivation, filtering evidence through teachers' conscious evaluations of credibility and professional authenticity. The confidence dividend, by contrast, operates within automatic motivation, as the emotional 'pay-off' of self-efficacy creates an impulse to persist with evidence-informed practices. Trust plays a dual role: as social opportunity, it is embedded in the relational and cultural context that makes engagement possible, while also underpinning reflective judgments of authenticity. Similarly, efficacy spans both capability, drawing on the knowledge and skills needed to enact practice and automatic motivation, since feelings of competence sustain persistence and resilience. Clarifying these placements shows that the heuristics developed in this thesis are not parallel frameworks, but refinements that extend COM-B's explanatory power in the context of teacher engagement with evidence.

Reflective motivation

Reflective motivation encompasses the conscious intentions, evaluations and beliefs that guide professional life. In teaching, this is driven by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors identified in this review. These include what this thesis calls a 'vocational aspiration', a deep-seated ethical commitment to act in the best interests of students, which frames EBP as a professional responsibility to improve their life chances (Fullan, 2011). It also includes what this thesis terms a 'problem-solving impulse', a pragmatic, needs-based desire to find effective solutions for immediate classroom challenges, which positions EBP as a practical toolset. Finally, it is driven by professional curiosity and a commitment to lifelong learning, which is a core part of a teacher's professional

identity (Anka et al., 2025). These drivers are filtered through what this work terms 'calibrated scepticism', a crucial component of reflective motivation where professionals consciously weigh claims in proportion to the evidence, protecting them from fads while allowing them to engage constructively with new ideas (Bol et al., 2022).

Automatic motivation

Automatic motivation involves the emotions, habits and impulses that often unconsciously shape behaviour (Michie et al., 2011). This is the domain where the competing psychological forces identified in this review exert their influence. It is where the 'confidence dividend' operates as a potent positive motivator, grounded in self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The positive feeling of increased self-efficacy that follows a successful 'mastery experience' creates an automatic impulse to repeat and extend the behaviour, fuelling a virtuous cycle of engagement (Bandura, 1977; Schunk & Ertmer, 2000). Conversely, it is also the domain where the fear and anxiety generated by the accountability paradox exert their force (Perryman et al., 2025). The 'horrible, horrific ordeal' of high-stakes inspection, as described by an NEU member, creates a strong automatic impulse to avoid risk, retreat to safe and easily defensible practices and comply with external demands (Fitzsimons & Smith, 2025; National Education Union, 2024).

These two systems are in constant interaction with each other. A teacher's strong reflective motivation to innovate for their students can be completely overpowered by the automatic fear of failure within a low-trust, high-surveillance system. For EBP to be adopted and sustained, both the conscious, reflective 'want to' and the emotional, automatic 'feel able to' must be aligned and positively oriented.

2.3.2   Opportunity (O) and capability (C)

While motivation provides the engine for EBP, the school environment determines the road on which that engine can travel. The external landscape, encompassing both the wider policy context and the immediate school culture, creates the opportunity and builds the capability for teachers to act on their motivations. The evidence synthesised in this review suggests that without supportive external conditions, even the most motivated teacher will struggle, highlighting the primacy of opportunity in the COM-B system, particularly in English context.

Opportunity is arguably the most constrained component for English teachers. Physical opportunity, in the form of time and resources, is chronically limited by high workloads, much of which is driven by the data-generation demands of the accountability system.

Social opportunity, which refers to the prevailing professional culture, is severely damaged by the 'culture of performativity' and the low-trust climate it engenders. However, this is also where school-level factors have the most power to mediate negative systemic pressures. Peer networks, such as

PLCs, are a crucial part of this, as the 'persuasion of peers' provides social proof that a new practice is worthwhile, creating the social opportunity for ideas to gain traction (Arterbery & Yavuz, 2020, p. 164; Stoll et al., 2006). To capture this role, this thesis introduces the term 'leadership lever' for the mechanism through which leaders shape the opportunity landscape. They cultivate social opportunity by fostering a culture of trust, psychological safety and inquiry and they create physical opportunity by strategically allocating the most critical resources: time and funding (Bambrick-Santoyo & Lemov, 2018).

Capability, both psychological and physical, is the primary target of most formal professional development (Timperley et al., 2007). At a systemic level, national policies can act as 'forcing functions' to build psychological capability across the system (Campbell, 1969; Fullan, 2007). The ECF and the suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQ), a family of government-accredited leadership and specialist development programmes for teachers and school leaders in England, are prime examples, explicitly designed to build teachers' knowledge of evidence-based principles and to provide the physical opportunity (in the form of statutory time) for mentoring and development. However, a detailed case study of the ECF reveals the complex and often contradictory interplay of the COM-B components. The NFER's national evaluation found that the programme simultaneously constrained physical opportunity by significantly increasing workload, while also boosting automatic motivation and psychological capability through a marked increase in teachers' self-efficacy (Walker et al., 2024). Furthermore, data from Ofsted and Teacher Tapp suggest that the perceived lack of flexibility and relevance of standardised content can undermine reflective motivation by conflicting with teachers' professional judgment (Ofsted, 2025b). The success of such policies, therefore, is not guaranteed; it is heavily mediated by school leadership, which can buffer against these negative effects by providing the essential on-the-ground support that makes national frameworks viable.

2.3.3   Artificial intelligence

A comprehensive analysis must address the most significant contemporary development in English education: the concerted push by the Department for Education to integrate Artificial Intelligence (AI) into schools. This policy initiative interacts directly and complexly with all three components of the COM-B model, providing a vivid real-time example of the framework's utility.

The government's primary stated goal for AI is workload reduction, positioning it as a policy lever to increase teachers' physical opportunity by freeing up time currently spent on administrative and resource-creation tasks (Department for Education, 2025a). In theory, more time creates more opportunity for teachers to engage in the deeper work of professional development and evidence-informed practice.

The impact of AI on psychological capability is inherently double-edged. For experienced teachers with established pedagogical schemas, AI-generated lesson resources can reduce extraneous cognitive load, thereby freeing mental capacity for higher-order tasks such as differentiation and addressing individual student needs. Systematic review evidence supports this potential, highlighting the ways in which AI can enhance efficiency and provide more time for higher-level pedagogical thinking (Tan et al., 2025). However, for novice teachers, reliance on AI may curtail engagement in the 'absolutely necessary' cognitive work required to construct foundational schemas (Kirschner et al., 2006; Tan et al., 2025). In such cases, the very efficiencies AI promises risk inadvertently slowing the development of deep professional capability, as teachers are shielded from the processes of pedagogical reasoning that underpin expertise.

Finally, a critical perspective must acknowledge the ethical dimensions that impact motivation. The potential for algorithmic bias to perpetuate societal inequities, concerns over student data privacy and issues of equitable access to AI tools all present significant challenges that could undermine teachers' ethical and professional reflective motivation to engage with the technology (Marian University Libraries, n.d.; Sreerama & Krishnamoorthy, 2022). The integration of AI, therefore, provides an illustration of the complex and often contradictory interplay between capability, opportunity and motivation, where an intervention designed to enhance one component may inadvertently undermine another.

2.3.4   Section summary

Section 2.3 places the COM-B model at the heart of the thesis's analysis, using it not as a checklist of teacher attributes but as a diagnostic lens on the professional environment. It contends that England's high-stakes accountability regime triggers an 'accountability paradox' that simultaneously limits opportunity, through loss of autonomy, time and trust, and distorts motivation by replacing intrinsic professional drives with the fear-based compliance demanded by inspection. Consequently, reforms that concentrate solely on enhancing teacher capability can offer, at best, fragile gains.

The narrative unpacks each COM-B component in turn. Motivation is portrayed as the interplay of reflective forces, moral purpose, problem-solving pragmatism and professional curiosity moderated by 'calibrated scepticism', and automatic forces, which oscillate between the positive 'confidence dividend' of self-efficacy and the anxiety that fuels performative, risk-averse behaviours. Opportunity emerges as the most constrained element: workloads inflated by data demands restrict physical time, while a culture of performativity corrodes social support. Yet the text shows that strong school leadership and professional learning communities can rebuild trust and create the time and resources teachers need. Capability, meanwhile, is the main target of national initiatives such as the Early Career Framework and the suite of NPQs; although these programmes raise knowledge and self-efficacy,

their inflexibility can exacerbate workload and conflict with professional judgement, illustrating the interdependence of COM-B domains.

The section closes by examining the government's push to embed artificial intelligence in schools. AI is presented as a real-time test of COM-B: it promises to free time and thus expand opportunity, but it may also stunt the development of novices' pedagogical schemas, weakening capability and raise ethical concerns that sap motivation. Taken together, the analysis argues that genuine progress on EBP demands systemic remedies that rebalance opportunity and motivation alongside capability, rather than technocratic fixes focused on teachers alone.

The interrelationships between these elements are summarised in Figure 1. The figure presents a COM-B-informed framework in which teacher engagement with EBP is depicted as the behavioural outcome shaped by three interacting levels of influence. At the top is the macro policy environment – a high-stakes, low-trust architecture of governance and performativity that constitutes the accountability paradox and primarily shapes professional opportunity. Beneath this are the school-level conditions for professional learning, including leadership and culture, the design of CPD and wider professional learning and development (PLD), coaching and mentoring, professional learning communities and the work of knowledge brokers. These structures mediate systemic pressures by building capability and creating, or constraining, the social and physical opportunities for teachers to engage with evidence. At the base is the individual teacher, whose professional identity and ethical commitments, together with the psychological heuristics of the authenticity test, calibrated scepticism and the confidence dividend of self-efficacy, drive reflective and automatic motivation. Arrows from each level converge on teachers' everyday engagement with EBP, while the COM-B components of capability, opportunity and motivation, shown in the right-hand column, provide the analytic lens for interpreting these relationships. The figure therefore depicts both a hierarchy of influences (macro, meso and micro) and the dynamic inter-relationships between the core concepts that structure the empirical analysis in later chapters.

Figure 1

COM-B Conceptual framework for teacher engagement with EBP
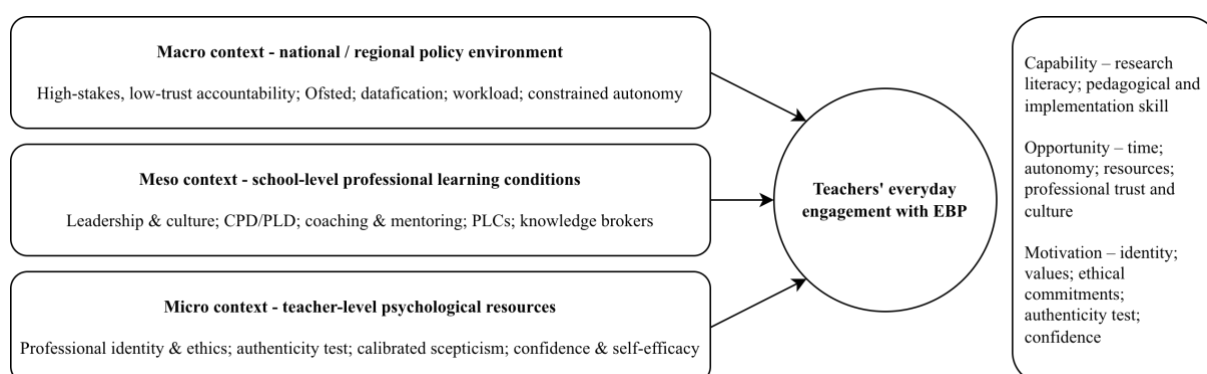
2.4   Chapter summary

This chapter has developed a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the complex behaviour of teacher engagement with EBP. It has argued that this engagement is not a simple technical act of knowledge transfer, but a deeply social and psychological process determined by the dynamic interplay between the individual professional and the system in which they work.

The argument began by establishing the challenging professional context of the English education system. It argued that a systemic 'accountability paradox' creates a high-stakes, low-trust environment that fundamentally constrains professional autonomy, a key component of opportunity in the COM-B model and perversely re-channels teacher agency towards performative, compliance-oriented behaviours. This culture of performativity, it was argued, creates a systemic barrier to authentic EBP.

The review then moved from this macro-level context to the micro-level, examining the heuristics teachers use to navigate this landscape. It was argued that in a low-trust environment, teachers rationally apply an 'authenticity test' to judge the trustworthiness of evidence sources, prioritising relational trust and perceived experience. Furthermore, their sustained engagement is driven by the prospect of a 'confidence dividend', a boost in self-efficacy grounded in the concept of mastery experience, that enhances automatic motivation and creates a virtuous cycle of improvement (Bandura, 1997). Professional development strategies such as coaching, mentoring and PLCs, facilitated by school-based knowledge brokers, were presented as the practical mechanisms for building the trust and capability needed to overcome these psychological barriers.

Finally, the chapter employed the COM-B model to synthesise these disparate factors into a single, coherent analytical framework. This analysis demonstrated that for EBP to occur, a teacher's motivation (both reflective and automatic) must be high, their capability (psychological and physical skills) must be developed and, crucially, the opportunity (both social and physical) must be present. The application of the model to contemporary policies, such as the ECF and the rise of AI, illustrates that these components are deeply interdependent and that policy interventions often create complex trade-offs between them.

Therefore, the central theoretical proposition emerging from this review is that in the specific context of the English education system, the three COM-B components are not equally weighted. The literature strongly suggests that opportunity, shaped by the systemic pressures of the accountability paradox, acts as the primary gatekeeper, creating the conditions under which motivation and capability can, or cannot, flourish (Michie et al., 2011). Consequently, the literature suggests that interventions targeting only teacher capability or motivation will likely have limited impact unless they also address the structural constraints on professional opportunity.

While this review has constructed a comprehensive model based on existing literature, the model remains theoretical. It highlights gaps and tensions that can only be resolved through empirical investigation into the lived experiences of teachers. This thesis seeks to test and enrich this model by asking: (RQ1) How do secondary school teachers in England understand and perceive EBP within the framework of current educational policies? This question probes the real-world manifestation of the 'paradox of evidence' and the 'calibrated scepticism' identified in Section 2.2. Furthermore, it asks: (RQ2) What factors influence secondary school teachers' understanding and implementation of EBP in their practice? This question seeks to empirically map the interplay of the COM-B components, investigating the relative power of systemic pressures (opportunity) versus individual drivers (motivation, capability) in the daily lives of teachers. Finally, looking towards solutions, it asks: (RQ3) How can teachers' perceptions and experiences inform future educational policies and professional development programmes to better support the implementation of EBP? This question aims to move beyond critique, using the voices of practitioners to identify leverage points within the system, ways to redesign CPD and policy to be 'COM-B aware' and genuinely supportive of an evidence-informed profession. This comprehensive theoretical framework, which provides the necessary justification and analytical lens for this empirical investigation, is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

COM-B in an educational context

Component	Sub-component	Formal definition (Michie et al., 2011)	Educational example from this review
Capability (C)	Psychological	Knowledge or psychological skills, strength, or stamina to engage in the necessary mental processes.	A teacher's research literacy and their knowledge of pedagogical principles, developed through mechanisms like the ECF and supported by knowledge brokers (Brown & Flood, 2020; Walker et al., 2024).
	Physical	Physical skill, strength, or stamina to perform the behaviour.	A teacher's skill in executing a specific classroom management routine or a complex instructional strategy, often honed through coaching and mentoring (Knight, 2007)

Component	Sub-component	Formal definition (Michie et al., 2011)	Educational example from this review
Opportunity (O)	Physical	Opportunity afforded by the environment, e.g. time, resources, locations and physical affordances.	The provision of dedicated time for collaborative planning, which is often constrained by workload pressures exacerbated by accountability demands (Walker et al., 2024).
	Social	Opportunity afforded by cultural milieu that dictates the way that we think about things, e.g. cultural norms.	A school culture of high relational trust and inquiry fostered by leadership, often operationalised within a PLC (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Stoll et al., 2006).
Motivation (M)	Reflective	Reflective processes involving plans (self-conscious intentions) and evaluations (beliefs about what is good and bad).	A teacher's professional identity as a learner, their ethical commitment to student equity and the vocational aspiration to improve student outcomes (Fullan, 2011; National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, 2023).
	Automatic	Automatic processes involving emotional reactions, desires (wants and needs) and impulses.	The fear and anxiety generated by a high-stakes Ofsted inspection versus the positive feeling of increased self-efficacy from the 'confidence dividend' (Bandura, 1997; Education Support, 2023; Institute for Employment Studies (IES) & BMG Research, 2025).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter sets out the methodological foundations for this inquiry. It begins by articulating the thesis's philosophical stance, explaining why a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is essential for addressing the research questions. It then details the research design, justifying the use of semi-structured interviews and the Critical Incident Technique. A transparent account of the purposive sampling strategy and the context of the participating schools and teachers is provided. Following this, the chapter details the two-phased data analysis procedure, which combines inductive reflexive thematic analysis with a deductive overlay using the COM-B model. The chapter concludes by discussing the structured processes employed to ensure trustworthiness and rigour, outlining the ethical considerations that guided the research and acknowledging the thesis's limitations.

3.1   Research paradigm and theoretical considerations

This thesis explores how secondary-school teachers interpret, enact and sometimes resist EBP within a policy terrain that simultaneously venerates and challenges 'evidence'. The investigation is guided by three interwoven research questions: How do teachers make sense of EBP under current policy conditions? Which contextual, relational and individual forces contour their day-to-day engagement with evidence? And how might those situated understandings inform the design of future policy and professional-learning initiatives?

Answering these questions requires a methodological approach that honours complexity and lived experience. Therefore, this enquiry is situated within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. This philosophical position is not merely a preference but an analytic imperative, flowing directly from the research questions. The paradigm proceeds from the ontological assumption that reality is not a single, objective entity but a multiple, ever-shifting and socially negotiated tapestry (Crotty, 1988; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). From this perspective, what counts as reliable evidence is not fixed but is co-produced through the everyday interactions of pupils, colleagues, leadership and policy artefacts. Epistemologically, the thesis adopts an interpretivist stance, viewing knowledge as provisional and co-constructed within the relational space between researcher and participant, a 'fusion of horizons' in Gadamer (1975, p. 301) terms. The researcher is not a neutral vessel discovering facts but a reflexive interlocutor whose presence shapes the stories that emerge (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt, 2000). A positivist or critical-realist alternative would risk fracturing these entangled processes into de-contextualised variables, obscuring the very dialogic complexity the research seeks to understand. This philosophical foundation, which foregrounds co-constructed meaning and situated experience, directly informs the research design and the specific methods of data collection and analysis detailed in the sections that follow.

This philosophical foundation directly informs the chosen methods. To capture richly textured accounts, the study employed semi-structured interviews, which provided a broad conversational framework. This was augmented by the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) as a focused elicitation strategy. In line with foundational work, CIT prompted recollections of specific incidents where the 'purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear... and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects' (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327). Inviting participants to narrate these moments of triumph, misfire, or quiet routine mitigated the risk of eliciting generic statements and kept the analysis grounded in the lived realities of professional practice (Butterfield et al., 2005; Flanagan, 1954; Gremler, 2004).

For the analysis, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was selected as it coheres with the study's paradigm. RTA rejects the notion that themes pre-exist in the data, instead foregrounding the analyst's active role in crafting patterned, theoretically situated stories (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis unfolded as an iterative traversal of Braun and Clarke's six reflexive phases (2006, 2019). The process began with intensive familiarisation, re-listening to audio files and composing reflexive memos to foreground the researcher's assumptions (Ortlipp, 2008). This was followed by systematic, data-close coding with an emphasis on honouring participant language while signalling nascent theoretical hunches (Koch, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Codes were then grouped into provisional themes, which were compared, collapsed and elaborated through repeated dialogue with the full corpus and the broader literature until each candidate theme demonstrated both internal coherence and external distinctiveness.

Only after a persuasive thematic architecture had stabilised were the findings re-examined through the COM-B model (Michie et al., 2011). In this final stage, the components of capability, opportunity and motivation functioned not as recoding categories but as 'sensitising constructs' (Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006). This sequencing allowed the COM-B framework to illuminate how experiential patterns translated into, or were obstructed from becoming, observable classroom practice, thus preserving the inductive integrity of the thematic analysis while positioning the results within a robust model of behaviour capable of informing intervention design (Tracy, 2010).

To ensure the rigour and credibility of this interpretive approach, two potential critiques are addressed proactively. First, to counter the charge that researcher subjectivity may lead to idiosyncratic findings, a contemporaneous reflexive journal was maintained to document theoretical hunches, decision points and epistemic doubts, rendering the researcher's constitutive agency visible and auditable (Finlay, 2002; Ortlipp, 2008). Second, in addressing the critique of generalisability, the thesis eschews statistical claims in favour of theoretical transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The primary mechanism for achieving this is thick description. Coined by Geertz (1973), thick description moves beyond a 'thin' reporting of facts, what happened, to an interpretive account of what

was going on. It involves embedding teachers' actions and utterances within a dense web of context, capturing not only their observable behaviours but also their intentions, the shifting policy pressures they navigate and the negotiated meanings that emerge within their departmental cultures.

By rendering this lived reality in such detail, the study provides readers with a rich, contextualised narrative. This allows them to make informed judgments about the extent to which the findings may resonate with, or diverge from, their own professional settings, thereby transforming the often-levied charge of limited generalisability into a strength of situated, nuanced understanding (Nowell et al., 2017). In bringing reflexive thematic analysis and the COM-B model into a carefully sequenced conversation, this methodology balances micro-level experiential texture with macro-level interpretive utility. It establishes a foundation capable of speaking credibly to classroom practice, school leadership and system-level policy reform.

3.2   Reflections on researcher positionality

The investigator's positionality is not merely a contextual factor to be managed, but a central analytic resource leveraged throughout the inquiry (Finlay, 2002). My own positionality is profoundly shaped by an intellectual and professional journey from the natural sciences to the classroom. My academic background is rooted in science, with both my BSc and MSc predominantly involving lab work. This training instilled in me a predisposition towards quantitative methodologies and a positivist search for objective truths, which sparked my initial interest in EBP. Upon transitioning to a career in teaching, I carried this scientific orientation with me, initially championing the EBP movement promoted by the Department for Education (DfE) indirectly through the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

However, my direct experience as a classroom teacher and later a line-manager revealed a significant disconnect. I came to perceive that the version of EBP being promoted was often not a genuine embrace of research inquiry, but was instead instrumentalised as a top-down, accountability-driven mechanism. Policies appeared 'cherry-picked' and were translated into simplified, often 'mutated' mandates at the school level, which I observed as doing more harm than good. This has led me to my current position: that for EBP to be beneficial, it must not come at a cost to teacher wellbeing or professional autonomy. Rather, teachers should be trusted and empowered as professionals to critically evaluate and adapt evidence to the unique needs of their students and contexts.

This journey defines my complex insider positionality. I was a colleague to all participants and the direct line-manager for Eleanor (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This relational status was coupled with my intellectual journey as a 'former advocate'. The term 'former advocate' here is specific; I am a former advocate for the top-down, compliance-focused model of EBP I first encountered, not of evidence itself. My personal and professional journey, from championing decontextualised effect sizes to a deep appreciation for situated complexity, mirrors the core tension of

the thesis itself: the chasm between reductive policy and the lived reality of the classroom. This 'encounter with complexity' precipitated my methodological pivot from measurement to meaning-making (Biesta, 2010) and the choice of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was therefore deliberate. RTA values the researcher's subjectivity as an 'analytic resource' to be made 'explicit, accountable and theoretically generative' (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

My insider status as a colleague to all participants conferred undeniable advantages. Recruitment was swift, rapport was easily established and a shared professional shorthand facilitated open communication (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). At the same time, this familiarity carried risks. The specific hierarchical relationship with Eleanor, for whom I was line-manager, required particular attention, as it could mute dissent or lead the participant to provide answers they assumed I expected. To counteract this, I began each interview with a clear reminder that participation was voluntary, entirely separate from any appraisal process and that only aggregated, pseudonymised findings would be reported (Kaiser, 2009; Petrova et al., 2016). Reflexivity was also crucial in managing this dual role. From the pilot phase onward, I kept a reflexive journal to note moments when my prior knowledge or managerial perspective, especially concerning Eleanor, might have influenced interview questions or initial interpretations. I later revisited these entries to surface implicit biases and recalibrate my analytic lens, ensuring my positionality was continuously examined and leveraged as an analytic resource rather than a source of distortion (Lincoln & Guba, 1982).

3.3   Ethical considerations and trustworthiness

3.3.1   Ethical considerations

Before data collection began, the project obtained approval from the University of Reading's Institute of Education ethics board, confirming alignment with the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018; Race & Vidal-Hall, 2019). Copies of the ethics approval form, the Data Protection Declaration and the Data Management Plan are provided in Appendix A, Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively, while the participant information sheets and consent forms for teachers and headteachers appear in Appendix D and Appendix E. Once headteachers' permission was secured, I sent recruitment emails to staff outlining the thesis's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation and the plan for a 45-minute interview structured around critical-incident prompts. Interested teachers contacted the researcher directly to volunteer procedure intended to shield them from any managerial pressure during recruitment (Wiles & Boddy, 2013).

Prior to each interview, participants received an information sheet and signed a consent form (Appendices A-E) that detailed anonymity safeguards, data-storage protocols and their right to

withdraw from the study up until their transcript had been verified (Israel & Hay, 2006). Questions were encouraged and answered in plain language to ensure consent was fully informed and unhurried.

During transcription, all identifying details (such as personal or school names, project titles, or specific local references) were removed or replaced with pseudonyms (Kaiser, 2009). Digital recordings and transcripts were stored on an encrypted, password-protected drive and any handwritten materials, such as the field notes taken after each interview (Appendix G) and the researcher's ongoing reflexive notes (Appendix H), were kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher.

De-identified excerpts from the data were shared with academic supervisors solely for feedback, reassuring participants that their candour would not compromise their professional relationships (Cresswell & Poth, 2018).

3.3.2   Trustworthiness and rigour

In qualitative research, rigour is demonstrated not through statistical measures of validity and reliability, but through the establishment of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To demonstrate that the findings of this inquiry are 'worth paying attention to' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290), this thesis adopts the four criteria of trustworthiness that are considered the 'gold standard' in interpretive research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The following sections detail the specific strategies employed to meet each of these criteria.

Credibility

Credibility, analogous to internal validity in quantitative research, refers to confidence in the truth of the findings. It is addressed through several integrated strategies. First, the study employed triangulation of data sources (Denzin, 1978). Thematic claims derived from interview data were systematically compared with publicly available documents, including statutory guidance from the Department for Education, Ofsted inspection reports for both schools and anonymised school-level artefacts such as departmental guidance documents and lesson resources. This allowed for the corroboration of accounts and the identification of contextual pressures shaping participants' experiences.

Second, where divergences emerged between interview data and documentary evidence, negative case analysis was employed. This involved a deliberate search for and examination of, data that contradicted or challenged emerging themes. Rather than being dismissed, these tensions were analysed until the thematic structure could be refined to account for them, thereby enhancing the robustness and explanatory power of the final analysis.

Third, the researcher's structured reflexive practice was a cornerstone of establishing credibility. As detailed in Section 3.2, a contemporaneous reflexive journal was maintained throughout the research process to render the researcher's constitutive role in knowledge production transparent and auditable (Finlay, 2002; Ortlipp, 2008). This practice of making my assumptions and decision-making processes explicit allows readers to assess the coherence between the data and the interpretations presented (Meyrick, 2006).

Transferability

Transferability, the parallel to external validity in quantitative analyses, addresses the extent to which findings can have applicability in other contexts. In qualitative inquiry, this is not a matter of statistical generalisation but of providing the necessary conditions for readers to make their own judgements about 'fittingness' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The primary mechanism for achieving this is thick description (Geertz, 1973). By providing detailed contextual information about the participating schools (Section 3.4.2), rich pen portraits of the participants (Section 3.4.3) and extensive, contextualised verbatim extracts in the findings chapter, the thesis offers a dense and vivid account of the research setting. This allows readers to make informed comparisons and to determine the degree to which the findings might resonate with, or diverge from, their own professional realities (Nowell et al., 2017).

Dependability

Dependability, analogous to reliability, concerns the stability and consistency of the research process over time. The key strategy for ensuring dependability in this study was the creation of a comprehensive audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The entire analytic process was conducted within NVivo software, which automatically time-stamped and logged every decision, from the creation of initial codes to the merging and refining of themes. This created a detailed, line-by-line history that makes the analytic pathway from raw data to final themes transparent and traceable. This auditable trail, supplemented by the reflexive journal and detailed methodological chapter, allows an external reviewer to follow the research process and understand how the conclusions were reached, thereby attesting to the study's dependability (Elo et al., 2014).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the neutrality or objectivity of the findings, ensuring they are grounded in the participants' data rather than the researcher's biases or interests. While complete objectivity is impossible in interpretive research, confirmability is achieved by demonstrating how conclusions are logically derived from the data. The audit trail described under dependability is the primary tool for this. Furthermore, the explicit and detailed discussion of researcher positionality (Section 3.2) is a crucial strategy for enhancing confirmability. By making my own journey, assumptions and potential

influences on the research process transparent, I enable the reader to assess how my perspective may have shaped the interpretation of the data. This reflexive transparency ensures that the findings can be confirmed as coherent with the data, as viewed through the declared lens of the researcher (Meyrick, 2006).

By systematically addressing these four criteria, this study establishes a robust foundation of trustworthiness, ensuring the rigour and integrity of its methodological process and the credibility of its findings.

3.4   Research design

3.4.1   Data sampling

A sampling strategy was employed to recruit an information-rich yet heterogeneous group of secondary-school teachers (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2002). Data collection began while I was still employed at School A, an inner-city academy and continued after my move to School B, a local-authority comprehensive, so five participants came from School A and five participants from School B. The two institutions were chosen not for convenience alone but because, together, they embody the dominant governance models in English secondary education, direct-funded academy and maintained comprehensive, thereby offering a natural experiment in how contrasting organisational conditions shape teachers' engagement with evidence (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Despite this structural contrast, both schools serve socially mixed urban catchments and operate within the same national policy climate, keeping extraneous contextual variation in check and permitting meaningful comparison of practice rather than of environment. Selecting one setting where I was an established insider and another where I was a recent arrival further sharpened reflexive awareness of positionality and reduced the risk that insight would be clouded by a single vantage-point. Thus, the pairing provided maximum variation in relevant organisational features alongside sufficient common ground to support credible analytic inference.

Having secured head-teacher consent at both sites, I mapped each staff structure and invited teachers whose roles and experience promised the greatest analytic breadth. Ten teachers, five in each school, volunteered and all were retained, producing a sample that spanned subject leads, early-career teachers and pastoral specialists. Because participation rested on individual choice rather than managerial nomination, recruitment was free of coercive pressure (Wiles & Boddy, 2013). Every participant received a detailed information sheet and signed written consent covering anonymity and data security (Cohen et al., 2017).

In line with the concept of information power (Malterud et al., 2016), sufficiency was reached after the tenth interview. This decision rested on three considerations aligned with the concept of 'information power'. First, the study's narrow aim (examining the process of engagement) meant that depth was

prioritised over breadth. Second, the sample's relative homogeneity (teachers in similar urban schools) meant that patterns were likely to become visible with fewer participants. Third, the use of a strong theoretical framework and dialogic interview style ensured the data collected was rich and conceptually dense, indicating that additional interviews would yield diminishing returns (Guest et al., 2006; Saunders & Townsend, 2016). Thus, a sample of ten was considered sufficient to reach a point of meaningful understanding for the research questions without sacrificing depth for breadth.

3.4.2   School context

To enable judgements about the transferability of the findings, it is essential to provide a 'thick description' of the research context (Geertz, 1973). Table 3 provides key contextual data for the two participating schools, moving beyond simple descriptors to offer a richer, more nuanced portrait of the environments in which participants worked. This level of detail is crucial for allowing readers to assess the degree to which the study's insights might apply to their own settings.

Table 3

School contextual data

School	School A	School B
Type	Academy (part of a Multi-Academy Trust)	Local Authority Maintained (Foundation School)
Pupil roll	c. 1000	c. 2000
Ofsted Judgement	Good	Good
Key contextual factors	Multi-academy trust (MAT), a group of state-funded schools in England governed by a single charitable trust and board of trustees, improvement strategy emphasises 'quality-first teaching' and instructional coaching, and is also an SSAT Leading Edge school, a badge that signals its aspiration to be a high-performing, research-engaged institution. Within this infrastructure	Grapples with high pupil mobility and staffing turbulence; parent-forum minutes record occasions when pupils encountered eight supply teachers in ten lessons during the Covid-19 resurgence. In response, its leadership has adopted a compliance-oriented improvement model, codifying the School B Way and earmarking £216000 of pupil-premium funding for tightly specified,

leaders promote The School A Way, foregrounding Rosenshine's Principles, retrieval practice and metacognition and routinely draw on Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) guidance in staff development	EEF-aligned interventions whose fidelity is monitored closely.

3.4.3 Participants pen portraits

To further contextualise the data and honour the individuality of those who took part, pen portraits for each of the ten participants are provided in Table 4. All participant names are pseudonyms, chosen to protect their anonymity while helping to humanise their accounts. This detail is vital for demonstrating the heterogeneity of the sample and for allowing analysis of how findings may differ across roles and experience levels.

Table 4

Participant pen portraits

Participant (pseudonym)	School	Role	Teaching experience
Eleanor	A	Second in department	20+ years
David	A	Deputy Headteacher	20+ years
Chloe	A	ECT	1 year
Michael	A	Subject Leader	10 years
Fatima	A	Class teacher	5+ years
Sarah	B	Lead practitioner	10+ years
Ben	B	Class teacher	6 years
Aisha	B	Subject Leader	7 years
Liam	B	Subject Leader	10 years
Maria	B	Deputy Headteacher	10 years

3.5   Data collection

This study adopted semi-structured interviews within a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) framework because this approach accords with the study's interpretivist epistemology, in which knowledge is treated as a situated, dialogic accomplishment rather than a pre-existing commodity (Kvale, 1996; Schwandt, 1994). The format afforded sufficient conversational latitude for teachers to offer richly textured, at times contradictory, accounts of evidence use, enabling participant-led avenues of enquiry while keeping discussion anchored to the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Such elasticity yields the 'chunky, context-rich' data that RTA requires for iterative, reflexive interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021) and aligns with Geertz's (1973) call for 'thick description' to understand meaning in context.

To prevent discussion drifting into abstraction, Critical Incident Technique (CIT) prompts were incorporated into the schedule after alternative elicitation devices, stimulated recall with lesson videos and vignette scenarios, proved less effective during piloting. CIT requires participants to recount concrete episodes with clear purposes and consequences, thereby surfacing tacit, context-bound decision-making (Butterfield et al., 2005; Flanagan, 1954). This approach anchored discussion in lived practice and revealed both the practical and emotional contours of classroom judgement. In this way, the hybrid design moved beyond what teachers claim to believe about EBP towards how they actually deploy, adapt, or resist it amid competing classroom pressures. Each narrated incident was earmarked as an initial code, for example, 'data-driven success' or 'evidence-resistant workaround', linking data generation directly to the first analytic cycle of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Table 5 summarises the advantages of integrating CIT in this thesis, the potential disadvantages noted in the literature and the strategies used to mitigate these challenges. Together, these measures enhance the trustworthiness of the data generated.

Table 5

Rationale for and mitigation of challenges within the Critical Incident Technique

Advantages of CIT for this inquiry	Potential disadvantages & challenges	Mitigation strategies employed in this thesis
Accesses concrete episodes of practice, grounding the analysis in 'lived realities' and avoiding overly abstract data.	Reliance on participant memory, which can be selective or imprecise, risking recall bias.	Interviews were scheduled promptly after initial contact to reduce the time lag. The CIT prompt was framed to allow for recall of both recent and highly significant past events.

Advantages of CIT for this inquiry	Potential disadvantages & challenges	Mitigation strategies employed in this thesis
Mitigates against generic statements, ensuring data is specific, detailed and focused on actual behaviours.	A focus on 'critical' incidents may obscure the nature of routine, everyday practice, leading to an overly dramatic portrayal.	The interview prompt was deliberately phrased to elicit a range of incidents, explicitly asking for stories of 'triumph, misfire, or quiet routine' to ensure a balanced perspective on professional life.
Elicits rich narrative data that reveals professional judgement, emotional responses and practical reasoning in context.	Participants may be reluctant to discuss 'misfires' or failures due to impression management or fear of judgement, leading to socially desirable responses.	The researcher's 'dual insider' status was leveraged to build rapport. Explicit assurances of strict anonymity and the decoupling of the research from any appraisal processes were given at the start of each interview.
Provides a flexible method that can be easily integrated into a semi-structured interview format to elicit stories with minimal researcher presupposition.	The definition of an 'incident' can be ambiguous, potentially leading to inconsistent data across participants.	The interview guide, including the CIT prompt, was piloted with two non-participating teachers and subsequently refined to ensure the request was clear, consistent and readily understood.

The interview guide, refined through a pilot with two non-participating teachers, was organised as a deliberate funnel (King & Horrocks, 2010), beginning with teachers' conceptual understandings and narrowing steadily towards situated action and structural influences. For example, participants were first asked, 'In your own words, what does evidence-based practice mean to you as a teacher?' before later being invited to recount a critical incident: 'Can you describe a recent moment of triumph, misfire or quiet routine where an evidence-based approach shaped your teaching?' This pairing captured both abstract beliefs and lived enactments, thereby operationalising the study's aim to link espoused theories with theories-in-use (see Appendix F). Ten interviews, each thirty to fifty minutes long, were then completed and audio-recorded with explicit consent. Participants chose either a face-to-face session in a quiet school room or a remote conversation via Microsoft Teams. Face-to-face interaction is often considered the qualitative 'gold standard' because it affords richer observation of gesture, posture and eye contact, deepening rapport and enabling sensitive follow-up

questions while contextual cues such as displays of pupil work can prompt fuller critical-incident narratives (Irvine et al., 2013; Self, 2021). Yet arranging a suitable time and securing rooms imposed logistical burdens that might have deterred heavily timetabled teachers and the researcher's physical presence risked heightening social-desirability bias (Khalil & Cowie, 2020). Video-conferencing removed geographical barriers, allowed screen-share of attainment dashboards, eliminated travel-related costs and emissions and used Teams' automatic transcription to expedite accurate, GDPR-compliant data capture (Archibald et al., 2019; Microsoft, 2025). Nevertheless, limited camera framing attenuates non-verbal cues, bandwidth drop-outs can fracture narrative flow and digital-divide issues, unreliable broadband or limited platform literacy, may skew participation towards better-resourced teachers (Foley, 2021; Krouwel et al., 2019). To balance strengths and weaknesses, identical guides were used in every mode; a contingency telephone number was supplied for online interviews; and sessions were scheduled at times least likely to clash with lesson change-overs or domestic responsibilities, with face-to-face meetings held in private, neutral rooms to dampen power dynamics and social-desirability cues (Archibald et al., 2019; Elwood & Martin, 2000).

All recordings were transcribed verbatim, despite the labour-intensive nature of the task, to preserve the nuance of spoken language and avoid the loss of contextual detail that 'tidying up' can introduce (King & Horrocks, 2010). Statements deemed sensitive, such as references to safeguarding concerns, were redacted at transcription and data were stored solely on the university's encrypted server, satisfying ethical requirements for handling potentially reputational narratives. Sample sufficiency was assessed through information power rather than saturation: by interview nine new material merely elaborated existing codes and one further interviews confirmed pattern stability (Malterud et al., 2016). Throughout the process the researcher, himself a former teacher, kept a reflexive journal (Appendix H) to monitor how shared professional identity might shape data generation and interpretation (Berger, 2015). The resulting corpus, grounded in vivid participant-selected incidents yet suffused with teachers' interpretative framings, provides the layered material requisite for RTA's recursive journey from coding to theme refinement, thereby maximising the study's capacity to illuminate how evidence-based practice is imagined, negotiated and enacted in the contingent realities of school life.

3.6   Data analysis

The analytic procedure was designed to ensure methodological coherence with the study's constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. It unfolded in two deliberately sequenced stages to balance the prioritisation of participant meaning with the need for an explanatory framework. Stage 1 comprised an inductive RTA, designed to let themes arise organically from the data while the researcher continually interrogated their own subjectivity. Stage 2 applied a deductive conceptual overlay, using the COM-B model (Michie et al., 2011) to illuminate, without dictating, the inductively generated

themes. The ordering of the stages was critical: it safeguarded the inductive integrity of the findings and ensured that the COM-B framework functioned as an interpretive lens rather than a prescriptive template (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Data analysis process
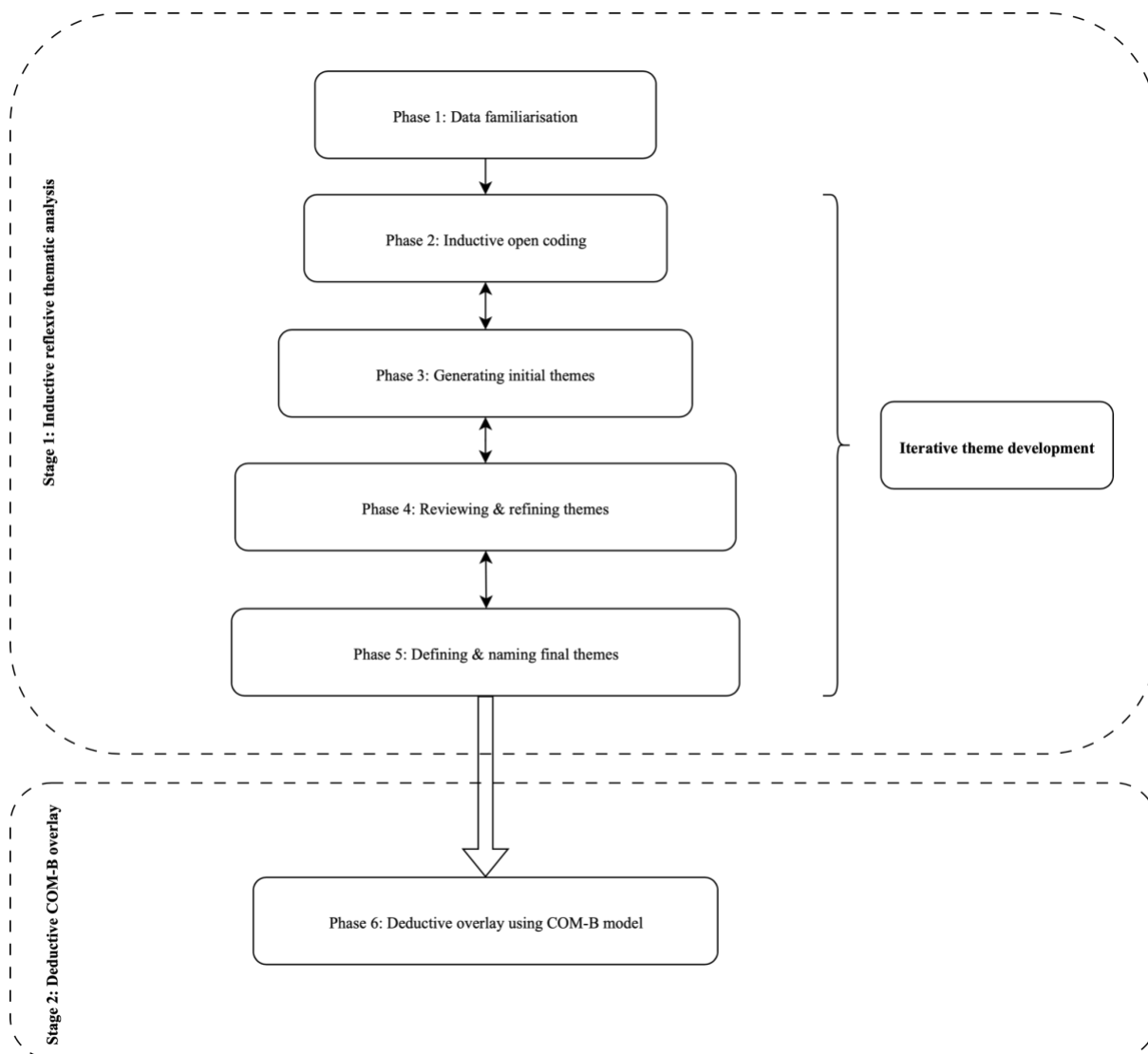
Stage 1: Inductive reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Analysis began Phase 1: Familiarisation with deep immersion in the dataset. Interview audio was replayed during daily commutes and verbatim transcripts were repeatedly read to cultivate a holistic feel for the material. A contemporaneous reflexive journal captured affective responses, emergent hunches and moments of epistemic doubt, with particular attention to the researcher's 'dual-insider' positionality as both teacher and scholar. This sustained engagement sensitised the analyst to the nuances of participants' language and world-views while foregrounding her own assumptions.

Phase 2: Generating initial coding followed. Systematic, line-by-line coding was undertaken across the entire corpus in NVivo 15. Codes were intentionally data-driven and 'organic': short, active labels expressed as far as possible in participants' own words, yet annotated with analytic memos that recorded emerging theoretical insights. Treating every utterance as potentially meaningful produced a large pool of initial codes and preserved the heterogeneity of teachers' experiences of EBP. The open codes generated for participants Michael and Ben are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Example of inductive codes generated by open reading of data

Michael	Ben
Insisting 'it has to work in your classroom'	Defining EBP as 'tried and tested by teachers'
Challenging 'unhelpful' habits	Relying on peer proof of results
Improving 'more methodically'	Extracting parts of an idea to use
Valuing a 'big cohort study' and 'somebody down the hallway' equally	Drawing on 'your own knowledge'
	Knowing what works for different kids
Asking 'will it help solve the problem?'	Asking colleagues about success rates
Asking 'can I see it fitting in?'	Checking context (higher/lower learners)
Being motivated by a 'niggling problem'	Checking for student engagement
Being motivated by 'problem kids'	Reading online reviews for social proof
Needing to 'tweak it to your setting'	Asking 'is it worth my time?'
Finding research that backs up existing practice	Wanting to make life easier
Having a 'reverse evidence base'	Wanting students to be more independent
Prioritising tasks with deadlines over reading	Feeling 'internal success'
Seeing policy as a tool to hold people 'to account'	Being used as a guinea pig
	Feeling mentor betrayed trust
Seeing policy as 'not an aspirational thing'	Feeling confidence knocked
Wanting to give teachers 'mental space'	Feeling 'like I couldn't teach'
Wanting to 'remove a lot of accountability'	Wanting 'more evidence-based' now
Balancing freedom for the 90% vs. managing the 10% who 'take the mick'	Not having time for uncertain methods
	Rejecting CPD as 'not relatable or useful'
Being 'the support at the moment'	Being told 'you're going to run with it'
Struggling with colleagues who 'aren't willing and don't care'	Getting history examples for science
	Feeling SLT doesn't understand 'application subjects'
'Magpie-ing' bits from new things	
Feeling inspired by CPD	Feeling judged or 'pointed fingers at'
Valuing feeling 'not alone in this problem'	Having to prove something doesn't work

Michael	Ben
Lacking time for EBP	Wanting a leader with a science background
Lacking money and staff for EBP	Wanting SLT to 'take trust' in teachers
Championing a practice ('six grids')	Lacking time to look through textbooks
Seeing results go up	Lacking time for observations
Filtering ideas through subject identity ('not really us')	Feeling CPD is 'Ofsted based'
	Distrusting government policy
Filtering ideas based on a current challenging class	Finding forced CPD was actually useful
	Collaborating with other schools
Learning from Teach First	Sharing what works with colleagues
Accessing specific people/resources	Adapting teaching when things go wrong
Needing 'permission to stop barrelling through the syllabus'	Scaffolding and slowly removing support
	Modelling thought processes
Trying a 'stupid' idea on a friend's recommendation	Using 'I do, we do, you do'
	Building on foundational knowledge first
	Focusing on a few techniques at a time
	Feeling overwhelmed by too many methods

In Phases 3 and 4, the analysis entered an iterative and non-linear process of theme development. This involved clustering initial codes into candidate themes, which were then rigorously reviewed and refined. This was inherently recursive: the researcher moved back and forth between individual codes, the full transcripts, visual thematic maps and reflexive-journal entries. The goal was to identify patterned meanings that addressed the research questions while remaining faithful to participants' perspectives. Candidate themes were interrogated against two criteria, internal coherence and external distinctiveness. Weak themes were collapsed, overly broad ones were split and provisional names were revised to capture each theme's essence more precisely. Disconfirming cases were actively sought to test the stability of thematic boundaries. All analytic turning-points were logged in the reflexive journal, making the researcher's influence transparent. Table 7 provides a worked example of this analytic phase, showing how a subset of the inductive codes in Table 6 were clustered into the final structure of Theme 3 (The 'How' of engagement).

Table 7

Worked example of clustering inductive codes into Theme 3

Initial inductive code (participant)	Interpretive focus in Stage 2	Subtheme (Chapter 4)	Final theme
Lacking time for EBP (Michael)	Chronic time pressure positions engagement with research as an optional extra that is routinely squeezed out by everyday workload demands.	4.3.1 The primacy of opportunity: workload and resource constraints	4.3 Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement
Prioritising tasks with deadlines over reading (Michael)	External accountability deadlines re-order priorities so that reading or adapting research is consistently deprioritised.	4.3.1 The primacy of opportunity: workload and resource constraints	4.3 Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement
Lacking money and staff for EBP (Michael)	Resource shortages (time, staffing, budget) are framed as structural rather than individual, emphasising that the barrier is systemic.	4.3.1 The primacy of opportunity: workload and resource constraints	4.3 Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement
Feeling confidence knocked (Ben)	Negative experiences of enforced initiatives and unsuccessful implementations erode teachers' sense of professional competence.	4.3.2 The erosion of professional capability	4.3 Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement
Feeling 'like I couldn't teach' (Ben)	When strategies do not work under high-stakes conditions, teachers interpret this as a judgement on their core competence.	4.3.2 The erosion of professional capability	4.3 Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement
Feeling CPD is 'Ofsted based' (Ben)	CPD is interpreted as a performance for the inspectorate rather than a vehicle for genuine learning, fostering cynicism.	4.3.3 The role of CPD in shaping the cycle of engagement	4.3 Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement

Initial inductive code (participant)	Interpretive focus in Stage 2	Subtheme (Chapter 4)	Final theme
Rejecting CPD as 'not relatable or useful' (Ben)	CPD content is seen as disconnected from classroom realities, leading teachers to disengage from sessions that do not speak to their context.	4.3.3 The role of CPD in shaping the cycle of engagement	4.3 Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement
Feeling judged or 'pointed fingers at' (Ben)	Accountability processes are experienced as personalised blame, encouraging defensive rather than exploratory responses to evidence.	4.3.4 The rationality of disengagement and the erosion of motivation	4.3 Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement
Having to prove something doesn't work (Ben)	The burden of proof is placed on teachers to demonstrate the failure of imposed initiatives, incentivising minimal compliance rather than wholehearted engagement.	4.3.4 The rationality of disengagement and the erosion of motivation	4.3 Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement

During Phase 5, the refined thematic structure was finalised. Once the thematic architecture appeared robust, analytic sketches were written for each theme. These sketches clarified the organising concept, scope and inter-relationships of the themes and culminated in concise, theoretically resonant names. The final structure comprises the four themes detailed in Table 8. The process of developing these themes was interpretive; they were not constructed by simply aggregating codes, but by identifying a central organising concept that illuminated a patterned meaning across the dataset. The evidential basis for each theme, illustrating the link between the data and the interpretation, is made transparent in Chapters 4 and 5 through the presentation of rich, contextualised data extracts, illustrating the interpretive story each theme tells about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Throughout Stage 1, NVivo functioned as a practical workspace, yet analytic judgement was intentionally cultivated through periods of slow, reflective engagement away from the software (Maher et al., 2018).

Table 8

Thematic structure

Theme	Subtheme
1. What counts as evidence?	1.1 The blended epistemology: weaving research, experience and context
	1.2 The currency of trust: the role of the respected colleague
	1.3 The authenticity test: guarding professional practice
	1.4 Professional gatekeeper: curating a knowledge ecosystem
2. The 'Why' of engagement	2.1 The commitment to solving pedagogical problems
	2.2 Pursuit of professional confidence and legitimacy
	2.3 The drive for professional growth and authenticity
3. The 'How' of engagement	3.1 The primacy of opportunity: workload and resource constraints
	3.2 The erosion of professional capability
	3.3 The role of CPD in shaping the cycle of engagement
	3.4 The rationality of disengagement ant the erosion of motivation
4. The 'Where' of engagement	4.1 The mediating role of school leadership and its impact on professional culture
	4.2 The structural conflict of policy in the English education system
	4.3 Professional identity and the teacher response

Stage 2: Deductive COM-B overlay

Only after the inductive thematic structure had fully stabilised was the data revisited through the COM-B lens in Phase 6. This deductive stage did not involve re-coding the data. Instead, it functioned as a theoretical overlay, using the COM-B framework as a set of 'sensitising constructs' to organise and interpret the inductively-generated themes (Bowen, 2006). The purpose of this stage was to map the rich, experiential findings onto a well-established model of behaviour change. This process was designed to enhance the explanatory power and practical utility of the findings, particularly for informing potential interventions, without compromising the inductive integrity of the initial analysis. The specific analytic function of this overlay for each theme is detailed in Table 9.

Table 9

Analytic function of COM-B as a deductive overlay

Theme	Analytic function of COM-B as a deductive overlay
Theme 1: 'What counts as evidence?'	To map participants' competing definitions of evidence against the COM-B components, thereby structuring an analysis of the interplay between their psychological capability (e.g. epistemic beliefs), social opportunity (e.g. policy discourse) and professional motivation (e.g. the drive for autonomy).
Theme 2: The 'Why' of engagement	To use the motivation component of COM-B as a critical lens for analysing the drivers of EBP engagement reported by participants and to explore whether the standard model fully captures the vocational and moral dimensions observed in the data.
Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement	To structure the analysis of reported barriers as a causal chain, demonstrating how a lack of opportunity (e.g. time, resources) systematically erodes professional capability (e.g. skills, confidence), which in turn diminishes intrinsic motivation.
Theme 4: The 'Where' of engagement	To deconstruct the systemic 'policy paradox' by using the tension between capability and opportunity as an analytical framework. This allows for an examination of how system-level factors simultaneously build teacher capability while undermining the opportunity for its meaningful use.

Transparency was built into every step of the process. Figure 2 provides a visual overview of the six overlapping phases; Tables 5–7 document the theme structure, code–theme mapping and COM-B synthesis; selected excerpts from the reflexive journal illustrate how assumptions were surfaced,

challenged and negotiated. Together, these materials satisfy the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability standards expected of qualitative educational research. By maintaining a constructive tension between inductive exploration and deductive explanation, the analysis simultaneously (a) retained the contextual richness of teachers' lived experiences and (b) supplied an explanatory scaffold that extends beyond description to actionable insight. The resulting account therefore speaks credibly to micro-level classroom practice while also informing leadership decisions and policy design, demonstrating the value of extending reflexive thematic analysis with a behaviour-change model without compromising its interpretivist roots.

3.7   Limitations

This thesis, like all qualitative inquiries, has defined boundaries. Acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the findings but clarifies the context in which they should be interpreted. The research design's primary strength is its capacity to generate a deep, context-rich understanding of teacher engagement with evidence. This depth is achieved through the intentional choice to prioritise detailed, interpretive analysis over broad statistical generalisability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2010). The aim was not statistical generalisability but theoretical transferability. The research design deliberately prioritised interpretive depth over quantitative breadth to develop a robust explanatory model of how and why the teachers in this study engage with evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2010). By supplying ample contextual detail ('thick description'), the thesis allows readers and other researchers to judge the fittingness of the insights to new settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In combining inductively derived themes with the COM-B behavioural framework, the research offers a conceptual model that may be applicable in analogous situations, even if it is not statistically representative of every context.

Second, while participants were approached based on purposive sampling, their choice to participate in the study was voluntary and it is plausible that teachers who are already positively disposed towards evidence-informed practice, or who feel confident discussing their engagement, were more inclined to take part. This potential self-selection bias means that perspectives from less engaged, more sceptical, or time-pressed colleagues may be under-represented, tempering the breadth of the explanatory model (Robinson, 2014; Tripepi et al., 2010).

Third, the data are based on self-report and retrospective recall. The use of critical-incident prompts anchored the conversations in concrete events, but it cannot wholly eliminate issues of memory fallibility, selective reporting, or social desirability bias, the tendency to present oneself in a favourable light when describing professionally valued behaviours (Krumpal, 2013; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Both interviewees and researchers are therefore subject to subtle forms of impression management when constructing narratives. The thesis sought to mitigate these influences by building rapport, ensuring strict confidentiality, explicitly encouraging participants to share examples of

'misfires' or challenges as freely as successes and by reminding them that the research interest lay in understanding difficulties as well as triumphs. These strategies likely reduced the inclination to provide overly polished accounts, but they do not entirely remove the influence of self-presentation.

Fourth, the interpretative, reflexive methodology means that the researcher's own perspective was deeply involved in shaping the results. Reflexive thematic analysis deliberately treats the researcher's subjectivity as an analytic asset, yet this stance also raises the possibility that prior beliefs or insider status influenced the themes or the subsequent COM-B interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Finlay, 2002). The project addressed this risk through continuous reflexive journalling, opportunities for participant reflection on preliminary findings and regular 'critical-friend' reviews of the analysis. These steps provided important checks and balances, but it remains plausible that another researcher might have constructed the data into a somewhat different narrative, an outcome that reflects the inherent flexibility of qualitative analysis rather than an error in execution.

Fifth, the scope of the findings is constrained by the specific context of the two schools involved. Both schools are large, urban secondary schools with diverse student populations and had recently been exposed to initiatives promoting evidence use. These common contextual factors likely shaped how teachers experienced evidence-based practice in ways that might differ in other environments (for example, in small rural schools, faith schools, or selective grammar schools). The thesis does not claim that its results are universally applicable; instead, it aims to spark theoretically informed comparisons by researchers and practitioners examining different settings (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2017).

Sixth, the research provides a snapshot of teacher engagement with evidence at a single point in time. The dynamic nature of capability, opportunity and motivation suggests that engagement may fluctuate over a school year or career. A longitudinal approach (such as follow-up interviews, diary studies, or observations across multiple time points) could capture how these factors and behaviours evolve and perhaps identify the impact of changes or interventions over time (Neale, 2020; Saldaña, 2003). Such longitudinal data were beyond the scope of this project, but they represent a valuable direction for future research.

A further limitation concerns the scope of the background information collected from participants. The study did not gather systematic data on teachers' routes into the profession, their academic or professional qualifications, or the number and types of schools in which they had previously worked. These characteristics can shape how teachers conceptualise evidence, the extent to which they feel professionally confident in engaging with research and the kinds of epistemic resources they draw upon in their practice. Their absence restricts the ability to interpret variations in the findings in relation to different career trajectories or training pathways. While the purposive sampling strategy

ensured diversity in role and experience, the omission of these background variables limits the granularity with which differences across participants can be understood.

Finally, there are practical limitations related to the use of analysis software. The project used NVivo 15 to organise and manage the data, which undoubtedly streamlined the handling of a large number of codes and excerpts. However, any software environment risks reifying preliminary analytic categories simply because it makes them visible and retrievable at the click of a button (John & Johnson, 2000). The researcher guarded against this by frequently stepping outside the software, for instance, printing out codes and physically rearranging them, to verify that themes still made sense off-screen. This oscillation between digital and paper-based analysis tempered the neatness and rigidity that software can inadvertently impose. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that the convenience of NVivo may subtly influence the process and so conscious effort was required to ensure that the technology remained a tool rather than a driver of the analysis (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019).

Recognising these limitations does not diminish the thesis's insights but rather clarifies the context in which they apply. The themes and models presented are best viewed as contextually grounded interpretations of how teachers engage with evidence, not as definitive pronouncements. Future work could build on these findings by incorporating direct classroom observations, involving a wider range of school types, or employing longitudinal designs to track changes in evidence-use engagement as policies shift and teachers progress through their careers.

3.8   Chapter summary

This chapter established a coherent methodological framework for investigating secondary-school teachers' engagement with EBP. It is rooted in a constructivist ontology (acknowledging multiple, socially constructed realities) and an interpretivist epistemology (viewing knowledge as co-created through researcher–participant interaction). Within this paradigm, reflexive thematic analysis provided the analytic spine of the thesis: through a recursive six-phase process, themes were crafted as patterned interpretations rather than 'discovered' as objective facts. Semi-structured interviews, enriched with CIT prompts, generated detailed narratives of teachers' practice while still allowing flexibility to explore unforeseen topics. A purposive sample of ten teachers from two similar urban schools was chosen to ensure a range of perspectives (varying in subject area, experience level and roles) within a bounded context. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and the data were managed with NVivo 15 software, facilitating organisation without automating any analytic decisions. Once a stable set of inductive themes had been developed from the data, the COM-B model was applied as a secondary lens to interpret those themes. This post hoc use of COM-B helped illuminate how each theme related to underlying behavioural drivers, without forcing the data into a pre-existing framework. Throughout the research process, careful attention was paid to ethics and rigour. Ethical integrity was upheld via institutional ethics approval, informed consent procedures,

strict anonymity and confidentiality protocols and secure data handling. Methodological rigour and trustworthiness were reinforced by the researcher's ongoing reflexive journaling, peer debriefing sessions to challenge and refine interpretations, incorporating participant feedback where possible, triangulating interview findings with external sources (like policy documents and literature) and maintaining an auditable trail of analytic decisions. By integrating reflexive thematic analysis, CIT-guided interviewing and a transparent reflexive stance, the thesis produced a richly contextualised yet theoretically transferable account of teachers' lived experiences with evidence. This robust methodological foundation lends credibility to the thesis's findings and ensures that the subsequent empirical chapters can speak convincingly to classroom practice, inform school leadership and contribute to evidence-informed education policy.

Chapter 4: Findings, analysis and discussion

This chapter presents and discusses the thematic findings derived from semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers regarding their engagement with EBP. It seeks to construct a detailed account of how teachers navigate the complex landscape of EBP by weaving together the authentic voices of practitioners with analytical commentary. The analysis is structured around four primary themes that emerged from the data. These themes map a journey from how teachers define and negotiate the concept of evidence (Theme 1), to their motivations for engaging with it (Theme 2), the practical and systemic conditions that shape such engagement (Theme 3) and finally the broader institutional and policy landscapes in which this all takes place (Theme 4).

As outlined in the methodology chapter, these themes were first generated inductively from the interview data through a process of reflexive thematic analysis. This approach ensured that the structure of the analysis was grounded in the participants' own expressed priorities and experiences. Following this inductive process, the themes were revisited through the deductive lens of the COM-B model of behaviour change, which posits that behaviour (B) is a function of capability (C), opportunity (O) and motivation (M). This model is not employed as a rigid coding framework but rather as a conceptual overlay. Its purpose is to deepen the explanatory power of the analysis, helping to clarify why certain factors appear to enable or inhibit teachers' engagement with EBP.

To ensure a clear and methodologically transparent presentation, this chapter adopts a consistent structure. For each theme and its corresponding sub-themes, the empirical findings from the participant data are presented first in a neutral, descriptive manner. This is followed by a distinct discussion section that offers interpretation and analysis, connecting the findings to the COM-B framework and relevant academic literature. This structure is deliberately chosen to ensure that the data is laid bare for the reader before any analytical conclusions are drawn, thereby demonstrating how the interpretation is grounded in the evidence provided by the participants.

4.1   Theme 1: What counts as evidence?

The data from this thesis suggest that before examining how teachers use evidence, it is crucial to first understand what they consider 'evidence' to be. The findings reveal that this is not a matter of simple definition but a complex and contested area. This theme explores how participants construct their understanding of evidence and how this process reflects a deeper tension concerning the nature of professional knowledge and autonomy in teaching.

To explore this central theme, the analysis will proceed through four interconnected sub-themes. The first examines the participants' construction of a blended, tripartite epistemology that combines research, experience and context. The second explores the critical role of relational trust and peer

testimony in validating new practices. The third investigates the 'authenticity test' that teachers apply to external information and its sources. The final sub-theme considers the agentic role teachers adopt as 'professional gatekeepers' who curate their own knowledge ecosystems. Together, these sub-themes will illuminate how the seemingly simple question, 'What counts as evidence?', becomes a key site of professional identity work and resistance.

4.1.1   A blended epistemology: weaving research, experience and context

A prominent concept emerging from the interviews was that teachers do not subscribe to a single, narrow definition of evidence. Instead, Eleanor, David, Michael, Sarah, Ben, Liam and Maria described a blended or multifaceted understanding. This was most clearly articulated by David who explicitly outlined a tripartite model, stating that EBP involves weaving together three distinct but essential strands.

> Evidence-based practice means to me, as a teacher, I hear evidence and think about, firstly, think about the research, the educational research base and I mean, the pure research... But when I think about and talk about evidence-based practice, I also think about the evidence of my own teacher experience and the context of which I am currently working in... the research can say one thing sometimes, but your context and your experience will say something different. (David)

A simpler, candid formulation came from Chloe, who framed EBP as research-backed elements of practice rather than attractive but untested ideas:

> So, I would guess it's like, basically elements of your practice that has research supporting it. And we know works, rather than just, oh, this sounds like a great idea. I'm going to do this in my classroom. Essentially, it is, right? (Chloe)

One participant described arriving at this blended epistemology as a developmental journey rather than an immediate stance. Liam offered a concise narrative arc, moving from early scepticism framed as 'teaching as art' to a more integrated view that takes research seriously while insisting on contextual fit:

> Yeah, I think when I first trained... I started off doubting evidence-based practice because I thought teaching was more of an art and you either had it you didn't, basically and it was more of a gut instinct... As I've got older, I realised, no, no, the people doing the research are on to something, but it's really important not to assume that, because there's evidence it's going to work for you. (Liam)

This trajectory from scepticism to recognition of research to insistence on contextual applicability, illustrates the evolving nature of teachers' professional epistemologies.

This model, comprising formal research, personal experience and local context, appeared to underpin how Eleanor, David, Michael, Sarah, Ben, Liam and Maria approached EBP. The 'experience' component was often described as a combination of personal judgment and peer-validated success. Ben, for instance, defined evidence as 'tried and tested methods by other teachers' combined with

'your own knowledge as a teacher, like, what do you know works best for different groups of kids', which they explicitly equated with 'Experience'. Eleanor made this filtering work explicit, emphasising an objective stance coupled with contextual selection:

> So, for me as a teacher, it means being able to look at evidence from kind of like an objective way, being able to select from it what I feel would work and that which I'd feel doesn't work. And then apply that into my own practice. (Eleanor)

However, the 'research' component of this model was not accepted uncritically. Maria, a school leader, while demonstrating a clear understanding of formal research methodologies, immediately highlighted their limitations. They acknowledged the value of scientific studies with control groups, citing the work of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) as an example, but pointed to a perceived flaw in how aggregated data is often presented.

> So, it would mean approaches, strategies and I guess overall practices you could argue that have gone through, gone through a proper scientific study. So, we're talking control groups. We're talking EEF would be a good example... But that's because one student made eight months progress and one student's made no progress. It's, it's those sorts of, those sorts of areas there. (Maria)

This observation suggests a concern that headline statistics can obscure significant variations in individual student outcomes. This scepticism towards decontextualised data was accompanied by a demand for research to be generalisable. Sarah stipulated that for research to be credible, it must be 'well researched over a few schools... in different settings, in different areas, so you've actually got some fair results, rather than just having one school and one headteacher talking about it'. This reflects a practitioner-led criterion for external validity.

Despite this critical stance, research is still valued, particularly when it acknowledges and validates the realities of the classroom. One teacher described their engagement with research as a positive extension of their university training, precisely because it legitimised their professional world.

> I don't think it has changed, you know? It's just research. It's a continuation of like what you do at uni... You could talk about actual kids and actual moments and it was allowed in education research and that was great and it was good. (Michael)

Within the participants' blended epistemology, the element of contextual fit was frequently given precedence. David, Michael and Liam indicated that for a piece of evidence to be considered useful, it must be applicable to their specific setting. This was illustrated by a series of diagnostic questions one teacher reported asking themselves when considering a new practice: 'What's going to work for [current school] kids? What's going to work in my room? What's going to work with my class sizes?' (Liam). This sentiment was stated even more directly by another participant, who suggested that local applicability could override the strength of the original evidence:

> I think evidence is one thing, but it then has to work in your classroom. So it doesn't really even matter how good the evidence is... in terms of what might adapt my teaching practice. (Michael)

Despite the articulation of this sophisticated, practitioner-led epistemology, the data also suggest a degree of uncertainty among teachers about what formally 'counts' as EBP. After describing the process of using end-of-unit test data to inform subsequent teaching, one teacher asked with apparent uncertainty, 'Is that still evidence-based practice?' (Fatima). Similarly, another participant sought clarification during the interview, asking, 'When you say evidence, you don't just mean research, do you?' (Aisha). This questioning sits alongside a richer, more informal sense of evidence articulated by the same participant:

> Because the evidence isn't just what's written in a book, not necessarily paper. It's what you see, isn't it? I feel. Yeah, that's, that's how I feel. (Aisha)

The findings presented above suggest that the participating teachers construct a complex and pragmatic professional epistemology. The tripartite model articulated by David, blending formal research, professional experience and local context, appears to represent a shared understanding, reinforced by the accounts of others, such as Ben who emphasised experience and Michael and Liam who prioritised contextual fit. This model can be interpreted not merely as a personal definition but as the teachers' implicit formulation of the legitimate knowledge base for their profession. In the sociological terms of Abbott (2014), a profession's claim to autonomy rests on its abstract knowledge system and its ability to demonstrate efficacy. The teachers' blended epistemology represents their version of that abstract knowledge system, one that integrates codified 'pure research' with the essential, tacit knowledge derived from practice.

The participants' critique of aggregated research data, as voiced by Maria and the demand for generalisability from Sarah, is not a rejection of research per se, but a sophisticated critique of its application. The concern that a statistical average masks the reality of individual learners suggests that teachers' scepticism is rooted in a professional and ethical responsibility to the specific students in their care. This moves their stance from one of simple resistance to one of demanding contextual validity, asserting their role as mediators, not just consumers, of research.

A significant point of analysis arises from the 'conceptual fog' revealed in the questions posed by Fatima and Aisha. Their uncertainty about whether their own data-informed practices 'count' as EBP suggests the influence of an external and perhaps more dominant, discourse. Aisha's characterisation of evidence as something one sees and feels indicates a tacit, embodied epistemology that sits uneasily with official, paper-centric definitions. When the dominant policy discourse elevates certain forms of evidence (e.g. large-scale quantitative studies) as a 'gold standard', it can create a crisis of confidence, causing practitioners to doubt the formal legitimacy of their own professional knowledge and judgement (Biesta, 2007; Slavin, 2002). This phenomenon can be understood as a form of 'epistemic

disenfranchisement', whereby a group's authority as knowers is systematically undermined (Fricker, 2007). The 'fog' is not a lack of knowledge, but a consequence of the perceived erosion of the authority of that knowledge. At the same time, Liam cautioned that scepticism and resistance persist among some colleagues, positioning EBP as a tool within a more complex conception of teaching:

> There are a lot of naysayers in education who are just like, 'No, education is broken, so evidence-based practice would never work' and equally, 'why should I listen to what someone else is doing if my results are good?'… there's not enough people who are willing to see it as a tool, as part of being a teacher, which is a far more complex thing. (Liam)

Viewed through the COM-B framework, this blended epistemology has a complex effect on behaviour. Teachers appear to possess the psychological capability to generate, value and use experiential and contextual data. However, the dominant discourse appears to constrain the social opportunity for this knowledge to be formally recognised and valued, which in turn may dampen their motivation to engage with externally mandated forms of EBP that do not align with their holistic understanding. In sum, the blended epistemology both asserts professional autonomy and exposes tensions with evidence hierarchies.

4.1.2 The currency of trust: the role of the respected colleague

The data indicate that for participants such as Michael, Fatima, Ben and Liam, the most persuasive form of evidence often comes from a trusted colleague. The testimony of a peer who has successfully implemented a practice can be a catalyst for change. One participant, who provided a particularly rich narrative on this topic, gave a clear example of this relational trust in action. The decisive factor when adopting a new strategy was not an abstract evidence base, but the public credibility and professional integrity of a colleague within the same subject discipline:

> And it actually helped that she's also very vocal when she doesn't like something. She's willing to stand in front of the whole staff body and say, 'that's crap'... So because I also I trust her integrity, basically... when she stands in front of me and says, 'this works', I'm more likely to give it a go. (Liam)

This reliance on peer recommendation appeared to place practice-based evidence on at least an equal footing with formal research. One teacher stated they were just as likely to adopt a strategy from 'somebody down the hallway that's tried something and it worked' as they were from a 'really well evidenced big cohort study' (Michael). While validated outcomes ('it worked') carry significant weight, one participant also delineated a threshold for what counts as 'evidence-based' beyond anecdote. As Sarah put it:

> So I would say, let's say, if someone's spoken about that, modelling really works. And there is a paper… that, for me, is now evidence-based. What is not evidence-based is a book that doesn't really have any data for me to refer to. (Sarah)

This underscores a preference for data-backed claims over mere opinion, even while practice-based testimony remains influential.

However, this trust is not granted indiscriminately. The data suggest it is earned through a subjective but sophisticated assessment of a colleague's professional competence. One participant explained that their willingness to accept a peer's advice was contingent on their perception of that person's expertise.

> I suppose it would be obviously subjective and it would be based on how I perceive that teacher, if I've either observed them teaching, or if I've know of their background... then I know that they can. (Fatima)

At the same time, some teachers voiced uncertainty about the provenance of colleague tips:

> Yes. But I wouldn't know whether that was evidence-based or not… the day-to-day, 'oh, try this', often is excellent. But you don't know where that's coming from. (Chloe).

This reflects selective trust: valuing peer wisdom while querying its evidential lineage. This vetting process can be highly specific and practical. Ben detailed the diagnostic questions they would pose to a colleague before adopting their practice, demonstrating a rigorous, informal peer-review process:

> If it's from a colleague, I will ask them more information about how they have tried it, their success rate. Was it better with higher learners or lower ability learners? What type of class did it have engagement? Did it have a positive success out of it? Have students made progress? (Ben)

Ben also articulated a probabilistic calculus when translating ideas across subjects:

> Have other teachers done this? Has it worked? If they haven't, it's probably not going to work. Or if they've done it in another subject and it's been a bit iffy, you've got a 50:50 chance of whether it's going to work within your area as well. (Ben).

This frames cross-subject transfer as a risk–benefit judgement rather than a straightforward import.

Finally, the data suggest that while a general school culture of trust is important, the most potent professional relationships are enacted at the departmental level. When probed on collaboration beyond subject boundaries, one participant drew a clear line around the 'epistemic community', 'I would, but mainly more for like behaviour, management styles, or if they've got an educational need, or if it's maths based than going to a maths teacher to think, how do you teach that in maths that has the highest success rate? And then you can use that'. (Ben). This boundary was echoed by another teacher in a leadership role who, when asked if they seek ideas from outside their department for their own teaching, replied, 'in my own practice, no' (Sarah). This departmental emphasis is consistent with Ben's 50:50 caution above, signalling that relevance attenuates as practices move further from subject-specific contexts.

These findings strongly suggest the enactment of what Sachs (2003, 2016) terms a 'democratic-relational' model of professionalism. This model, founded on collegial trust, collaboration and shared values, stands in contrast to hierarchical, 'technocratic-managerial' models. The power of a phrase like 'trust me, this works' resides not in a dataset but in a trusted relationship, a shared professional identity ('another history teacher') and a credible claim of contextual efficacy. Viewed through the COM-B framework, this reliance on trusted colleagues highlights the role of social opportunity (a collegial, high-trust environment) in enabling engagement. In other words, peer credibility and relational trust serve as a mediator of motivation, a trusted colleague's recommendation effectively passes the authenticity test and lowers the perceived risk of trying a new practice, thereby energising teachers' motivation to adopt the evidence-based approach (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). This social proof within a professional community can be a more efficient catalyst for change than abstract evidence, as it comes pre-validated for relevance and feasibility (Daly & Little, 2010; Rogers, 2003). Yet, as Sarah and Chloe indicate, many teachers also seek external warrants (papers, data) or question provenance, tempering social proof with evidential checks.

The finding that this trust is earned based on perceived competence and vetted through specific, practical questions as detailed by Ben, suggests this is not an egalitarian free-for-all, but a meritocracy of practice. Influence is granted to those who have demonstrated their skill and earned the respect of their peers. Furthermore, the data indicating that the subject department is the primary locus for this trust refines the concept of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) (DuFour, 2004; Stoll et al., 2006). For core pedagogical matters, the most potent 'epistemic community' appears to be the department, where colleagues share not just a school context but a specific curriculum, assessment framework and set of subject-specific challenges. This has practical implications for school leadership, suggesting that fostering genuine EBP may be more effectively achieved by resourcing department-level collaborative inquiry rather than focusing solely on whole-school initiatives.

However, this reliance on relational trust presents both benefits and risks. While it can accelerate the spread of effective, contextually appropriate practice, the mechanism itself is agnostic to the objective quality of the information being shared. The same social network that efficiently disseminates a new strategy could just as easily amplify unvetted fads, entrench mediocre practice, or reinforce a collective culture of low expectations. A colleague's trusted but misplaced judgment that 'this is too difficult for our kids' could prematurely shut down a potentially valuable innovation. In practice, some participants mitigated this risk by looking for independent empirical anchors (e.g. papers or data) or by treating cross-subject transfer as uncertain (a '50:50 chance'), thereby building a modest check against insularity. This suggests that while such democratic-relational networks are an important professional asset, they may need to be coupled with sources of external challenge and critical appraisal to prevent insularity and ensure they drive genuine improvement rather than reinforcing the status quo.

4.1.3   The authenticity test: guarding professional practice

The data suggest that participants apply a stringent 'authenticity test' to external evidence and the individuals who present it. This filter appears to operate on two distinct but related levels: a vetting of the messenger's credibility and a weary cynicism towards the message itself, particularly when it is perceived as a top-down mandate or the latest fad.

The first layer of this filter involves an assessment of the messenger's lived professional reality. A detailed narrative from Liam highlights the sophistication of this process. They recounted attending a conference where a presenter offered a 'phenomenal' strategy, but the idea was ultimately dismissed after the presenter's own working conditions were revealed.

> I also like to know what the person's role is... I'll never forget being at a conference... someone was presenting a really good idea... And then someone asked him what his role is in school and he was like, 'Well, I'm a deputy head'.... how many teaching hours do you have? And he was like, I've got 10 teacher hours a fortnight. And then all of a sudden, you're like, 'Well, you can afford...'. I have no doubt his strategy was phenomenal... but is it practical for an everyday teacher? (Liam)

Complementing this narrative, the same participant articulated the principle behind their judgement:

> The second person hadn't set foot in the classroom for 20 years and straightway, that devalues that slightly for me, whatever results they're going to present are devalued slightly because they're not in a classroom... whereas if they can stand and say, I've taught in a variety of different schools and I guarantee this works... that has so much more value to me. (Liam)

Taken together, these accounts make the filter's criteria explicit: (a) recent, substantive classroom experience; (b) breadth of experience across varied school contexts; and (c) claims framed as tested in practice rather than merely theorised.

The strategy appears to be rejected not on the grounds of ineffectiveness, but of impracticality. The key variable was the presenter's reduced teaching load, which was not relatable to the context of an 'everyday teacher'. This sentiment was echoed by Aisha, who valued a CPD session because 'it felt real, because it felt like he'd actually lived it. And actually, this is not just somebody writing something that has never worked in a school before'. Conversely, research 'produced by people who do not actually have any education experience' was dismissed by Eleanor as being 'not grounded in practice at all'.

The second layer of the filter is a cynicism towards the frequent cycle of new initiatives. This was captured by Eleanor, who critiqued a tendency in their school's leadership to adopt practices based on trends rather than identified needs.

> I think there's a tendency by this member of SLT to kind of look at these things and think, oh, you know, we need to be doing this because it's like the latest thing, because everybody else is doing it. (Eleanor)

This 'evidence fatigue' may be exacerbated when leadership does not provide a clear rationale for change. Eleanor expressed profound frustration at being told what to do without being told why, a sentiment shared by Chloe.

> I find that a lot of the stuff that's been introduced in school is just like, 'Oh, we're going to do this'. So, we're going to do guided reading but no 'why?' Or 'we're going to use a ruler to put underneath the text'. But no 'why?'... there's no, no. 'Why?' behind any of it. 'Why does this work?' (Eleanor)

This demand for a rationale was elaborated by Chloe, who linked the absence of 'why' to their own sense of professional responsibility and confidence:

> I think if you're using a... practice in your teaching; you should probably understand why you've been asked to do it... I'm now feeling guilty on that, 'Oh, I don't, did I not listen to the CPD?'... I think it's not done... in a way that is explicit enough or engaging enough for staff that people are actually like engaging at the moment in the 'why' rather than just the 'what'. (Chloe)

Chloe went on to describe the emotional toll of this process, reporting that being subjected to CPD sessions presenting information they perceived to be incorrect left them feeling 'really, really, devalued' and demotivated. In other words, the 'why' is not merely informational, it is tied to professional identity, signalling respect for teachers' judgement and accountability for their practice.

The 'authenticity test' described by participants can be interpreted not as simple anti-intellectualism, but as a rational and protective mechanism. It functions as a form of professional self-preservation against the pressures of what (Mehta, 2013b, p. 1) describes as a 'technocratic logic', which seeks to standardise practice and devalue practitioner expertise by positioning teachers as technicians who implement solutions developed by others. The filter for a relatable professional context is a logical and necessary check for feasibility, protecting a teacher's finite time and energy from ideas that do not respect the intense pressures of their role.

The repeated, frustrated demand for the 'why' behind new initiatives, voiced by both Eleanor and Chloe, is particularly revealing. This is more than a simple request for information; it is a demand for professional respect and recognition of teachers' identity as knowledgeable practitioners. The role of a technician is to implement instructions; the role of a professional is to understand the underlying principles of their work so they can diagnose problems, adapt to context and exercise judgement. When leadership withholds the 'why', they are perceived as treating teachers as technicians, implicitly positioning them as passive implementers of policy rather than as autonomous professional agents. Therefore, the demand for 'why' can be seen as a micro-level act of resistance and a reassertion of professional identity. It suggests a critical element of change management: even the most robustly

evidence-based strategy is likely to be met with resistance if it is implemented in a way that is perceived as de-professionalising. The process of implementation appears to be as important as the content of the intervention.

In COM-B terms, this dual-layered filter directly impacts teacher motivation. If the messenger fails the credibility test or the message is perceived as another baseless fad, the motivation to engage is significantly diminished. This, in turn, shrinks the perceived opportunity to use evidence meaningfully, as engagement is withheld. For research and new initiatives to gain traction, are more likely to gain traction when brokered by individuals who pass the authenticity test, meet the explicit criteria above and leaders must provide a transparent rationale that honours teachers' professionalism.

4.1.4   Professional gatekeeper: curating a knowledge ecosystem

The data suggest that in response to a complex information environment, teachers actively assume the role of 'professional gatekeepers', curating their own trusted sources of knowledge. This behaviour appears to be a pragmatic response to the challenges of accessing and interpreting primary research. Maria, a school leader, expressed a preference for engaging with synthesised research presented in books over reading the primary sources themselves.

> The thing is, where I've probably in terms of actually changing my practice, where I've actually found the most information, where I found it in a really usable form, where I feel able and confident to use it... is probably through books, through not through primary research, but through books which reference primary research. (Maria)

The rationale provided was that books present information in a 'really usable form'. This preference is bound up with a desire for actionable guidance rather than high-level principles.

> They don't always come with the tangible strategies where you can take it and go, 'Okay, well now I'm going to do this…'. It's like, it should include this, it should include this… as a teacher… I've got to find a strategy. (Maria)

This frustration helps explain the appeal of pre-digested sources that translate general guidance into concrete steps. This preference for translated, pre-digested information was also evident in how participants use digital networks. Eleanor described using a social media platform as a professional curation tool, relying on trusted individuals to filter the vast amount of available research.

> I follow certain people on Twitter who are really thoroughly embedded in educational research and they will flag up papers that are really worth reading and looking at and because I'm time short, that's what I do. (Eleanor)

This curation extends to other digital tools. Michael mentioned using 'Teacher Tapp', an application that provides a daily 'two-minute thing to read', highlighting the demand for low-friction, bite-sized access to ideas. The effectiveness of these curated sources seems to lie not just in their ability to

simplify, but also in their skill at making complex ideas memorable and relatable. Maria gave a specific example of an analogy that made a complex concept tangible and memorable in a way that academic writing often does not.

> ...the idea of 100 metre race really sticks in my mind... that analogy, sticks in the brain because it's visual and you can absolutely relate to it in a way that you can't relate to university research. (Maria)

This gatekeeping also involves a layer of peer-vetting. Ben described using social media to check the viability of an idea before investing time in it:

> If it's an online piece, I will try and read up a few more reviews on it, so maybe go on to social media and just go read about this. Has anyone got any experience with it? Is it worth my time? (Ben)

However, for some of the most research-engaged participants, this model of relying on curated summaries has its limitations. Liam articulated this aspiration for direct engagement with primary research using an explicit medical analogy that frames access to live research as a marker of professional status.

> The Lancet for doctors is literally the latest, cutting-edge thinking. And I think that we need the education equivalent… I think access to current, live research could be really useful. Rather than just this person wrote this book in 2017, 2018, it's a good book. It's evidence-based. Yeah, but is it the latest evidence? (Liam)

The behaviours described above can be analysed as an agentic act of 'professional gatekeeping', The term **'professional gatekeeping'** can be used to describe teachers' active curation of knowledge sources. This extends Thornton's (1989, p. 4) account of teachers' curricular–instructional gatekeeping beyond curriculum content to the selection, filtering and translation of evidence. (Thornton, 1989). This is not a passive act of consumption but an active process of curating a bespoke knowledge ecosystem in response to information overload and the perceived inaccessibility of traditional academic research. This gatekeeping is a highly adaptive strategy for time-poor professionals, a point made explicitly by Eleanor who uses curation 'because I'm time short'.

These findings highlight the critical, often unacknowledged, role of 'knowledge brokers' (Ward p.4), the authors, bloggers and social media figures who perform the crucial work of translation (Kislov et al., 2017; Malin et al., 2019; Ward et al., 2009). Their labour is not merely one of summarisation. They perform cognitive and affective translation, making complex ideas accessible (lowering the capability demand), memorable through narratives and analogies and professionally resonant (passing the authenticity test). This process simultaneously boosts motivation and expands opportunity by providing low-friction access to ideas The scale and persistence of this demand can be understood through insights from the knowledge-mobilisation literature, which highlights how structural constraints, limited time, linguistic complexity and restricted access routes,

create a persistent mismatch between the supply of usable research and the needs of classroom practitioners (Best & Holmes, 2010; Levin, 2013; Nutley et al., 2007).

> I think where the EEF, I think, struggles from a teacher perspective, is that often it's guiding principles. Which are great and evidence informed, but they don't always come with the tangible strategies where you can take it and go, 'Okay, well now I'm going to do this and see how it works'… time-poor teachers… don't have the time to take the overarching principles and turn them into concrete strategies to try in school. (Maria)

Teachers are 'time short' (Eleanor), find academic language dense (Maria) and face journal paywalls that block access to current research:

> sometimes… if they're behind a paywall, I just can't access them. (Eleanor).

> I find that journals from universities hard to access from a linguistic point, but actually they're just hard to access because they're behind a paywall and I'm not no longer a part of the university, therefore I can't access them… (Maria).

These structural and practical constraints clarify why teachers turn to brokers who translate high-level guidance into concrete, actionable strategies. The aspiration expressed by Liam to move beyond these brokers and engage directly with primary research is also significant. It could be viewed as a strong expression of the professional gatekeeper role and a desire for full professional autonomy. It is a claim for the right not just to use knowledge that has been curated by others, but to critically appraise it at its source, thereby engaging directly with the profession's primary 'abstract knowledge base' (Abbott, 2014).

4.1.5   Theme summary

The findings presented in this theme suggest that for the participating teachers, the question 'What counts as evidence?' is far from a simple definitional issue. It is a sophisticated, identity-driven matter that appears to be the primary ground on which they navigate their professional autonomy and integrity.

Synthesising the findings from the four sub-themes, it is possible to argue that the participants' personal and collective epistemology is the arena for a fundamental conflict between two competing visions of their profession. On one side is a technocratic-managerial model, often associated with policy and accountability regimes (Mehta, 2013a), which appears to prioritise standardisation and certain forms of quantitative data, positioning teachers as implementers of external solutions. The findings suggest that this model is perceived by participants as a de-professionalising force. Their 'evidence fatigue' and the stringent 'authenticity test', characterised by the demand for a credible rationale and a relatable messenger, can be understood as rational, protective responses to a logic that they feel can devalue their expertise and constrain their judgment. This was a sentiment articulated across multiple interviews, including those with Eleanor, Chloe, Ben, Aisha and Liam.

On the other side, the participants appear to actively construct and defend a democratic-relational model of professionalism (Sachs, 2003, 2016). This model is enacted through several key practices identified across the data. Its intellectual foundation is the 'tripartite epistemology' that weaves together formal research with professional experience and local context, asserting the primacy of contextual fit, as described by David, Michael, Ben and Liam. Its social enactment is found in the reliance on 'relational trust', where the testimony of a respected colleague within a departmental 'epistemic community' carries considerable weight, a point evident in the accounts of Michael, Fatima, Sarah, Ben and Liam. Its agentic response is seen in the teachers' role as 'professional gatekeepers', with Eleanor, Michael, Ben and Maria all describing how they curate their own trusted knowledge ecosystems to reclaim a degree of epistemic authority.

Therefore, the struggle over what counts as evidence can be interpreted as a proxy for a more significant tension over the nature of the teaching profession itself. It is a contest that touches upon who has the right to define the problems of practice, who is qualified to validate solutions and ultimately, what it means to be a teacher. The participants in this thesis emerge not as passive consumers or resisters of evidence, but as active theorists of their own practice, whose epistemology is simultaneously a claim for autonomy and a defence of a vision of teaching as a complex, relational and human-centred profession.

To crystallise the core tenets of these two opposing models that have been identified through the analysis of the data, a summary is provided in Table 10.

Table 10

Summary of the technocratic-managerial model and the democratic-relational model

Dimension of professionalism	Technocratic-managerial model	Democratic-relational model
Core logic	Rationalisation, standardisation, control.	Participation, collaboration, trust.
Source of valid knowledge	External, codified research (e.g. RCTs).	Blended epistemology: research + experience + context.
View of teacher	Technician; implementer of external solutions.	Agentic professional; diagnostician, creator of knowledge.
Locus of control	Hierarchical; top-down mandates from leadership/policy.	Collegial; peer networks, professional communities (e.g. departments).

Dimension of professionalism	Technocratic-managerial model	Democratic-relational model
Primary currency	Accountability, data, fidelity to programmes.	Relational trust, demonstrated competence, shared context.
Implied goal of EBP	System efficiency, standardisation of outcomes.	Student-centred problem-solving, contextual efficacy.

4.2   Theme 2: The 'Why' of engagement

This theme investigates the 'motivation' (M) component of the COM-B model for behaviour change, building upon the epistemological framework of teacher judgement established in Theme 1. The analysis shifts from external pressures to the intrinsic drivers that appear to compel teachers to engage with EBP. It explores how participants in this thesis weigh the effort of engagement against the perceived benefits for their students and their own professional identity. The COM-B model offers a useful starting framework, conceptualising motivation as comprising two sub-components: reflective motivation, involving conscious planning and evaluation and automatic motivation, encompassing emotions and habitual responses (Michie et al., 2011).

To address the complexity of the data, this theme is structured into three sub-themes that emerged as the primary drivers of engagement: the moral commitment to solve pedagogical problems; the pursuit of professional confidence and legitimacy; and the drive for professional growth and authenticity. For each sub-theme, the empirical findings from the participant interviews will be presented and analysed first. This is followed by a separate discussion section that connects these findings to relevant literature and theoretical frameworks.

While these three drivers are explored separately for analytical clarity, the evidence suggests they are not disparate motivations but rather interconnected facets of a single, unifying construct. The analysis will culminate in arguing that these drivers are manifestations of what this thesis terms 'Vocational Aspiration'. This construct will be proposed as a necessary refinement to the standard COM-B model's conceptualisation of motivation, particularly within professional contexts defined by a strong moral purpose.

4.2.1   The commitment to solving pedagogical problems

Across the data, teachers describe a moral commitment to student welfare that translates into a pragmatic, problem-solving stance toward evidence. Participants presented this drive as intrinsic and central to their professional identity.

A recurring view, articulated most clearly by Eleanor, was that professional action is guided by the needs of the students in front of them:

> The children. So, the children in front of me are the motivation for everything that I do. So, I know when they're not getting something I know, when they're finding something really difficult to understand. It's I'm constantly reflecting and thinking about how I make it better for them. So that's what drives me. (Eleanor)

This motivation is immediate and relational rather than abstract; the emphasis on 'constantly reflecting and thinking' signals an ongoing process, not a one-off decision.

Several participants (Chloe, Michael and Maria) framed engagement with evidence as a practical response to specific classroom challenges rather than an academic exercise. As Chloe put it: 'If a problem is identified, the immediate question becomes, 'What do I know that might fix this?'' Michael similarly summarised: 'I think it's to solve a problem, isn't it?' This orientation was consistent across roles. A school leader, Maria, emphasised 'the why, what's the problem it's trying to solve' and noted that academic research often lacks 'tangible strategies' for immediate use, helping to explain a preference for pre-digested summaries and the role of knowledge brokers who translate research into usable routines.

Importantly, the 'problem' at stake is not limited to remediation. David described teaching both a 'top set class who were just exceptionally intelligent' and classes with 'incredibly low ability', which led him to draw on cognitive science (e.g. working memory). As he concluded, 'I think the children I teach are a huge part of what [drives me]'. Here, problem-solving extends beyond fixing deficits to closing any gap between students' current state and their potential, fundamentally, a drive for effective pedagogical differentiation. This orientation is often activated by specific, concrete events in the classroom, which act as narrative catalysts. For example, Michael described how student apathy, 'the kids just don't care about Pythagoras', could trigger a search for alternative approaches. Likewise, Aisha's struggle to teach an abstract topic on food sustainability that the 'kids don't get at all' prompted a search for more effective pedagogical strategies. This suggests that the 'problem' is not always a student deficit but can also be an internal, professional one related to the teacher's own knowledge. This was particularly evident for teachers working outside their specialism. Fatima, for instance, explained that their proactive engagement with resources for a non-specialist subject was driven by a fundamental desire to be competent for their students: 'I'm not as so experienced in [non-specialist subject], I want to make sure I get it right'. Here, the moral commitment to serve students is channelled into a drive for personal subject-knowledge development, highlighting that the 'problem to be solved' can be the teacher's own preparedness. Chloe provided a particularly clear example of this causal chain, describing how a 'chaotic year' with a fragmented timetable resulted in students with 'weird gaps' in their knowledge. The professional need to diagnose and fill these gaps to get students 'back on the same page' directly led this participant to seek out specific, evidence-informed strategies to solve this precise classroom puzzle.

This moral commitment also appears to foster a notable willingness to experiment. Ben stated this directly. When asked about trying new techniques for a 'lower ability' group, the response was immediate and unconditional:

> If I think it's going to help them remember... then any day, I will try new techniques, if it can help with their memory. (Ben)

The phrase 'any day, I will try' suggests a proactive and experimental stance where the potential benefit to the student outweighs the personal cost or risk of innovation.

Finally, the findings indicate the existence of a self-reinforcing motivational cycle. The intrinsic reward derived from observing student success appears to be a significant source of professional fulfilment that sustains the initial moral drive. Ben articulated this as

> Because at the end of the day, teaching is hard, but when you see that you've worked hard and the students have worked hard and they've got those grades, that is what teachings about. And I know it shouldn't be about the grades, but sometimes you're like, yes, I've got those nines out of them. I knew they could do it. And it's that success internal that keeps you in teaching then. (Ben)

This account makes the cycle concrete by linking teacher effort, student effort and outcomes to an intrinsic sense of success that sustains ongoing engagement. While one participant acknowledged that external accountability can sharpen this focus, 'You do [intervene] because you know you're going to be held to account' (Aisha), the data consistently point to the internal, moral commitment as the primary engine. This suggests a plausible feedback cycle: a classroom problem triggers a moral commitment, which drives a search for solutions and a willingness to experiment; the resulting student success provides an intrinsic reward that reinforces the original commitment, making future engagement more likely.

The findings presented above resonate with established theoretical concepts regarding professional motivation and identity. The strong, student-centred moral purpose articulated by participants aligns closely with conceptions of teaching as a vocation. Hansen (1994) defines a vocation not merely as a job, but as a practice defined by its inherent moral framework, social commitments and service orientation. The statement from Eleanor that 'the children... are the motivation for everything' is an expression of this vocational ideal, where the work is imbued with a purpose that transcends simple contractual obligation.

Furthermore, the self-generated, problem-solving drive described by participants is characteristic of intrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) distinguish intrinsic motivation, doing an activity for its inherent satisfaction, from extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external rewards or punishments. The data suggest that while extrinsic pressures exist, the more enduring motivators for these teachers are internal, stemming from the professional self and the satisfaction of helping students succeed. The 'success internal' described by Ben is a clear example of an intrinsic reward that sustains behaviour.

The proactive and experimental stance identified in the findings, particularly in Ben's 'any day, I will try' comment, can be understood through the lens of self-efficacy theory. Bandura (1977) and later Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) have shown that individuals with high self-efficacy, the belief in one's own capabilities to achieve goals, are more likely to be open to new ideas, exert more effort and

persist longer in the face of setbacks. The moral commitment to students appears to fuel this efficacy, providing the impetus to try new approaches in the belief that a solution can be found. This sub-theme therefore suggests that for these teachers, the moral commitment to serve students is not a passive value but an active, energising force that drives a cycle of problem-solving, experimentation and intrinsic reward.

4.2.2 Pursuit of professional confidence and legitimacy

A second significant driver for engagement with EBP that emerged from the data is the pursuit of psychological and social reassurance. A strong and recurring sentiment among participants was that knowing a strategy is supported by research provides what can be termed a 'confidence dividend'. This dividend functions as both a personal anchor in a profession marked by uncertainty and a social tool for professional legitimacy.

At the individual level, this confidence provides psychological reassurance and a sense of security. Chloe articulated this by contrasting research-informed methods with improvisation, suggesting that an evidence-based approach is likely to be '9 times out of 10 going to be more effective than something you just pull out of the ether'. This belief in the reliability of research serves as an anchor, giving teachers the conviction that their efforts are well-founded and likely to be effective over time. This security, in turn, appears to grant teachers the psychological permission to innovate. The backing of research can lower the perceived risk of deviating from established routines, empowering experimentation. As Aisha stated simply, 'I suppose the evidence gives you that confidence to think, yeah, let's do something different'.

The findings suggest, however, that this confidence is not a naive or blind faith in evidence as a panacea. Participants demonstrated a more sophisticated and critical perspective. Chloe provided a particularly nuanced account, holding two seemingly contradictory ideas in tension:

> If you know that something does have the evidence behind it, you know that if you stick to it, it is actually going to have an impact eventually... even if something's evidence-based, does that mean that it's going to work for every class every time? Of course not. That's not how kids work. (Chloe)

This statement is significant because it separates faith in a principle from the expectation of a specific outcome. The confidence lies in the process of using evidence as a starting point, providing the resilience to persist through implementation challenges, while simultaneously acknowledging the need for contextual adaptation. Where teachers have accrued evidence-backed successes, that experience appears to strengthen professional judgement and support principled rejection of unpromising approaches:

> And I think that also is what gives me the confidence to be like, 'that's not going to work'. Because I've spent so long honing down into what I know makes the biggest difference and I can see it year after year. It makes a huge difference. (Eleanor)

Beyond personal reassurance, the confidence dividend has an important social and political function. The data indicate that evidence is used as a tool of persuasion to build collective buy-in and justify change to colleagues. Aisha described a situation where they needed to convince a senior colleague of the merits of a new diagnostic testing approach. The research base became a key lever for influence:

> I did need the evidence in that circumstance, because I needed to convince somebody that this should work because of this, that this is what the research is showing. (Aisha)

This shows how research-based practice provides rhetorical power and professional legitimacy. It allows a teacher to transform what might be perceived as a personal preference into a professionally sanctioned approach, a vital tool for those in middle leadership or anyone seeking to influence school improvement. Participants also located this need for legitimacy within a climate of surveillance and potential blame:

> I think most teachers are sceptical of evidence-based practice, because... They're scared of judgment. They're scared of being judged. If their... results go down, they're going to be judged. So the biggest thing is reassurance that taking risks is okay, trying things that you've read somewhere is okay... that trial and error is okay, failure is okay. (Liam)

In such a climate, the 'confidence dividend' functions affectively as reassurance, permission to take informed risks , and politically as cover against censure. This need for legitimacy extends beyond persuading colleagues and functions as a crucial defence in the face of formal accountability. The pressure of student targets, for instance, can motivate intervention, as teachers feel compelled to act because they 'know you going to be held to account with the target grades' (Ben). In this context, an evidence-based approach provides a defensible rationale for pedagogical choices, offering a shield of professional legitimacy should student outcomes be scrutinised.

For some practitioners, the ultimate source of confidence and legitimacy comes not from consuming external research but from producing their own local evidence of impact. Liam offered a re-framing of what it means to be evidence-based, shifting the focus from consumption to production:

> I think that there's a big misunderstanding that just because you've read something someone else has done... that your practice is evidence-based, when actually it's only evidence-based, if you can stand there and say... I have done this. These are my results. This... has worked. (Liam)

This perspective appears to represent the apex of the confidence dividend. The greatest professional assurance is achieved when an externally proposed strategy is tested and validated within one's own unique context. This process reflects a complex negotiation between external authority and internal,

contextualised knowledge. This pursuit of confidence and legitimacy appears to be part of a broader project of professional identity construction. By seeking external, research-based validation, teachers actively align themselves with a professional ideal of the modern, effective practitioner. For 2 participants, the term 'evidence-based practice' had become almost synonymous with 'best practice'. When comparing two school initiatives, Michael concluded one was superior because, 'This one is hopefully more of a best practice... that's what we're aiming for'. This aspiration motivates teachers to engage in a 'personal choice to actually look at how best to teach something' (Fatima), thereby embodying an identity of professional effectiveness.

The nature of the 'critical confidence' expressed by participants aligns with a mature understanding of EBP, which views evidence not as a 'cookbook' of recipes but as a guiding resource that must be integrated with professional judgement and contextual (Biesta, 2007; Davies, 1999; Sharples, 2013). The ability of Chloe to hold both a belief in the long-term efficacy of an evidence-based approach and an awareness of its contextual limitations is indicative of this sophisticated stance. The high value that Liam places on practitioner-generated evidence connects directly to Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory. Bandura posits that 'mastery experiences', direct, personal successes, are the source for developing self-efficacy. The process described by Liam, of taking an external idea and proving 'This... has worked' in their own classroom, is a clear example of a mastery experience that builds robust professional confidence and autonomy. This suggests that teachers are not just passive consumers of evidence but are actively mediating between external professional standards and the internal demands of their authentic classroom practice. They seek external validation from research to gain legitimacy with colleagues (Aisha) and align with system-level definitions of 'best practice' (Michael), while simultaneously asserting that the ultimate arbiter of a practice's value is its successful, authentic implementation in their own context (Liam). This is not a contradiction but a complex professional balancing act.

Finally, the connection made by participants between EBP and 'best practice' can be situated within the wider context of policy discourses over the past two decades. Governments and professional bodies have increasingly promoted an ideal of the evidence-informed educator, creating a professional landscape where engagement with research is a marker of legitimacy and effectiveness (Department for Education, 2010; Hargreaves, 2000). The aspiration to align with this ideal, as expressed by Michael and Fatima, suggests that the pursuit of the confidence dividend is not just a psychological need but also a strategic act of identity construction within this modern professional context. This strategic act is often formalised through engagement with accredited professional development. As Maria noted, their high familiarity with research was a direct result of undertaking the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), as 'a lot of that comes from research'.

> So, the NPQH does, yeah, because you have to engage in it… Otherwise you're
> not allowed to do the final assessment… They can't check you… but you need to

> write something… you have to read the evidence and you have to engage in that thinking around putting it into practice. (Maria)

While such structures can legitimise EBP, they may also invite surface compliance, engagement to satisfy procedural demands rather than to deepen practice, which further explains why teachers seek a genuine confidence dividend to support informed risk-taking.

4.2.3   The drive for professional growth and authenticity

A third key driver of engagement suggested by the data is an intrinsic desire for professional development. This drive encompasses intellectual curiosity, the pursuit of high personal standards and the construction of a coherent and authentic professional identity. For participants Eleanor, David and Sarah, teaching is viewed not as a static set of procedures to be repeated, but as a dynamic field of inquiry that invites continuous learning and improvement.

This drive is often sparked by simple professional curiosity. Eleanor explained that if a piece of research 'intrigues me', they will apply it, seemingly for the satisfaction of seeing what difference it might make. For others, this curiosity is fuelled by more deeply personal psychological drivers. David offered a candid self-analysis, identifying a combination of a need for novelty and a striving for excellence as key motivators:

> ...boredom, I think there's an element of I don't like doing the same thing over and over again, I want to know if there's, I'm a bit of a perfectionist, can I do this better? Can I refine this... I'm horribly competitive with myself. (David)

This 'perfectionism' and internal 'competitiveness' are not about outperforming colleagues but appear to be expressions of an aspirational drive to close the gap between one's current professional self and a more idealised future self. For others, this drive for growth is less an individual pursuit and more a relational and emotional one. The experience of attending a conference, for example, could be professionally renewing not just for its content, but for the sense of community it provided. Michael described such an event as 'just inspiring, which doesn't happen that much', leaving them feeling 'uplifted' by being in 'a whole room of people with really similar experiences, really similar issues that you don't feel like you can raise'. This suggests that professional growth is also fuelled by the validation and connection found in professional communities, which can combat the isolation of classroom practice.

The inverse of this drive for growth is a marked sense of professional malaise when development is perceived to have stalled. Sarah offered a poignant expression of this, attributing their past growth to their intrinsic nature ('me as a person') and articulating a clear desire to continue that trajectory. The subsequent feeling of being 'stagnant' is presented as a salient emotional signal of an unmet professional need:

> I mean, it's evolved, but I do think it's more because of me as a person rather than what I was given. It has evolved. I would like it to keep evolving, but I don't know in the last year how much it has evolved. I do feel a bit stagnant in how much I know. (Sarah)

This statement illustrates the potential emotional consequence when the professional environment does not provide opportunities for the growth that these teachers intrinsically seek. For such professionals, standing still is incongruent with their sense of self.

This drive for growth is not always self-initiated; it can also be a socially scaffolded process. Ben provided a clear example of this, describing how their Head of Department introduced a new technique and encouraged them to 'Give it a go, see how you like it'. After finding that they 'really, really enjoyed it' and that the 'kids found it really interesting', the participant then 'took it a step further', adapting and extending the practice independently. This illustrates a model of professional development where growth is initiated by a trusted colleague before becoming a self-directed and authentic part of the teacher's own practice.

By contrast, the data also show a distinctly individualised pathway in which teachers initiate and sustain growth without external prompting. As Fatima explains:

> I know that other [specialist subject] teachers don't, haven't even looked at those documents. So, it would just be, what might, you know, my personal choice to actually look at how best to teach something. And so I've read, I read it. (Fatima)

Juxtaposing Ben and Fatima highlights the coexistence of socially scaffolded and individually initiated drivers of growth within the same professional culture. Extending this individually initiated trajectory, some teachers look beyond their immediate context to broaden the scope of their learning. As one participant put it:

> I'd like it to be bigger than that. I'd like to use more research that is being tried on a national, regional level, or tap into the research being conducted at other schools and things. (Liam)

This forward-looking stance underscores an expansive professional vision that connects personal initiative to engagement with a wider research community.

Furthermore, the data suggest that this process of professional growth is not about the indiscriminate accumulation of new skills, but about the thoughtful and authentic integration of new practices into a coherent professional identity. Liam revealed a sophisticated element of this reflective process: the assessment of 'fit' between a new method and their established teaching 'style':

> The second thing would be my own confidence delivering it. So if I look at it, I think, oh, that suits my teaching style... Is that an activity or a method that I think I can match my style? Because trying to change my style to meet... a method... is not

always going to work, because if I'm not fully invested, the kids will pick up on it. (Liam)

Relatedly, motivations to experiment often braid together authenticity with pragmatic concerns. One teacher framed the appeal of new practices in terms of both professional ease and pupil agency:

> Either if it makes my life easier as a teacher, you always want to make your life easier, whether it allows students to be more independent and feel like they've got more of a success in the activity or lesson, or whether students just find it a bit easier. Can they do more on their own? Can they be more independent?… (Aisha)

This balance between personal convenience and student empowerment further nuances how authenticity is constructed in practice. For the most strategic practitioners, this aspirational drive creates a state of constant readiness for improvement. At this strategic end of the continuum, Maria, a school leader, described their engagement with research as highly targeted, driven by a pre-existing 'desire to change' in an area where they perceive 'massive gains to be made'. The metaphor used to describe this state is particularly revealing:

> No, I think, I think what influences the decision mostly would be the why, what's the problem it's trying to solve... I'm looking to change at the point of engaging with the research... I'm almost it's pushing an open door. (Maria)

The 'pushing an open door' metaphor captures a motivational state where the professional is not waiting to be convinced of the need for change but is actively scanning the horizon for credible solutions to problems they have already identified.

The emphasis placed by Liam on the 'fit' between a new method and their personal 'teaching style' can be illuminated by the 'onion model' of teacher reflection (Korthagen, 2004). This model posits that a teacher's identity is layered, with outer layers of behaviour and competencies surrounding inner layers of beliefs, identity and mission. For change to be sustainable and effective, it must be aligned across these layers. Liam's reflection on whether a method can 'match my style' is, in effect, a form of 'core reflection' to ensure that a new practice is congruent with their inner professional identity, preventing a disconnect that they believe students would perceive.

The feeling of being 'stagnant' expressed by Sarah highlights a subtle but important factor in professional well-being. While much of the literature on teacher attrition focuses on workload and behaviour management, this finding points to an internal cause of dissatisfaction. Thwarting a professional's fundamental need for development can contribute to the emotional exhaustion associated with burnout, a phenomenon linked to high rates of teacher attrition (Sutcher et al., 2019). This provides a plausible link between the individual motivations explored in this theme and the systemic barriers to be examined later.

Finally, the 'pushing an open door' metaphor from Maria has significant implications for leadership and professional development. It challenges a deficit model of professional development, which assumes teachers need to be 'pushed' into changing their practice. Instead, it suggests a model where leadership is about identifying and empowering the pre-existing motivations of staff. As Robinson (2011) argues, the most effective school improvement initiatives are those that tap into teachers' desires to solve problems they themselves have identified as critical. This perspective reframes the challenge of engagement from one of creating motivation to one of creating the conditions for existing motivation to flourish.

4.2.4   Synthesising the drivers: proposing 'vocational aspiration'

The preceding analysis has explored three distinct, yet interconnected, drivers for teacher engagement with EBP. The evidence presented across these sub-themes, the moral commitment to solve student problems, the search for professional confidence and legitimacy and the drive for personal growth and authenticity, suggests the presence of a single, underlying motivational force. The data indicate that these are not separate motivations operating in parallel but are better understood as different facets of a unified, identity-linked commitment to a professional ideal.

Re-examining key evidence through this lens reveals these connections. The foundational moral commitment articulated by Eleanor in the opening sub-theme, the declaration that 'the children... are the motivation for everything', can now be interpreted as more than just a single driver. It appears to be one manifestation of a more stable, enduring professional disposition that generates a continuous motivational state. Similarly, the 'horribly competitive' perfectionism described by David seems to be more than a simple desire for growth; it suggests a long-term, aspirational drive to close the gap between the current and ideal professional self. This underlying drive also manifests in more pragmatic forms. It is evident in the persistent, functional mindset of Michael, who framed all engagement with evidence as a direct response to solving a classroom problem and in the direct, action-oriented questioning of Chloe when faced with student knowledge gaps: 'Well, how can I? What can I do about this?'

The intrinsic emotional reward derived from seeing students succeed (Ben) is the fuel that reinforces this deep-seated purpose, while the professional pain of perceived stagnation (Sarah) and the demand for authenticity in practice (Liam) can be seen as protective mechanisms for this core professional identity. These drivers are not simply calculations or reactions; they appear to be expressions of a fundamental 'wanting' to be a good teacher and to see students succeed. Based on this synthesis of the data, this thesis formally proposes the term 'Vocational Aspiration' to name this emergent construct. It can be provisionally defined as the enduring, identity-rooted goals and values that energise and guide professional practice.

To appreciate the theoretical implications of this finding, it is necessary to revisit the 'motivation' component of the COM-B model. The model defines motivation as the collection of brain processes that drive behaviour, comprising two sub-components: 'reflective motivation' (conscious plans and goals) and 'automatic motivation' (emotions, impulses and habits). Despite its utility, a notable critique of the model is that its conceptualisation of motivation may be incomplete. Marks (2020), for example, argues that the model is 'unfit for purpose' because it omits the 'crucial causal element of 'Wanting' or 'Aspiration'. The argument is that the model's focus on reflective plans and automatic impulses fails to account for the stable, goal-oriented dispositions that are central to human action and identity.

The findings from this thesis, synthesised as vocational aspiration, offer empirical support for this theoretical critique, suggesting its particular relevance within a professional context. The motivations articulated by the teacher participants cannot be neatly categorised as either reflective plans or automatic emotions. They represent something more stable, more foundational and more deeply tied to identity. The construct of vocational aspiration aligns closely with the concept of a deep-seated 'want' or 'aspiration' that Marks (2020) argues is missing from the original model.

Therefore, this thesis formally proposes that for understanding the behaviour of professional groups characterised by a strong moral or service-oriented purpose, the 'motivation' (M) component of the COM-B model requires expansion. The construct of vocational aspiration is proposed not as a replacement for the reflective and automatic components, but as a third, foundational dimension that energises and directs them. It is formally defined as:

> The enduring goals and values rooted in professional identity that motivate and guide day-to-day practice.

It is this vocational aspiration that helps explain why a teacher, at the end of a demanding day, might still spend time researching a new approach for a struggling student. The action is not just a plan and it is more than an impulse; it is an act driven by a fundamental and aspirational sense of professional self. Incorporating this dimension, as summarised in Table 11, appears to grant the model greater explanatory power when applied to the complex, value-laden world of professional practice. This moves the analysis from simply applying a model to critically evaluating and contributing to it.

> There are a lot of naysayers in education who are just like, 'No, education is broken'... And then you get people who all they want to do is read books about teaching children rather than actually teaching children. I just think there's not enough people who are willing to see it as a tool, as part of being a teacher, which is a far more complex thing. (Liam)

Table 11

Proposed refinement of the COM-B model for professional contexts

Feature	Standard COM-B Model	Proposed refined model (with Vocational Aspiration)
Core driver of action	Reflective plans & Automatic impulses	A stable, identity-linked Vocational Aspiration that energises and directs plans and impulses.
Role of capability & Opportunity	Direct influences on behaviour	Enablers or constraints on the expression of Aspiration.
Primary locus of motivation	Moment-to-moment calculation or reaction	Enduring professional attitude and identity project.
Explanatory power in professional contexts	Limited in explaining proactive, value-driven and long-term goal-oriented behaviour.	High, by accounting for the foundational 'why' that underpins professional action and resilience.

4.3   Theme 3: The 'How' of engagement

This theme directly addresses the central argument advanced in the Literature Review: that 'opportunity' often functions as the primary gatekeeper to teachers' engagement with EBP. Moving beyond the exploration of teachers' epistemological beliefs in Theme 1 and their intrinsic motivations in Theme 2, this section presents granular, empirical evidence of the practical and systemic constraints that teachers face.

The analysis will use the COM-B model of behaviour to investigate how these three components interact within the professional lives of the participants. The analysis that follows will deconstruct the lived experiences of the participants to explore how these components may interrelate, contributing to a system where the professional aspiration to engage with evidence is consistently thwarted by the structural realities of the teaching profession.

4.3.1   The primacy of opportunity: workload and resource constraints

The investigation into the 'how' of engagement begins with what participants identified as the most significant and persistent barrier: a fundamental lack of opportunity to engage with research. This lack of opportunity is not a single issue but manifests in two primary, interconnected forms: an overwhelming workload that precludes the time for deep professional thinking and a perceived inaccessibility of academic knowledge itself.

A prominent component of diminished opportunity was a chronic and overwhelming lack of time, a finding that resonates with decades of research into EBP in education (Cooper et al., 2009; Williams & Coles, 2007). This is not merely a scheduling inconvenience; it is a structural reality that shapes professional decision-making at a micro-level. This dynamic is best understood as strategic triage, a form of rational disengagement in which teachers prioritise urgent, high-certainty tasks over longer-horizon professional learning, even when the latter may be beneficial. As Michael put it:

> ...now it's, 'do I sit and read a book that I think will be, maybe helpful, or do I do these five things that have to be done by this deadline?' And when you have a closed amount of time like that... you're going to prioritise those other ones. (Michael)

A stark example was provided by Maria when considering the implementation of the Frayer model, a known evidence-based vocabulary strategy (Frayer et al., 1972). The barrier was not a lack of knowledge or will, but the concrete, immovable reality of the working week:

> I think time is the major one... it's not on my slides and I haven't got time to change them. I think that that is the main barrier, right? And I've got a five-period day on Monday, I can't go through and change them all for Monday. (Maria)

This quote vividly illustrates how workload can create inertia. The path of least resistance is to use pre-existing resources ('my slides'), even when one knows a better, evidence-informed alternative

exists. The cognitive and temporal cost of deviating from the established routine is calculated as being too high, demonstrating how the very structure of the working day can systematically prevent the implementation of EBP. This reality was expressed with equal clarity by Eleanor, who articulated not only the absence of time during the working day but also the personal cost of allowing professional duties to encroach on private life: 'That's super hard... Finding time, I don't want to spend my evenings doing that. And there's very rarely time during the day'. This statement grounds the abstract problem of 'workload' in the lived reality of professional boundaries and personal wellbeing.

This sense of being overwhelmed by the daily demands of the job is a widely shared sentiment. Aisha provides a visceral account of the daily grind, highlighting how the sheer volume of teaching is compounded by a constant stream of administrative demands: 'how hard it is to teach five lessons a day in a classroom... and then if you introduce things like, you need to log this, you need to log that... it's frustrating'. This accumulation of low-value tasks creates a professional environment where time for deep thinking is not just scarce, but actively displaced. The pressure created by this lack of time fosters a pragmatic, risk-averse mindset. As Ben explains, the scarcity of time makes experimentation a luxury that cannot be afforded: 'Because we are very short for time and I don't want to be trying methods that I'm not sure about or that have a low rate, because what's the point?'. This is a rational calculation; when time is the most precious commodity, it must be invested in activities with a guaranteed return, reinforcing a reliance on established routines over potentially superior but untested evidence-based alternatives. The cumulative effect is an erosion of reflective practice:

> I don't think we have enough time… I don't think I have ever got enough time
> where I can sit and think about how I can do better. (Sarah)

Echoing this, another teacher summarised the constraint bluntly:

> I mean, I don't, but I feel like there's just such little time in my timetable to
> actually [do more]… (Fatima)

Crucially, the data reveal that this 'tyranny of workload' is not simply a generic lack of time to find or read research. As established in Theme 1, the participants' core epistemological stance positions them as professional sense-makers, not passive implementers of external directives. They believe it is their professional duty to skilfully adapt any new approach to their unique context, a process of professional translation that is both complex and time-consuming. The inability to perform this essential work was articulated by Michael, who explained that the process of 'tweaking' is indispensable groundwork before a strategy can be responsibly implemented, let alone recommended to colleagues:

> ...much as you can read the research, that doesn't mean you're not going to need to
> tweak it to make it work for you. You're always going to need to tweak it to your
> setting or your situation or subject... I had to kind of figure that out before I could
> even start telling anyone else about it. (Michael)

This account elevates the act of adaptation from a matter of individual classroom effectiveness to a communal professional responsibility. The inability to perform this work due to time constraints not only renders a promising strategy unusable for the individual but also halts the process of peer-to-peer knowledge sharing that underpins professional learning communities. This lack of time for adaptation makes even high-quality, pre-digested research summaries from organisations like the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) difficult to action. As Maria explained, such resources often provide principles rather than ready-made strategies, leaving a crucial implementation gap that time-poor teachers cannot bridge:

> I think where the EEF, I think, struggles from a teacher perspective, is that often it's guiding principles. Which are great and evidence-informed, but they don't always come with the tangible strategies where you can take it and go, 'Okay, well now I'm going to do this and see how it works'... time-poor teachers... don't have the time to take the overarching principles and turn them into concrete strategies to try in school. (Maria)

This points to a deeper, more structural problem. Liam made the critical point that the strategies with the most potential impact are often those that require the most structural slack in the system, more time, smaller classes, or more non-contact periods:

> If I ever, like look at something that's been researched and I don't think I can action it nine times out of 10 - it's time. Nine times out of 10 the most effective things... require smaller classes or, or more non-contact or more contact time... it all comes down to time. (Liam)

This insight is critical because it reframes the argument from 'teachers are too busy' (an individual problem) to 'the system lacks the capacity for high-impact practice' (a structural problem). It implies that even a teacher with perfect time management skills would be unable to implement these strategies because the necessary preconditions are outside their control.

Compounding this primary barrier of time is a secondary, structural barrier to opportunity: the perceived inaccessibility of academic research itself. Eleanor, Fatima and Maria highlighted the problem of paywalls locking away publicly funded research. Eleanor noted, 'I literally have not signed up to any particular journals or anything like that, because it's a... huge subscription cost'. Fatima echoes this, identifying the primary barriers to engagement as simply 'Time, money' and explaining that departmental budgets are not prioritised for 'subscriptions to magazines', let alone academic journals. This adds a crucial layer of financial reality, showing that even if time were available, cost remains a significant hurdle. Maria clearly distinguished between the challenge of academic language and the simple, logistical problem of the paywall:

> I find that journals from universities hard to access from a linguistic point, but actually they're just hard to access because they're behind a paywall and I'm not no longer a part of the university, therefore I can't access them... (Maria)

Yet when these financial barriers are set alongside accounts of time scarcity, the latter consistently dominates. Consider the explicit juxtaposition: 'I literally have not signed up to any particular journals or anything like that, because it's a... huge subscription cost'. (Eleanor) with '…personally, I don't use them because I don't have the time to go down and look through them all'. (Ben, referring to a free school CPD library). The contrast shows that even when resources incur no cost, the overriding constraint of time prevents engagement. This suggests participants perceived the publishing model as a structural barrier. Participants reported relying on freely available summaries and makes them dependent on pre-digested, secondary sources, thereby limiting their agency as critical consumers of primary research.

The participants' subjective experiences of being 'time-poor' are corroborated by national data. The Department for Education's (DfE) own surveys have consistently shown that teaching is a profession characterised by long hours. The most recent 'Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders' survey found that full-time teachers work on average 52.4 hours per week (Department for Education, 2024b). While figures have fluctuated slightly over the past decade, most surveys concur that a working week of around 50 hours during term time has been a persistent feature of the job. This intense workload is not a minor grievance but a system-level challenge, frequently cited as the reason why a majority of teachers have considered leaving the profession. This contributes to high rates of attrition, particularly within the first five years of a teacher's career, which in turn incurs significant economic costs related to recruitment and supply cover and exacerbates workload for the remaining staff.

However, the analysis of the participant data suggests that the problem is not merely the quantity of hours worked, but the quality of the professional work that is being displaced. When the participants' accounts of lacking time for the high-value professional tasks of adaptation, contextualisation and strategy development are juxtaposed with national data on how teachers spend their time, a critical picture emerges. The DfE's 2023 survey revealed that 75% of teachers felt they spent 'too much' time on 'General administrative work', with over half reporting spending too much time on data recording and behaviour incident follow-up (Department for Education, 2024b). Survey responses suggest a substantial share of time goes on administrative and compliance tasks, actively displacing the time required for the complex cognitive work that constitutes true EBP. This aligns with findings that stress is often a product of having 'too little professional discretion'(Karasek, 1979; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The workload barrier, therefore, can be interpreted not just as a practical obstacle but as a de-professionalising force that systematically undermines the teacher agency and epistemological stance identified in Theme 1.

A similarly nuanced interpretation is required for the second barrier to opportunity: access to knowledge. The participants' identification of paywalls and costs as significant obstacles presents an apparent contradiction with the current landscape of academic publishing in the UK. The UK is often

described as a leader in the promotion of Open Access (OA) publishing (UK Research and Innovation, 2021). Driven by major policy initiatives from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Research Excellence Framework (REF), there has been a dramatic shift towards making research freely available. By 2022, it was estimated that around 80% of the UK's research output could be made OA and over half of all research is now published via OA routes, a stark increase from just 15% a decade earlier (Brayman et al., 2024).

This discrepancy between the participants' perception and the policy reality gives rise to what might be termed the 'Paywall Paradox'. However, further analysis of the data suggests a related phenomenon: the 'Illusion of Resources'. Even when resources are made available at no financial cost, they remain functionally inaccessible. For example, Ben notes the existence of a school CPD library with a 'whole rack of evidence-based textbooks', but offers a crucial caveat: 'Personally, I don't use them because I don't have the time to go down and look through them all'. Read together with Eleanor's concern about 'huge subscription cost', the pairing underscores that time, not money, is the primary gatekeeper; without protected time, material provision becomes an illusion of access. The books are there, but the opportunity to engage with them is not. This suggests the persistence of the paywall as a perceived barrier may be explained by interconnected factors. First, it could be a legacy barrier: teachers who encountered paywalls in the past may have ceased trying to access journals, assuming the landscape remains unchanged. Second, it may be a navigational barrier: even when research is free, it is often housed in disparate institutional repositories or complex databases that are difficult for non-academics to navigate effectively, leading to a form of 'scholarly isolation'. Third, it may be a psychological barrier: the long-standing image of academic research as an exclusive, impenetrable and costly domain may be so entrenched that it deters engagement before it even begins.

This reframes the challenge for the research community and for school leadership. The solution is not merely to make research open or to provide a library, but to actively communicate its openness and to create the protected time and curated, user-friendly pathways that bridge the gap between the world of academic scholarship and the world of professional practice. Without addressing the fundamental lack of time, any resource-based intervention is likely to remain an illusion.

4.3.2   The erosion of professional capability

The chronic lack of opportunity to engage with evidence, driven by workload and access barriers, appears to have a direct and corrosive effect on teachers' professional capability to do so. This erosion of capability is not a pre-existing condition but a predictable consequence of a system that fails to provide the necessary conditions for professional skills to be practised and maintained. This aligns with existing research which has long identified a lack of skills and confidence as a barrier to EBP (Cooper et al., 2009; Hemsley-Brown & Sharp, 2003).

The data from this thesis provide a compelling narrative of how this erosion occurs. A significant capability gap was articulated by Chloe, who candidly admitted to feeling ill-equipped to navigate the world of academic research, identifying both a lack of research literacy and a corresponding lack of confidence:

> I don't necessarily know where to look... as well, because I'm not really from an academic background. Like I studied maths... reading academic journals is difficult to say the least. So, it's also figuring out what's accessible to me. (Chloe)

This indicates a capability gap that stems from a lack of training and exposure, not from a lack of will. In parallel, the same participant acknowledged that, beyond mandated inputs, they had not self-initiated further study: 'I haven't done any independent study other than the reading I've been asked to do' (Chloe). This underscores how constrained 'opportunity' (COM-B) suppresses practice, setting the stage for subsequent atrophy.

The same participant provided a narrative of skill atrophy, describing how their understanding and use of EBP has deteriorated since their initial teacher training. This lack of ongoing practice has led to a reliance on simpler, purely experiential heuristics:

> Honestly, I think mine is probably got worse rather than better... I'm having to relearn what it means to actually use... the research... rather than, 'Oh, this is what worked for me with this situation so, I'll do that'. (Chloe)

This account is an illustrative example of the consequences of diminished opportunity. The system's failure to provide sustained opportunities to practise the skills of EBP leads directly to their erosion and a measurable decay in professional capability. While early-career scaffolds can temporarily buoy evidence engagement, participants described a slide once those structures recede. As one teacher reflected on their familiarity with EBP:

> Reasonably good. It's not as good it used to be. (Liam)

This succinct exchange crystallises capability decay in the absence of regular practice. This is not an isolated experience. The decay can also manifest as an erosion of a teacher's ability to even articulate their own practice, a foundational skill for reflection. Fatima, when asked about their own use of evidence-based techniques, admits, 'I would probably need more practice at identifying what I actually do'. This statement reveals a decay in metacognitive awareness; without the time or stimulus for regular reflection, the ability to critically self-assess and articulate one's own professional actions atrophies. The retreat to less reliable forms of practice is a logical consequence of this skills decay, demonstrating how the system can inadvertently 'un-train' teachers, moving them away from the very dispositions it purports to value.

This passive absorption of practice, without critical engagement with the underlying principles, was a recurring theme. This phenomenon, which can be termed 'professional osmosis', was described by Michael:

> I wouldn't say I'm very familiar with research, but if you brought some to me, I'd probably be like, 'Oh yeah, I do that... I've heard of this'. (Michael)

Here, evidence-based techniques seep into classroom practice through training or school policy, but the teacher is stripped of the agency to understand the 'why' behind the strategy, limiting their ability to adapt it skilfully to new contexts. Furthermore, the data reveal that the concept of 'capability' for EBP extends beyond research literacy. Maria provided a surprising and crucial example of this, highlighting how an evidence-based vocabulary strategy, the Frayer model (Frayer et al., 1972), can be rendered useless if the teacher lacks the foundational linguistic knowledge to support it:

> I think the other thing is, is the deeper knowledge base. So, the how?... a few science colleagues have said... I just don't know what synonyms and antonyms are... that would be a barrier to them using that model... because I don't know what those two things are and and therefore that's really challenging. (Maria)

This insight significantly broadens the definition of the capability barrier. It reveals that the implementation of an evidence-based strategy carries a 'hidden curriculum' of assumed foundational knowledge. A teacher's capacity to use an evidence-based tool is contingent not just on their ability to understand the research behind it, but also on their own underlying subject and pedagogical knowledge.

The participant data, particularly the narratives of skill decay from Chloe and the eroded metacognitive awareness from Fatima, suggest that professional capability for EBP should be conceptualised not as a static attribute acquired during Initial Teacher Training, but as a perishable asset. In the context of the COM-B model, 'capability' is a necessary precondition for behaviour. However, this analysis indicates a reciprocal relationship: a lack of 'opportunity' to perform the behaviour (engaging with research) directly causes the 'capability' to atrophy. This creates a self-reinforcing loop. The lack of time and access to practice the skills of finding, interpreting and adapting research leads to their erosion. This erosion lowers professional confidence, which in turn makes future engagement with research seem more daunting and less likely, even if a rare opportunity were to present itself. This dynamic helps to explain why one-off CPD interventions that aim to 'upskill' teachers often fail to create lasting change; they do not address the systemic lack of opportunity for the continuous practice that is required to maintain and build these perishable skills (Cordingley, 2015).

The Frayer model example provided by Maria offers a second, equally important development of the 'capability' concept (Frayer et al., 1972). It reveals what might be termed the 'hidden curriculum' of EBP implementation. The success of an evidence-based strategy is not solely dependent on the teacher's understanding of the evidence for that strategy. It is also contingent on a bedrock of pre-

existing, often tacit, subject and pedagogical content knowledge. This presents a critical flaw in many professional development models that focus only on delivering the 'new strategy' without first diagnosing or addressing these potential foundational knowledge gaps. It suggests that for EBP to become truly embedded, CPD must evolve beyond the simple dissemination of 'what works' and incorporate diagnostic elements that can identify and support teachers in developing the prerequisite knowledge needed to make those strategies work in their classrooms. This helps to explain why even apparently simple and well-evidenced strategies can fail to gain traction, not because of teacher resistance, but because of unaddressed gaps in this hidden curriculum of foundational capability. An important question that emerges here is whether these foundations are sufficiently laid during Initial Teacher Training. If ITT does not explicitly develop and embed the skills of engaging critically with research and make visible the layers of subject and pedagogical knowledge that underpin strategy use then teachers may enter the profession without the necessary base to sustain evidence-informed practice. Recent work by Sims et al. (2023) illustrates this challenge: while video modelling of an evidence-based strategy improved trainee teachers' classroom skills, it did not improve their underlying knowledge or self-efficacy. This suggests that ITT may provide exposure to practices but not always cultivate the deeper, more durable capabilities needed for teachers to engage confidently and independently with evidence. As such, professional development later in a teacher's career is not simply building on firm ground, but often compensating for gaps left unaddressed at entry level.

4.3.3   The role of CPD in shaping the cycle of engagement

> Whole school CPDs I've not found useful. I do think they could be an email.
> (Sarah)

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) represents the system's primary formal mechanism for intervening in the cycle of disengagement by building capability and motivation. However, the data from this thesis reveal the CPD system is often perceived by participants as failing to meet their professional needs, pointing to significant structural flaws. Far from interrupting the cycle, the dominant, top-down models of CPD described by Eleanor, Fatima, Sarah and Ben frequently serve to reinforce and even accelerate it by providing neither the time for implementation nor the professional respect required to foster genuine engagement.

A concise and critical assessment of the prevalent model of CPD was offered by Eleanor. The phrase 'done to us' captures the sense of disempowerment and lack of professional agency that characterises this experience. The core failure identified is that such models provide no space for the essential professional work of implementation and adaptation:

> I feel very much like the CPD has just been done to us, without any real time for us
> to embed and put it into our practice. (Eleanor)

This lack of authenticity is often palpable to teachers, who can see through superficially interactive but ultimately meaningless tasks. The same participant provided an insightful deconstruction of poor CPD design, diagnosing the collaborative tasks as 'tokenistic gap-fillers' designed to meet the facilitator's needs rather than the learners':

> The talk that we're given in CPD sessions is just kind of tokenistic... It's just the only talk that takes place is part of the facilitation where clearly the person who is delivering the CPD has been told, 'you must get them to do something and don't talk to them the whole time'. (Eleanor)

This cynicism is widespread. Teachers quickly diagnose when professional development is driven by external accountability rather than a genuine desire for professional learning. Fatima offers a blunt assessment of their experience with whole-school CPD sessions: 'I feel like they just have, they just tick a box for Ofsted and it's not actually valuable'. This perception of inauthenticity is compounded by a sense of inefficiency (see epigraph) and it breeds a deep cynicism that is demotivating. As one teacher put it, they could:

> ...not learn a single bloody thing. And also know that what they're telling you is wrong. And that's probably why I take it upon myself to read... so much because I think well, I'll just improve my own practice then because no one else is doing it for me. (Eleanor)

The stakes are non-trivial:

> I think that poor quality CPD in schools is one of the biggest driving forces for pushing teachers out the profession… I've seen it in so many schools… they've [not] 100% realised or value the expertise that they've got in front of them. (Eleanor)

The perceived motive behind a CPD activity appears to be as important as its content. A further critical failure of generic, whole-school CPD is its inability to account for subject-specific pedagogical needs. Ben, a science teacher, describes how a school-wide initiative, the Universal Thinking Framework, is consistently presented with examples from humanities, making it difficult to apply in their own context: 'their examples are always history... They're very much in there 'this is what we're trying, this is what we're going to do and you're going to run with it''. The participant explains that for 'application subjects' like science, a different pedagogical sequence is required, where foundational knowledge must be secured before higher-order thinking tasks can be attempted. The failure of the CPD model to recognise this disciplinary distinction leads to frustration and a sense of being unfairly judged when the generic strategy proves ineffective.

In stark contrast, David and Michael also described experiences of effective CPD. These successful models work precisely because they function as integrated interventions, simultaneously addressing opportunity, capability and motivation. A key ingredient for this success is psychological safety.

Michael described a session on 'having tough conversations' that was effective because it created the conditions for a different kind of professional interaction:

> I think our sessions, for instance, on the having tough conversations was really helpful... the fact that we could be really honest with our actual problems and share things... with people that actually get it and also to feel like you're not stupid and you're not alone in this problem. (Michael)

Data suggested this model may work because it restores agency and relevance, which fuels motivation ('our actual problems'). It provides psychological safety ('be really honest', 'not stupid', 'not alone'), which creates the opportunity for genuine collaboration. This collaborative sense-making with peers who 'get it' is a mechanism for building applicable capability. Safety, in this context, acts as the bridge between opportunity and capability.

The culmination of this vision for effective CPD is captured in David's inspiring description of a 'journal club'. This model serves as a practical blueprint for a cycle-breaking intervention:

> Oh, so I have a dream to bring in journal club here... journal clubs as a CPD session is transformative... you actually say, right, you've all got half an hour read this and you have a beautiful, quiet room, everyone reads it and then discussion starts and you get these little pockets in it turns into a whole thing. (David)

Participants described this approach as transformative because it creates a virtuous cycle. It begins by restoring opportunity (protected time, access to material). This opportunity is then used to build collective capability (collaborative reading and sense-making). The success and relevance of this process directly fuel intrinsic motivation. The fact that such models are described as a 'dream' rather than a reality demonstrates how the system's primary mechanism for professional learning is often failing to interrupt the cycle of disengagement.   In practical terms, restoring teacher agency also means enabling self-directed choice:

> I would like to be pointed in the right direction by my school… maybe a CPD library and I get to pick what I want to get better at, because the school wouldn't really know what I need… I will pick what suits me best. (Sarah)

The cynicism and feeling of being 'done to' expressed by Eleanor do not exist in a historical vacuum. This sentiment can be understood as a legacy of previous eras of education policy in England. The New Labour government (1997-2010), for instance, was characterised by a series of large-scale, top-down and highly prescriptive school improvement initiatives, most notably the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. These strategies mandated specific pedagogical practices, such as the daily 'Literacy Hour', with a tightly prescribed structure that emphasised whole class teaching and phonics. While these policies were driven by a stated goal of raising standards, they were often implemented with a rigid, compliance-focused approach that was seen by many as undermining professional autonomy and judgment. This history of top-down reform may have conditioned generations of teachers to be sceptical of centrally driven initiatives. Therefore, the 'tokenistic' CPD

described by Eleanor is not just a poorly designed session; it is an echo of a policy paradigm that prioritised fidelity to a prescribed model over authentic professional inquiry.

The evidence from participants such as Ben reveals an additional layer to this failure. The problem with 'one-size-fits-all' CPD is not merely its top-down delivery; it is its frequent disregard for the distinct pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) that defines different subject disciplines (Loewenberg Ball et al., 2008; Shulman, 1986). When a school-wide initiative is presented with examples exclusively from a single subject area, such as history, it implicitly elevates that subject's pedagogy to a universal standard. This approach is bound to fail in subjects with fundamentally different epistemologies and pedagogical requirements, such as the empirical and procedural nature of science or the abstract logic of mathematics. For a science teacher like Ben, being mandated to use a history-centric framework is not just impractical; it is a de-professionalising act that invalidates their subject-specific expertise.

A similar blind spot is evident in national policy: analyses of the Core Content Framework (CCF) and its successor ITTECF show a strong tilt toward generic content and research-promoting a scientistic view of educational knowledge at the expense of contextualised pedagogic traditions (Hordern & Brooks, 2024, 2025). The British Academy has warned that giving primacy to such frameworks risks sacrificing subject-specific content and provider autonomy (British Academy, 2021). Meanwhile, even government documentation acknowledges that tailoring CPD/training to subject and phase is seen by the sector as necessary (Department for Education, 2024a). By failing to contextualise EBP within the discipline in both policy and implementation, such frameworks foster resentment and increase the likelihood that CPD will be perceived as irrelevant, accelerating the very cycle of disengagement they are meant to break.

In contrast, the 'journal club' model described by David may function as a useful counterpoint. It can be conceptualised as a 'virtuous cycle' that directly counters the 'vicious cycle' of disengagement by simultaneously addressing all three components of the COM-B model. It creates opportunity by providing protected time and access to research. It builds capability through collaborative interpretation and discussion in a psychologically safe environment. Finally, it fosters motivation by grounding the activity in professional curiosity and peer collaboration, rather than external compliance. This model aligns with a more contemporary understanding of evidence-informed practice as a process that combines external research with practitioner expertise and contextual knowledge. The gap between the 'done to' reality and the 'journal club' ideal illustrates a substantive shortcoming in the system's approach to professional learning. Instead of acting as an intervention to break the cycle, ineffective CPD often becomes an accelerator, further eroding the very motivation it is supposed to build.

4.3.4   The rationality of disengagement and the erosion of motivation

The final stage in the cycle described by Eleanor, Michael, Sarah, Ben and Aisha is the erosion of intrinsic motivation. The evidence from this thesis suggests that this should not be interpreted as a sign of teacher apathy or a lack of professionalism. Instead, disengagement emerges as a logical and rational response to a professional environment that consistently thwarts effort, disrespects expertise and makes meaningful engagement a high-effort, low-reward activity. The data reveal that 'disengagement' is not a single phenomenon but a sophisticated, multi-faceted response that can be simultaneously pragmatic, emotional and cognitive.

First, disengagement is presented as a rational act of strategic triage. In a time-poor environment saturated with competing demands, teachers are forced to make constant calculations about where to invest their finite energy. Michael explains how a non-urgent, 'maybe helpful' task like reading a book is inevitably deprioritised in the face of immediate, compliance-driven deadlines. The choice is a matter of professional survival:

> I think some of it is just once you've taught for a while, you've already got stuff in in your arsenal... now it's, 'do I sit and read a book that I think will be, maybe helpful, or do I do these five things that have to be done by this deadline?'... you're going to prioritise those other ones. (Michael)

This is not a failure of motivation; it is a strategic and logical prioritisation of finite resources in the face of overwhelming demands. When the system makes genuine engagement practically impossible, disengagement becomes a sensible course of action.

Second, disengagement is framed as a protective mechanism for one's professional integrity and emotional well-being. This rational withdrawal is compounded by the personal and professional cost of being subjected to a broken system. Eleanor captures the feeling of professional insult that comes from being forced to sit through poor-quality, irrelevant and sometimes factually incorrect CPD. The result is a deep sense of professional devaluation that actively drains the will to engage:

> I spent a lot of my time feeling really, really devalued and my exp- and my experiences and isn't valued. And it's just so demotivating to sit in CPD sessions and not learn a single bloody thing. And also know that what they're telling you is wrong. (Eleanor)

This sense of being devalued is exacerbated when teachers feel unsupported by leadership during times of crisis. Aisha recounts a period of severe student behaviour issues where the leadership response lacked empathy, with teachers being told, 'It's only six students, what are you worried about?'. The emotional toll of this invalidation was immense: 'the one thing that gets you down is, if the behaviour is really bad, because you just feel well, you're not doing the job, you feel like, is it me? Like, yeah, it's horrible'. In this context, emotional withdrawal is not apathy; it is a necessary defence against a system that fosters isolation and self-doubt.

A particularly concerning account of professional culture was provided by Ben, who described an experience where they felt a mentor had disingenuously encouraged them to trial a technique the mentor themselves did not believe in. The mentor admitted afterwards, 'yeah, I didn't think that would work, but I didn't want to try it myself and I wanted you to try it out'. The impact on the participant was significantly negative, creating a situation where disengagement becomes the only ethical and rational response: 'not only did it knock my confidence, it knocked the kid's confidence and made me feel like I couldn't teach'. This experience represents the endpoint of the cycle. In this instance, the system appears not only to have failed to support the teacher but may have also undermined their sense of professional worth and, crucially, used them in a way that risked negative outcomes for students. Withdrawing from such a system is a necessary act to preserve one's professional and ethical identity.

Finally, disengagement can be a protective mechanism against the cognitive and emotional burden of navigating a noisy and, at times, untrustworthy information environment. Here, initiative fatigue operates as the proximate cause that precipitates rational withdrawal as the effect. Eleanor captures the cumulative overload generated when schools layer new demands without retiring old ones: 'The, the biggest barrier to all of it has been schools, introducing initiative after initiative after initiative. And without abandoning anything' (Eleanor). In response, Sarah articulates the logical outcome, deliberately narrowing attention to protect cognitive bandwidth: '...sometimes it's just best to close that door. There's a lot out there and as teachers, we don't know what to pick or what to not and it is getting a bit difficult'. (Sarah). When faced with a bewildering array of options and lacking the time or trusted curation to make an informed choice, 'clos[ing] that door' becomes a logical coping mechanism to manage cognitive load and mitigate the anxiety of making a poor choice, thereby linking the cause (initiative fatigue) to the effect (rational withdrawal) in teachers' day-to-day decision-making (Fullan, 2011). The analysis of the experiences of Eleanor, Michael, Sarah, Ben and Aisha suggests that 'disengagement' is not a monolithic state of apathy but rather a spectrum of rational coping strategies developed in response to a dysfunctional system. The data allow for a more sophisticated conclusion than simply 'teachers lose motivation'. The responses described by these participants can be categorised along this spectrum. Michael's response is primarily pragmatic, a calculated decision based on time and deadlines. Eleanor's response is affective and ethical, an emotional and moral withdrawal to protect their sense of professional self-worth from a devaluing system. Aisha's account of feeling unsupported during a behaviour crisis is an example of this affective withdrawal, driven by feelings of isolation and self-doubt. Ben's experience of being manipulated by a mentor represents the most extreme form of ethical withdrawal, a necessary response to a serious breach of trust. Finally, Sarah's response is cognitive, a conscious decision to reduce information overload and the anxiety of choice in a complex information landscape. Framing these as distinct but related rational strategies moves the argument beyond a simplistic narrative of teacher

burnout. It portrays teachers as active agents making logical, albeit professionally suboptimal, choices to survive within a system that fails to support their intrinsic desire to improve.

For some, this spectrum of in-role disengagement culminates in leaving the profession. The very drivers identified by participants in this thesis, overwhelming workload (as articulated by Eleanor, Aisha, Liam and Maria), the feeling of being devalued by ineffective CPD (described by Eleanor, Fatima, Sarah and Ben) and a lack of professional support (recounted by Ben and Aisha), are the same factors cited repeatedly in national reports as the primary reasons for England's teacher retention crisis (McLean & Worth, 2025). With a significant number of teachers leaving within their first five years and many more actively considering it, the connection appears clear (Department for Education, 2025b). This links the micro-level experiences of these participants to the macro-level crisis in the education sector. It suggests that the cycle of disengagement does not just harm the quality of evidence-informed practice within schools; in its final turn, it pushes dedicated professionals out of the system entirely, perpetuating the very staff shortages and workload pressures that initiated the cycle in the first place.

4.3.5   Theme Summary

The analysis of the participants' lived experiences in this theme has revealed that the practical barriers to teacher engagement with EBP are not a disconnected list of grievances. Instead, the findings suggest they are interconnected components of a single, self-perpetuating systemic failure. This analysis began by showing how a chronic lack of opportunity, driven primarily by the 'tyranny of workload' and the perceived inaccessibility of resources, acts as the lynchpin of this system. This lack of opportunity for practice was then shown to directly cause an erosion of professional capability, as essential skills in research literacy, metacognitive reflection and even foundational pedagogical knowledge atrophy without use. This dual failure is compounded by a formal CPD system that is often perceived as ineffective and decontextualised, serving to accelerate the cycle rather than interrupt it. The final, logical outcome of this systemic breakdown is the erosion of intrinsic motivation, where disengagement becomes a rational act of professional and personal self-preservation for time-poor professionals working in a devaluing system.

To provide a visual synthesis of this theme's argument, the mechanics of this cycle and its potential antidote are presented in Table 12. This table maps the mechanics of the cycle and a potential virtuous counter-cycle to the components of the COM-B model, grounding each stage in the empirical evidence provided by a broad range of participants.

Table 12

Cycle of disengagement and its systemic antidote

Component of the cycle	The disengagement cycle	The engagement cycle	Illustrative empirical evidence (disengagement → engagement)
Opportunity	Chronic lack of time ('tyranny of workload') prevents the essential professional work of adaptation. Compounded by paywalls and inaccessible formats.	Protected, collaborative time is created. Open-access, pre-digested summaries are provided.	'I think time is the major one... it's not on my slides and I haven't got time to change them'. (Maria) → 'You actually say, right, you've all got half an hour read this and you have a beautiful, quiet room, everyone reads it and then discussion starts'. (David)
Capability	Lack of time and access prevents development of research literacy. Dense academic language and lack of confidence act as formidable barriers.	Collaborative sense-making and structured inquiry build skills and confidence in a supportive context.	'I'm not really from an academic background... reading academic journals is difficult to say the least'. (Chloe) → '...we could be really honest with our actual problems and share things... with people that actually get it and also to feel like you're not stupid'. (Michael)
Motivation	Systemic failures lead to cynicism and rational disengagement. EBP is perceived as a futile, high-effort, low-reward activity.	Agency, choice and direct relevance to classroom problems rekindle intrinsic motivation. Success creates a positive feedback loop.	'It's just so demotivating to sit in CPD sessions and not learn a single bloody thing'. (Eleanor) → 'It was just inspiring, which doesn't happen that much and you left feeling uplifted... you could focus on your problems'. (Michael)

4.4 Theme 4: The 'Where' of engagement

This final theme directly addresses the systemic origins of the core argument advanced in the Literature Review: that a fundamental paradox lies at the heart of education policy. Moving beyond teachers' epistemological beliefs (Theme 1), their intrinsic motivations (Theme 2) and the practical barriers they face (Theme 3), this section offers a macro-level analysis of the policy environment that underpins these issues.

The COM-B model of behaviour is employed not to provide a disconnected list of factors, but to deconstruct what is conceptualised here as a 'policy paradox'. This analysis reveals a structural contradiction: while one arm of government policy invests heavily in building teacher capability, another simultaneously erodes the opportunity for that capability to be exercised.

In unpacking this paradox, the discussion demonstrates how systemic conflict is interwoven with the findings of previous themes, ultimately producing a system where teachers' professional motivation to engage with evidence is consistently undermined by the structural realities of the English education system.

4.4.1 The mediating role of school leadership and its impact on professional culture

This section explores how the national policy paradox is experienced and negotiated at the school level. The findings suggest that the abstract pressures of policy are made concrete through the actions of school leaders and the professional cultures they cultivate. The school environment thus becomes the crucial arena where systemic contradictions are either amplified, leaving staff exposed and overwhelmed, or actively mediated, creating pockets of professional agency and resilience. The analysis will first present the findings from participants regarding the role of leadership and the resulting cultures of collaboration or fatigue, before discussing these findings through the theoretical lenses of policy mediation and organisational behaviour.

The data from this study suggest a near-unanimous view among participants that the nature of school leadership is the single most important factor in enabling or disabling their engagement with EBP. It was consistently framed as a non-negotiable prerequisite for any meaningful improvement work.

A clear distinction was drawn between supportive and unsupportive leadership. David, Michael and Aisha for instance, described how effective leaders create the necessary conditions for engagement. Michael referred to the importance of creating 'mental space' for innovation, which involves removing the high-stakes fear that can 'stop[s] people taking chances'. Michael's account frames effective leadership as carving out psychological slack by 'remov[ing] a lot of accountability that would stop people taking chances', thereby converting abstract policy pressure into protected opportunities for inquiry and trial. This sentiment was articulated by David, a school leader, who

contrasted their current supportive environment with a previous one. They asserted that individual motivation is insufficient without leadership that actively creates the right conditions, concluding, 'Having a head teacher that does that is super, super important. So, it has to start there. And if it doesn't start there, then nothing else will land'. Reinforcing this point, David recalled:

> I've worked in a school where the SLT didn't engage with it. And so, I could shout from the rooftops about it, but it was never going to be totally successful. (David).

This perspective suggests that for this participant, the primary variable determining success was not the individual teacher's motivation but the mediating function of the leadership team. In terms of the conceptual framework, a supportive leader effectively creates social opportunity by fostering a high-trust culture where teachers feel safe to take risks. Teachers apply an 'authenticity test' not only to research sources but also to initiatives coming from leadership, a leader who has earned trust will see their initiatives embraced (motivation is maintained), whereas in a low-trust, top-down climate, new programmes fail this authenticity test and teachers' motivation deteriorates or becomes mere surface compliance. This trust in leadership judgement was echoed by Aisha, who felt confident in new initiatives because their leader 'doesn't do things for the sake of it... you kind of trust his judgment'.

In contrast, a different type of leadership was described by Eleanor and Ben, characterised by top-down, low-trust managerialism. Ben depicted an environment where the agenda was dictated with a ''my way or the highway'' approach, backed by the threat of punitive monitoring: 'if you try and defer from that, it makes life a lot harder, because when they come around to do their drop ins, they're going to question you more'. Similarly, Eleanor described a situation where the school's teaching and learning focus was 'led by one person with one view, a dominant view', where the rationale was 'never made clear'. This style appears to directly erode the psychological safety required for authentic engagement and risk-taking. This dynamic is potentially exacerbated by a lack of clear communication. Maria, a school leader, acknowledged that the rationale for senior leadership decisions is not always made explicit to staff, partly from a concern that staff 'do not care or hear it'. This communication gap risks leaving teachers feeling that new initiatives are arbitrary, which can foster cynicism.

The findings suggest that the professional culture within a school, characterised by either vibrant collaboration or weary fatigue, is a direct consequence of how leadership manages these external and internal pressures. In environments described as supportive and high-trust, peer collaboration was identified as an efficient mechanism for spreading effective practice. Liam's account of adopting a strategy based on a colleague's simple assurance, ''Trust me, this works'', illustrates this. In a time-poor, high-risk system, a peer's recommendation offers a rational solution, as it comes pre-validated for contextual fit and provides the social proof that mitigates the risk of failure. This aligns with the view of Chloe, who noted that such targeted, collegial advice is often more valuable than formal, whole-school CPD.

Conversely, where the pressures of the policy paradox are allowed to permeate the school unchecked, the dominant cultural response appears to be initiative fatigue. Eleanor described this as 'introducing initiative after initiative after initiative... without abandoning anything Liam provided a detailed case study in which leadership linked an action research project directly to performance management. This coupling transformed a learning opportunity into a compliance threat, such that 'it put people off… and they linked it to performance management… And that really, that really turned people off evidence'.. As Chloe stated, finding time for new demands is 'super hard', leading many to simply 'opt not to bother'. This suggests that initiative fatigue is not simply weariness, but a strategic disengagement in response to unsustainable demands.

The participant data can be interpreted through the theoretical lens of leadership as policy mediation. School leaders are positioned as 'street-level bureaucrats' who must interpret and translate external pressures for their staff. Their actions appear to align with the concepts of 'bridging', which involves adapting the organisation to external demands and 'buffering', which aims to protect the organisation from disruptive external forces. The findings from this study suggest that what participants perceive as effective leadership involves a sophisticated combination of both strategies. These leaders appear to bridge to the capability-building elements of policy (such as embracing the ECF) while simultaneously buffering their staff from the most damaging, opportunity-destroying pressures of the accountability regime. By contrast, amplifying occurs when leaders transmit external accountability pressures unfiltered or fuse improvement activity with high-stakes appraisal, thereby converting development into surveillance.

In the language of the COM-B model, the 'mental space' described by Michael is a direct manifestation of psychological and social opportunity. By buffering staff from excessive pressure and the fear of failure, leaders create the psychological safety required for teachers to risk trying new approaches and engaging authentically with evidence. Conversely, amplifying removes opportunity by heightening perceived risk and narrowing discretion, as in the performance-management coupling described by Liam. The punitive, compliance-driven leadership style described by Ben actively removes this opportunity, fostering a culture of risk aversion and perpetuating the very behaviours the EBP movement seeks to overcome.

This perspective allows for a re-framing of 'initiative fatigue' not as a sign of unprofessionalism, but as a rational, adaptive response to the institutional environment (Ball, 2003; Biesta, 2009; Day & Gu, 2010). The phenomenon is well-documented as the predictable consequence of being repeatedly asked to invest in new practices without adequate time, resources, or psychological safety. The experience recounted by Liam, where an initiative 'turned people off evidence', suggests that poorly implemented change does not just fail; it can create a form of institutional scarring that inoculates staff against

future engagement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Spillane et al., 2002). This is not mere weariness, but a learned, protective disengagement born from past experiences of poorly managed change.

Furthermore, the data may point to a deeper, more systemic driver of these negative school cultures. The stress experienced by school leaders themselves, as they grapple with accountability pressures, could be a key factor. Research into the effects of accountability systems has found evidence of 'emotional contagion' of stress within schools; teachers are more likely to feel stressed by accountability if their colleagues and, to a lesser extent, their headteacher also feel stressed (Kelchtermans, 2005; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). It is plausible, therefore, that the top-down, compliance-driven leadership style described by Ben is not simply a matter of personal preference but a behavioural response of a leader who themselves feels under immense pressure from the external accountability system. This leader's stress and the management style it produces, may then translate national policy pressure into a local cultural reality of fear and risk-aversion. It is therefore plausible that the top-down, compliance-driven leadership style described by Ben reflects a stress response to external accountability, which locally amplifies national pressure into a culture of fear and risk-aversion. This interpretation offers a more systemic explanation for unsupportive leadership, shifting the focus from individual fault to the pressures inherent in the system itself.

4.4.2   The structural conflict of policy in the English education system

This section elevates the analysis from the school level to the national policy landscape. It deconstructs the 'policy paradox' by examining its two opposing arms: the explicit mandate to build teacher capability in EBP and the systemic forces of workload and accountability that appear to erode the opportunity for this capability to be meaningfully exercised. Using the COM-B model as a critical framework, the analysis suggests that these are not merely competing pressures but contradictory forces, where one arm of government policy may actively negate the other.

> I remember leading the curriculum when those changes came in. And what happened is everyone stripped out all the fun stuff, we've got to focus on the content and those changes force teachers to go into some really boring, rote teaching panic... they took out a lot of the stuff that's supporting the learning and also was engaging students... And then what we saw were, they're not superfluous, they're actually really important parts of student's learning. (David)

This vignette concretises the paradox: a central policy push reshapes practice in ways that appear to undermine the very conditions (engagement, scaffolds for understanding) that evidence suggests are necessary for high-quality learning.

The data show a consistent and often positive, recognition among David, Chloe and Maria of policies designed to build teacher capability. The Early Career Framework (ECF) and the suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) were frequently cited as significant, systemic investments in the workforce. David, a school leader, offered a strong endorsement of the ECF, viewing it as a necessary

and welcome reform that filled a previous 'gap in the system for inducting new teachers'. The impact on new teachers appears particularly profound. Chloe, an early career teacher, credited their entire understanding of EBP to their induction, stating, 'to be honest, it all of mine has just come from my ECT training this year'. This sense of compulsory engagement was affirmed by Maria, who, while undertaking an NPQ, noted, 'you have to engage in it... you've got to apply what you've read'. These frameworks seem to function as 'forcing functions' for research engagement.

However, the data from Aisha and Maria also contain hints that this capability-building mandate has limitations when operating within the wider paradoxical system. The motivation for engagement can become extrinsic and compliance-driven. For example, Maria expressed doubt about whether their engagement with research literature was 'truly check[ed]'. These comments suggest a potential risk of 'surface compliance', where a practice is adopted to meet a requirement without the deep, intrinsic motivation needed for it to be sustained and effective.

In direct opposition to this capability-building mandate, participants' accounts vividly detail the systemic forces that constrain their ability to act on their enhanced skills. The most prominent of these is unsustainable workload. Chloe described the challenge of finding time for anything beyond core duties as 'super hard'. This was reinforced by Fatima, who observed that essential professional tasks like planning and reflection are often not seen as the 'most important thing' and are therefore the first to be sacrificed under pressure.

This pressure of limited time, illustrated in Theme 3 by Maria's account of being unable to amend a single lesson plan due to the immovable reality of the working week, is compounded by a high-stakes accountability culture. This culture appears to erode the psychological safety needed for innovation. Ben, for example, explained their avoidance of unfamiliar teaching methods by citing the lack of time to recover if a new strategy were to fail in a high-pressure context. More profoundly, the system's focus on measurable outcomes can, it seems, distort professional priorities. Liam provided an account of this process, describing how a data-driven system linked to pay progression

> It forced you to be really strategic in terms of which kids get support, but it forced
> you to be strategic for the wrong reasons... I'd be ruthless. I'd look at my targets
> and like, right, which kids do I know are absolutely gonna get this, they kind of get
> the least of my attention. Which kids do I think are at risk of not getting those they
> get the most of my attention. Which kids are absolutely not getting those targets?
> Yeah, I don't have time to worry about. (Liam)

This testimony suggests that the accountability system can create a situation of intense professional and ethical conflict, compelling teachers to prioritise performance metrics over what they perceive to be the genuine educational needs of their students. This helps explain why the same pressures documented in Theme 3 (workload: 'super hard') and Theme 4.1 (initiative fatigue) may manifest not only as stress and burnout but as value-conflict injuries that corrode professional identity.

The findings presented above can be synthesised to illustrate a fundamental conflict at the heart of the English education system. Table 13 summarises this systemic conflict, mapping the key policy drivers to their apparent effects on the components of behaviour change, grounding the analysis in the study's qualitative data and wider evidence.

Table 13

Summary of the systemic conflict

Policy driver / systemic force	Targeted COM-B component	Observed effect & illustrative evidence
The capability-building mandate		
Early Career Framework (ECF) & National Professional Qualifications (NPQs)	Capability (psychological)	Builds knowledge of EBP and research literacy, creating a formal requirement for engagement. (Quotes from David: 'I really liked the government policy around the ECF', Chloe: 'it all of mine has just come from my ECT training', Maria 'you have to engage in it'. Supported by literature on embedding EBP in standards and early ECF evaluations (Cordingley, 2015; Institute for Employment Studies (IES) & BMG Research, 2025)).
The systemic destruction of opportunity		
Unsustainable workload	Opportunity (physical: time)	Removes the essential time for professional adaptation, reflection and implementation of new practices. (Quotes from Chloe: 'super hard', Fatima: teachers 'don't see planning... as the most important thing'. Substantiated by national data: full-time teachers work 52.4 hours/week, only 17% find workload acceptable (Department for Education, 2024b)).

Policy driver / systemic force	Targeted COM-B component	Observed effect & illustrative evidence
High-stakes accountability (e.g. Ofsted)	Opportunity (social/psychological) & motivation (automatic, fear)	Chills innovation, punishes failure, discourages risk-taking and fosters superficial compliance over authentic engagement. (Quotes from Ben: avoidance of uncertain methods, Liam: being forced to be strategic for the 'wrong reasons'. Substantiated by research linking accountability to stress and burnout (Friedman, 2000)).

This can be understood not simply as a 'push-pull' tension but as a structural contradiction. The state invests significantly in building teacher capability, only to place them in a professional environment where they appear to lack the time, autonomy and psychological safety, the opportunity, to deploy that capability effectively. The chronic time deficit, substantiated by government data showing long working hours and low satisfaction with workload, is particularly damaging. It directly undermines the professional need for the time-consuming work of adapting evidence to specific contexts, a core element of the teachers' epistemology identified in Theme 1.

Liam's testimony about being 'forced to be strategic for the wrong reasons' points to a phenomenon that may be more profound than a practical dilemma. This experience can be interpreted as a potential source of 'moral injury', the psychological harm that can occur from acting in ways that transgress one's deeply held moral and ethical beliefs (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2007; Litz et al., 2009; Santoro & Berliner, 2021). This concept provides an explanatory link between the pressures of the accountability system and the high levels of teacher stress, burnout and attrition documented in England.

The structure of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), a cornerstone of recent government policy, may function as a key site where this policy paradox is amplified. While intended to drive up standards, the available evidence suggests a complex picture. Table 14 synthesises data from recent reports comparing key metrics in large MATs and local authority (LA) maintained schools.

Table 14

A comparison of teacher workload and retention in MAT vs. LA schools

Metric	Large MATs	LA-Maintained Schools	Data Source(s)
Workload	67% 'often/always' work evenings. 61% 'often/always' work weekends.	59% 'often/always' work evenings. 53% 'often/always' work weekends.	(National Education Union, 2025)
Teacher turnover (secondary)	19.5% average annual turnover.	14.4% average annual turnover.	(Hodge et al., 2024)
Leaving the profession	More than 1 in 9 teachers left the profession (2022-23).	1 in 11 teachers left the profession (2022-23).	(National Education Union, 2025)

This data suggests a potential causal chain. The MAT structure, often characterised by a drive for standardisation and performance improvement across multiple schools, may intensify accountability pressures on staff. This pressure appears to manifest as higher reported workloads for teachers in large MATs compared to their LA-school counterparts. This, in turn, may be a contributing factor to the significantly higher rates of teacher turnover observed in large MATs. This dynamic is further complicated by an 'accountability gap', where Ofsted inspects individual schools but not the MAT as a single legal and employer entity, a situation which Ofsted itself has suggested is inefficient and which may lead to a diffusion of responsibility for the overall health of the system.

However, the picture is not one-sided. The same research that highlights higher turnover also finds that large MATs often admit a greater proportion of disadvantaged pupils and can demonstrate higher attainment outcomes for these groups and that they are more likely to maintain positive financial balances. Therefore, MATs appear to be a microcosm of the entire policy paradox. They may be successfully achieving certain stated policy goals (e.g. improved outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, financial efficiency) through mechanisms that simultaneously appear to undermine other critical goals (e.g. teacher wellbeing and retention). This creates a system that risks high levels of staff burnout and attrition in the pursuit of measurable results, embodying the central contradiction of investing in capability while eroding the opportunity for that capability to be sustained over the long term.

4.4.3   Professional identity and the teacher response

Faced with the systemic contradictions outlined above, the teachers in this study are not passive recipients of policy. Their persistent calls for greater professional autonomy and trust represent more than a simple wish list; they can be interpreted as a rational and sophisticated professional response. This call for autonomy is not an abstract preference; it is a direct response to institutional scarring. The experience recounted by Liam in the previous section, where a well-intentioned action-research project was transformed into a compliance threat that ultimately 'turned people off evidence', is emblematic of how poorly managed change can inoculate staff against future engagement. This section argues that this response constitutes a defence of a particular form of professional identity, one rooted in agency, ethical judgment and collaborative inquiry, against a system that appears to increasingly redefine professionalism as technical compliance. By presenting an integrated analysis of the teacher response, this section will draw on theories of professionalism and street-level bureaucracy to argue that these demands are a necessary attempt to reclaim the conditions required to do their job effectively and ethically.

The data from this study show participants calling for fundamental changes to the governance of the education system. This desire for a system more grounded in practitioner experience was a recurring sentiment, articulated more strongly by Sarah and Ben. Ben, for example, made an explicit call for the Department for Education to be 'run by teachers or educators who understand what it's like to be in schools'. Their plea was for a system that grants schools the 'flexibility to work with different schools... and not be based on grades', but rather on striving for 'success rather than failure'. This view is strongly echoed in Sarah's assertion that meaningful change 'has to come from them [teachers]. It can't come from people that don't teach'. Together, these statements represent a clear demand for professional expertise and situated knowledge to be valued at the highest levels of policy-making. This conviction was, at times, voiced with professional defiance that underscores a siege mentality towards external interference:

> I tend to not listen so much to government policies because they are not educators. They are politicians. (Eleanor)

> Everybody thinks they're an expert in education because they went to school. But it doesn't mean they actually understand what it's like to work as a teacher and and how to get the kids in front of you to learn. (Eleanor)

Furthermore, the call for 'trust' was defined by participants in very specific, practical terms. It was not presented as a vague desire for less oversight, but as a crucial component of the professional environment. As Liam earlier stressed, teachers need a culture where 'failure is okay', a point that applies in the policy context as well'. This definition reframes trust as the essential precondition for psychological safety, the very thing that enables the experimentation, adaptation and professional

learning that are central to EBP. It is the assurance that professional inquiry will not be met with punitive consequences.

The participants' calls for autonomy can be interpreted as a form of resistance against a de-professionalising trend identified in critiques of modern education reform. Scholars have argued that policies influenced by neoliberalism often seek to reposition teachers as technicians, whose primary role is the efficient implementation of centrally determined curricula and pedagogies, measured by standardised outputs (Apple, 2006; Ball, 2008). In this model, professionalism is defined by compliance and performativity. The policy paradox identified in this thesis is a key manifestation of this trend: teachers are given the tools of EBP (capability) but are denied the professional space and discretionary judgment (opportunity) to use them as autonomous professionals. Their call for autonomy can therefore be seen as a defence of a professional identity based on expertise, ethical responsibility and the capacity to make situated judgments in the best interests of their pupils.

The day-to-day behaviours of teachers within this paradoxical system can also be theorised through the lens of 'street-level bureaucracy'. This theory posits that when frontline public service workers are faced with overwhelming demands, limited resources and conflicting goals, they inevitably develop routines and coping mechanisms to make their work manageable. These informal practices, born of necessity, become the de facto policy that citizens actually experience. Many of the behaviours identified throughout this thesis can be re-analysed as these very coping mechanisms. The 'authenticity test' applied to researchers (Theme 1), the heavy reliance on the 'tried and tested' advice of trusted colleagues (Theme 4) and the strategic disengagement from new initiatives (Theme 3) are all rational strategies for rationing scarce resources, time, cognitive load and emotional energy, in a high-risk, low-trust environment. They are pragmatic ways of managing the unmanageable.

Viewed from this perspective, the recurring plea for trust is not an abstract or sentimental request. It is a demand for the core condition that is essential for effective and humane public service: the professional space to exercise discretion without the constant threat of punitive sanction. The 'reassurance' described by Liam is the most valuable resource a leader or policymaker can provide, as it directly creates the Psychological Opportunity for genuine engagement.

This analysis must also acknowledge the valid counter-argument to the 'failure is okay' sentiment. The imperative to ensure that students, who only have one opportunity at their education, are not disadvantaged by failed experiments is a significant ethical consideration for the system. The resolution to this tension, as implied by the participants' vision, is not an absence of accountability or a disregard for student outcomes. Rather, it is a call for a shift towards a model of low-threat accountability, where trial, error and even failure are seen as integral parts of a structured, collective professional learning process, rather than as high-stakes events that trigger punitive consequences for individuals. It is a vision of a system that learns, rather than one that simply measures and sanctions.

A balanced professional ideal, agentic, ethical and research-engaged while resisting both technocratic rigidity and instrumentalised 'experimentation', was captured by Liam:

> I've seen people come into teaching who are wonderful historians and wonderful with children, but who have their way of doing things and will never change. And don't understand that actually, you've got to do some research... But I've also seen the flip side, where we've had people come into teaching who are so academic and see the kids as basically an experiment opportunity... I feel like evidence-based practice is something that isn't always understood about the relationship we should have with it. (Liam)

4.4.4   Theme summary

The analysis within this theme suggests that a teacher's capacity to engage meaningfully with EBP is fundamentally governed by a professional and policy environment that appears to be in direct conflict with itself. The preceding sections have deconstructed a 'policy paradox' at the heart of the English education system, revealing a state of systemic incoherence that seems to undermine its own stated goals. The evidence from the 10 participants across 2 schools in this study, while not generalisable to the entire profession, offers an illustrative account of how this paradox may be experienced at the chalkface.

One arm of government policy, most notably through frameworks like the ECF and NPQs, invests significantly in building teachers' capability, their knowledge of and skill in EBP. As Chloe and Maria confirmed, this creates a formal requirement for engagement with research literature. Yet, in direct opposition, another set of systemic forces, namely, unsustainable workload pressures and a high-stakes accountability culture, appears to systematically undermine the opportunity for that engagement to be authentic and sustained. The chronic lack of time, evidenced by national data showing a 51.2-hour average work week for full-time teachers, removes the physical opportunity for reflection and adaptation. Simultaneously, the culture of fear that can be fostered by the accountability regime erodes the psychological safety needed for innovation, a reality captured in the observation that fear can 'stop[s] people taking chances'. This pressure can lead to a form of ethical conflict, compelling teachers to make strategic decisions that may run counter to their professional judgment.

The resulting professional cynicism and initiative fatigue are, from this perspective, not signs of teacher failure but are logical, predictable and rational consequences of being trapped within this incoherent system. The persistent call from practitioners for greater autonomy and trust can thus be understood not as a simple desire for less oversight, but as a sophisticated and necessary act of professional self-defence. When teachers call for a system that permits professional risk-taking and views failure as a learning opportunity, they are not asking for an absence of standards, but for the professional space to enact the very capabilities the system claims to value.

This struggle is the daily, lived manifestation of the foundational conflicts identified throughout this thesis. The policy paradox provides the structural explanation for why the 'tyranny of workload' (Theme 3) is so pervasive; it is not an accident but a direct consequence of a system that appears to prioritise accountability metrics over the professional time needed for adaptation. This systemic frustration of practice, in turn, risks undermining the vocational aspiration identified in Theme 2, taking intrinsically motivated professionals and fostering the very cynicism the system then decries. It is this entire dynamic that gives the conflict over what counts as 'evidence' (Theme 1) its profound urgency, as teachers' professional judgment becomes their last and most important line of defence.

Ultimately, the systemic context, the 'Where' of engagement, emerges as an arbiter that shapes, constrains and gives meaning to all other aspects of teachers' engagement with EBP. Because the barriers to EBP appear to be fundamentally systemic, rooted in a structural paradox that places capability and opportunity in direct opposition, any meaningful solutions would likely need to transcend individual or even school-level interventions. While acknowledging the limitations of this small-scale study, the findings establish a clear rationale for a wider re-evaluation of the systemic conditions within which teachers in England are expected to work. By deconstructing this policy paradox, the analysis completes the empirical investigation of this thesis and sets the stage for the Integrative Discussion, which will synthesise these findings to articulate the thesis's original contribution to knowledge.

Chapter 5: Integrative discussion – the interplay of capability, opportunity and motivation

The preceding chapters of this thesis have presented a thematic analysis of the factors influencing teachers' engagement with EBP. The analysis has identified and explored discrete themes related to professional beliefs, systemic barriers and individual motivations. The purpose of this integrative discussion is to move beyond the description of these separate components and to synthesise them into a coherent, explanatory model. This section seeks to illuminate the dynamic and recursive interplay between these factors, demonstrating how they combine to form a complex system that governs teacher behaviour in relation to EBP. In doing so, it addresses the question of how the various findings of this study interconnect and what holistic understanding emerges from their synthesis. This discussion therefore revisits the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 2 (Figure 1), which situated teacher engagement with EBP within the COM-B model, mediated by authenticity, trust and self-efficacy. The purpose here is to test, refine and extend that framework in light of the empirical findings.

To achieve this synthesis, the argument will be structured in a specific sequence, moving from the foundational to the consequential. The discussion will begin by presenting and analysing the data on how participants in this study construct and validate knowledge claims, proposing that a shared professional epistemology serves as the bedrock for their subsequent actions and attitudes. It will then trace the practical consequences of this epistemological stance, demonstrating how these foundational beliefs directly shape participants' experiences of and responses to, the practical realities of their professional lives, particularly in relation to workload and time. Finally, using this integrated understanding of belief and practice, the discussion will undertake a critical application and refinement of the COM-B model. This final step will use the synthesised findings to test the utility and expose the limitations of the framework in a low-autonomy professional context.

Through this structured synthesis, this discussion will develop a central argument. The evidence presented in this study, when taken as a whole, suggests a hierarchical relationship between the components of the COM-B model as they apply to teacher engagement with EBP in the current English context. It will be proposed that opportunity, when defined in a specific, professionally relevant manner, appears to function as the primary mediating factor. This specific form of opportunity, it will be argued, acts as a critical gateway that enables professional capability to be effectively applied and authenticates the intrinsic motivation that is required for genuine and sustained practice change.

5.1 The foundational role of professional epistemology in validating evidence

To construct a comprehensive model of teacher engagement with EBP, it is necessary to begin with the foundational beliefs that shape professional perception and judgment. As established in the thematic analysis (Chapter 4), teachers in this study do not operate within a hierarchical model of evidence that privileges formal research. Instead, they employ a sophisticated and blended professional epistemology that weaves together academic research, craft knowledge and contextual data (Biesta, 2007; Brown & Rogers, 2014; Hofer, 2000). This epistemology is operationalised through heuristics such as the 'authenticity test', a vetting of a claim's source for professional credibility, and a strong reliance on peer-validated practice (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; McCroskey & Teven, 1999). Practically, this means that motivation rises or falls with relational trust: peer-endorsed ideas that pass the authenticity test are energising; abstract, context-distant research rarely is. This aligns with the earlier framework's identification of authenticity and trust as central psychological dynamics in teachers' engagement with evidence. Thus, teachers' reflective motivation is filtered through this authenticity lens: only ideas that pass the authenticity test (i.e. come from a credible, trusted source) will trigger their motivation to invest effort, illustrating how trust operates as a pivotal psychological gatekeeper in the COM-B system.

While these behaviours can be seen as a defence of professional identity, this integrative discussion proposes a more pragmatic interpretation: this epistemology functions as a highly rational and efficient risk-management strategy (Costa & Kallick, 2008; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2021). The classroom is a high-stakes environment where decisions have immediate consequences for student learning. Simultaneously, the primary professional resource, time, is severely limited. In such a context, the adoption of any new practice represents a significant investment of a scarce resource for a potentially uncertain outcome. It is, in essence, a calculation of professional risk.

From this perspective, the 'authenticity test' and the preference for peer-validated strategies are not simply expressions of scepticism towards research; they are logical risk-mitigation heuristics. A recommendation from a trusted colleague working in a similar context has already undergone a form of field testing (Cordingley et al., 2003; Erez & Grant, 2014). It comes with an implicit validation of its 'contextual fit' and practical viability, thereby lowering the perceived risk for the teacher considering its adoption. Conversely, an abstract research paper, however rigorous, represents a higher-risk proposition. As the findings in Chapter 4 demonstrate, it requires a significant investment of time and cognitive effort to deconstruct, translate and, most importantly, adapt, with no guarantee of a positive outcome in a specific classroom setting.

Therefore, the epistemological framework observed in the data is not only a philosophical stance on the nature of knowledge, as discussed in the literature on personal epistemologies, but also a pragmatic response to the daily realities of resource scarcity and professional accountability (Chan & Elliott, 2004; Roth & Weinstock, 2013). This foundational understanding of how teachers validate knowledge

by managing risk is essential, as it has direct and observable consequences for their engagement with the practical barriers to EBP, which will now be explored.

5.2 The practical consequences of foundational beliefs on teacher practice

The professional epistemology identified in the preceding section is not an abstract philosophy; the data suggest it has direct and tangible consequences for how teachers experience and respond to the challenges of EBP. The analysis suggests a link can be traced from this foundational belief in context-dependent, adaptable knowledge to the specific nature of the practical barriers reported by participants.

The most prominent and consistently reported barrier to EBP engagement was a chronic lack of time due to overwhelming workload. However, to fully understand the significance of this finding for our integrative model, it must be interpreted through the epistemological lens established above. If, as the data suggest, teachers believe that no external evidence can be implemented 'off the shelf', then the act of engaging with EBP is not one of passive consumption. It is an active and complex process of professional labour (Kennedy, 2005; Schön, 1992). Participants view it as their core professional duty to deconstruct, analyse and meticulously tailor any new approach to fit the unique needs of their students, their subject and their school's culture. Accordingly, to 'pass' the authenticity test an EBP proposition must not only be credible in the abstract but also recognisable within the teacher's lived repertoire, do-able with their students, in their subject and school. Because repertoires and prior mastery experiences vary, so too does risk tolerance: some teachers calibrate more cautiously, while others with stronger self-efficacy and positive early wins accept greater implementation risk. This helps explain why an approach judged viable in one context is dismissed as too challenging in another. This process of adaptation, as described by Michael, is not an optional extra; it is considered the very essence of skilled teaching and the mechanism by which external knowledge is made meaningful and effective. This work is cognitively demanding, iterative and, above all, time-consuming. In COM-B terms, then, the barrier is not 'time' in the abstract but opportunity in a specific, professionally meaningful form: protected time and cognitive space for the adaptive work teachers deem essential.

This understanding allows for a more precise interpretation of the 'lack of time' reported by participants. It is not merely a generic complaint about being busy. It is, more specifically, a lack of time and cognitive capacity to perform the essential professional work of adaptation (Feldon, 2007; Sweller et al., 2019). When a participant expresses reluctance to spend evenings 'doing that', the 'that' refers not just to reading an article, but to the deep, reflective and demanding cognitive labour that their professional epistemology requires for any new idea to be responsibly implemented. The system, by filling all available temporal and cognitive bandwidth with the immediate demands of teaching and administration, structurally prevents them from engaging in the very practice it purports to encourage.

This dynamic places practitioners in what can be described as a 'professional double bind' (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012; Engeström & Sannino, 2011). On one hand, they are driven by their professional identity and epistemological beliefs (their vocational aspiration) to perform the complex work of contextual adaptation. This is what they understand 'good teaching' to be. On the other hand, they are systematically prevented from doing so by the weight of their workload and the lack of protected time. Under these conditions, a teacher's disengagement from EBP may not be a sign of low motivation or resistance, but a rational and necessary act of psychological and professional self-preservation (Ball, 2003; Education Support, 2023; Kearney & Smith, 2018). To attempt the work of adaptation without adequate time and resources would be to do it poorly, violating their professional standards. Faced with this impossible choice, withdrawing from the task can be a logical, albeit professionally frustrating, resolution. Seen through COM-B, the double bind is an opportunity squeeze that suppresses authentic motivation, even among teachers with strong capability and moral purpose. This tension provides a critical lens through which to re-evaluate the utility of standard behavioural models like COM-B, a task to which this discussion now turns.

5.3   Critical application of the COM-B framework in a professional context

The synthesis of findings regarding teacher epistemology and the practical constraints of their work provides a useful foundation for a critical application of the COM-B framework. In Chapter 2, the conceptual framework positioned COM-B as the outer structure, with authenticity, trust and self-efficacy mediating its operation. The present analysis builds on this starting point by showing how empirical findings reconfigure these relationships, particularly the hierarchical role of opportunity and the importance of vocational aspiration. The model's utility as a 'conceptual lens' is clear. However, the data from this study demand a more nuanced engagement, revealing a hierarchy among its components and challenging the assumption that they are always independent.

The analysis thus far points towards opportunity as an important gateway to EBP engagement (Fitzsimons & Smith, 2025; Michie et al., 2011). Building on Section 5.2, which described how teachers experience 'lack of time' as a lack of protected cognitive bandwidth for adaptation, this section formalises that finding within COM-B. Here, opportunity is defined not as time in the abstract but as protected, collegial, and cognitively spacious professional latitude to enact judgment-led adaptation. This distinction matters for design: simply reducing workload will not suffice if the freed time is neither protected nor purposed for collaborative, reflective, adaptive work; it will be reabsorbed by other tasks. Specified in this way, opportunity functions hierarchically as the primary gatekeeper that enables capability and authentic motivation to translate into behaviour.

Furthermore, the most compelling evidence for a critical re-evaluation of the COM-B model emerges from the analysis of structured, mandatory frameworks such as the ITTECF and NPQs. These frameworks can be seen as a systemic attempt to 'engineer' two of the model's components: they

create opportunity (by allocating protected time) and aim to build capability (by providing structured content). However, the data suggest that, in some cases, they may do so at the expense of the third component: motivation. Aisha's ambivalent comment regarding their NPQ, 'I don't really like it, but I have been allowed to do it, which is good', is illustrative. It captures a grudging acceptance where the engineered opportunity is recognised as valuable, but the experience itself is undesirable. This sentiment, coupled with concerns about 'surface compliance', reveals a critical tension. The very mechanism used to bolster opportunity and capability, a top-down, standardised structure, appears to be the cause of the decline in motivation. This exposes a dynamic that challenges a simple, additive application of the COM-B framework. It suggests that the components are not always independent variables where a deficit in one can be compensated for by an increase in the others. In this professional context, they appear to be dynamically and sometimes inversely related. The intervention designed to 'fix' the opportunity problem can simultaneously damage motivation (Mersha et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2016). This occurs because the 'motivation' component, as typically applied, does not adequately capture the deep-seated, identity-linked drive for professional autonomy, judgment and respect that the data reveal as a primary driver for these teachers. The negative reactions are not simply about 'not liking' a course; they can be interpreted as a response to a perceived threat to one's professional self, a de-professionalising experience that runs counter to the teachers' core epistemological stance of valuing context-specific, practitioner-led judgment. This finding adds empirical support to critiques of the COM-B model that suggest it can be overly simplistic, potentially overlooking the crucial causal element of 'wanting' or 'aspiration' that connects intention to behaviour (Marks, 2020; Rajagopalan, 2021). The vocational aspiration identified in Chapter 4 appears to be precisely this missing element. When an engineered opportunity clashes with this deeper aspiration, authentic motivation is eroded. Conversely, when an initiative aligns with teachers' vocational aspiration and passes the authenticity test, for example, a new strategy introduced by a trusted peer or tried in a context similar to their own, teachers who experience early success reap a confidence dividend. In other words, that mastery experience boosts their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), which in turn reinforces motivation and encourages further engagement with EBP. This positive feedback loop, anticipated by the original framework, was evident in participants' accounts (e.g. Aisha noted that 'the evidence gives you that confidence to think, yeah, let's do something different' in her practice). Therefore, a refined application of the COM-B model in a professional context must account for the potential of such inverse relationships and recognise that the 'how' of an intervention is as important as the 'what'.

Finally, the data call for a more nuanced reading of the COM-B capability component. While much EBP discourse focuses on building baseline capability, the findings indicate that a one-size-fits-all approach to knowledge mobilisation is inadequate. Liam's desire to move beyond translated summaries and engage directly with current, live research sits in clear contrast to colleagues who benefit from knowledge brokers distilling evidence into accessible formats. Taken together, this

suggests that capability is not monolithic but exists along a novice–expert continuum (Diery et al., 2020; Evans, 2008; Hattie, 2003). The profession encompasses teachers who require substantial scaffolding to interpret and apply research through to expert practitioners capable of critically appraising primary sources (Kirschner et al., 2006; Lukins et al., 2023).

A knowledge-mobilisation system that treats all teachers as novices risks patronising and alienating its most engaged members. Instead, support should be stratified: novices need translated summaries, modelling and structured scaffolds; developing practitioners benefit from brokered syntheses and guided inquiry; experts require direct access to primary research, opportunities for methodological debate and autonomy in inquiry. In short, a more sophisticated and respectful EBP ecosystem is needed, one that accommodates different levels of capability, provides meaningful pathways for progression and honours teachers' professional autonomy and vocational aspiration.

Looking at the data through the conceptual framework, what emerges is a refined, empirically grounded account of how the teachers in this study came to use EBP. Opportunity, described by participants as protected time and cognitive bandwidth within a trusting, collegial culture, functions as the primary gatekeeper: without it, even high capability and strong motivation rarely translated into behaviour. At the centre of the decision process sit authenticity/trust and self-efficacy. Participants reported testing new ideas against an 'authenticity test' based on source credibility, context fit and peer validation, and described a confidence dividend when early attempts worked, which encouraged them to persist. Motivation was further shaped by vocational aspiration – teachers' identity-level commitment to doing right by their pupils – which could be energised or undermined by how initiatives were designed and experienced. Using the same macro–meso–micro structure as Figure 1, Figure 3 translates this conceptual model into an empirically derived representation, populating each level with the specific policy, institutional and psychological features reported by participants and foregrounding authenticity/trust and self-efficacy as central mediating mechanisms linking capability, opportunity and motivation to teachers' everyday engagement with EBP.

Figure 3

Refined conceptual framework
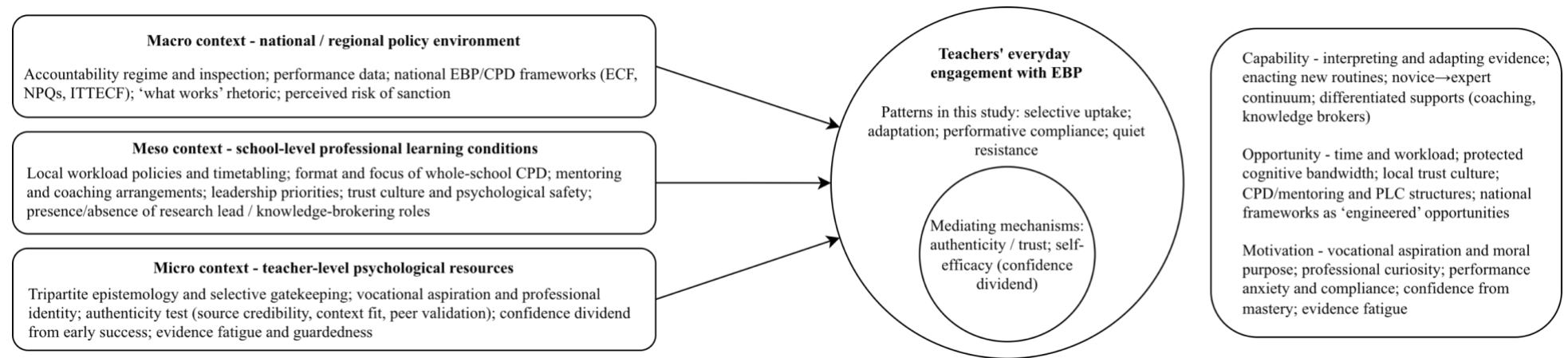
5.4   Chapter summary

This chapter has synthesised the findings of this study into an integrative account of how teachers engage with EBP. It has shown that teachers' blended epistemology functions less as a rejection of research and more as a rational risk-management strategy, guiding how they validate knowledge and manage professional uncertainty. The discussion then demonstrated how this epistemological stance directly shapes teachers' experience of workload and time, reframing these not as generic barriers but as structural constraints on the cognitively demanding work of adaptation. Finally, the chapter applied these insights to the COM-B model, exposing the hierarchical role of opportunity, the mediating importance of authenticity, trust and self-efficacy and the limitations of treating capability and motivation as monolithic constructs.

In doing so, the analysis has refined the preliminary conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2. The findings extend that framework by demonstrating how opportunity functions as a gatekeeper, how motivation must be understood in relation to vocational aspiration and how capability requires stratification across levels of expertise. This refined model provides the foundation for the concluding chapter, which will consider its implications for policy, practice and future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the complex reality of EBP among secondary school teachers in England, aiming to develop an understanding of how practitioners perceive, engage with and are influenced by research in their professional lives. Moving beyond narratives of a research–practice gap, the thesis discussed a critical review of the literature with a reflexive thematic analysis of teacher interviews, all interpreted through the theoretical lens of the COM-B model. This final chapter synthesises the key findings by providing direct answers to the three guiding research questions that underpin this thesis. In doing so, it draws together the unifying thread of this thesis: the central argument advanced here is that opportunity may act as a fundamental gatekeeper to a sustainable, expert and genuinely evidence-informed teaching profession.

6.1 Research Question 1: How do secondary school teachers in England understand and perceive EBP within the framework of current educational policies?

The findings suggest that practitioners adopt a pragmatic and blended approach when considering evidence, one that often is divergent to existing organisational (school) policy. Teachers in this study tended to resist a rigid, hierarchical model of evidence that privileges randomised controlled trials (RCTs) as golden standard (as often imported from the medical field); instead, they elevate contextual relevance and professional wisdom as equal alongside formal research findings. This professional way of knowing is operationalised through what this thesis terms the 'authenticity test', a heuristic by which teachers evaluate new information. The focus shifts from asking the universal 'what works?' to asking the situated and professionally crucial 'what is useful here?'(Cartwright & Hardie, 2012).

This stance is not a rejection of evidence itself. Rather, it can be understood as a professional and ethical response to the decontextualised, one-size-fits-all logic that some participants perceived as underpinning national policy. It represents a form of resistance to the 'learnification' of education, the reduction of education's complex moral purposes to the efficient production of measurable outcomes (Biesta, 2007, 2009). England's high-stakes accountability culture, epitomised by Ofsted inspections, has created to what has been described as a culture of 'performativity', where appearing to meet externally imposed metrics can become more important than authentic, student-focused practice (Ball, 2003). In this context, top-down EBP initiatives risk being seen by teachers not as helpful tools for improvement, but as another set of metrics to perform. When a teacher insists on applying their professional judgment or asks whether a strategy is useful for their specific students in their specific classroom, they are not being 'anti-evidence', they are pushing back against the decontextualising logic of a performative system. In this reading, their epistemological stance can be seen as a nuanced form of resistance, born of experience, that prioritises practical usefulness and context. It may be interpreted as an ethical commitment to student-centred practice over compliance.

6.2 Research Question 2: What factors influence secondary school teachers' understanding and implementation of EBP in their practice?

The COM-B model, which posits that behaviour occurs as a result of the presence of capability, opportunity and motivation, provided a powerful analytical framework for examining the dynamic forces at work. The evidence from this study suggests that the teachers who participated have a strong intrinsic motivation, rooted in what this thesis calls a 'vocational aspiration'. Teachers often experience a tangible boost in self-efficacy after mastering a new practice (a 'confidence dividend'), which serves as a form of positive automatic motivation and creates a virtuous cycle of improvement (Walker, 2024). Meanwhile, a deficit in capability (the knowledge and skills to engage in EBP) did not emerge as the primary barrier in this study. Government policy, for example, the new Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF), has heavily focused on systematically building teachers' psychological capability (knowledge and pedagogical skill). However, the evidence from this study indicates that this emphasis may only partially address the core problem preventing wider EBP engagement (Anderson & Platt, 2025).

Instead, the findings indicate that opportunity emerged as a crucial, and often the most constrained, component in this study. Opportunity constraints manifest in two related forms. The first is physical opportunity, which in the COM-B model refers to environmental factors and resources that facilitate a behaviour, in this case, chiefly time. Empirical data from the teachers pointed to what participants described as excessive workload and a chronic lack of time that together undermine teachers' capacity to engage in professional inquiry. This is not merely a subjective perception but a systemic problem, as evidenced by national data: an overwhelming 90% of teachers considering leaving the profession in 2023/24 cited high workload as a key factor (McLean & Worth, 2025).

Various policy responses to workload have been attempted, but several commonly proposed measures carry unintended consequences for teacher professionalism. For example, mandating reduced lesson planning through centrally prepared materials may free up some time (increasing physical opportunity) while simultaneously undermining teachers' autonomy and professional judgment, with potentially negative effects on their reflective motivation and buy-in. Any policy response must therefore balance time-saving initiatives with the preservation of professional agency (Stacey et al., 2024). Moreover, teachers' workload has been further exacerbated by deteriorating pupil behaviour since the COVID-19 pandemic (Department for Education, 2025c; McLean & Worth, 2025; Ofsted, 2023); dealing with behavioural issues now consumes even more of the finite time and emotional energy that could otherwise be directed toward innovation and improvement in practice. This ongoing erosion of physical opportunity has been identified in national data as a key contributor to the severe teacher recruitment and retention challenges in England, and the accounts in this study are consistent with that picture. Teacher attrition rates remain high, 9.6% of teachers left the profession in 2022/23, a figure above pre-pandemic levels, and secondary initial teacher training recruitment in 2024/25

reached only 62% of the Department for Education's target (McLean & Worth, 2025). Taken together, these statistics suggest that insufficient time and excessive workload may be critically undermining the sustainability of the teaching workforce.

The second major opportunity deficit is in social opportunity, which encompasses interpersonal and cultural factors such as professional norms, trust and school climate. Social opportunity for engaging with evidence is eroded by a prevailing high-stakes, low-trust work culture in English education. This culture, a product of what has been termed the 'accountability paradox', arises when systems of stringent control, designed ostensibly to improve quality and build trust, instead produce the opposite effect: they foster fear, compliance and surface-level performance over genuine improvement (Perryman, 2009). Constant pressure from inspections and a history of frequent, top-down reforms have created a deep-seated 'initiative fatigue' among teachers (Fullan, 2007). In such an environment, psychological safety is lacking; teachers are less willing to take risks or experiment, which are actions inherent in authentic evidence-informed practice (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

In summary, the findings of this research support the central argument of the primacy of opportunity. The data show that opportunity, specifically, the time (physical opportunity) and the trustful conditions (social opportunity) necessary for professional learning, functions as the primary gatekeeper for EBP engagement. As one participant vividly illustrated, even a great teaching idea is rendered useless if 'it's not on my slides and I haven't got time to change them'. This simple, real-world example encapsulates the core insight that without providing teachers with the basic opportunity (time and supportive conditions) to engage with research, any interventions aimed at increasing capability or motivation are unlikely to succeed at scale.

Notably, this conclusion is not merely an external critique of policy but also provides a theoretical explanation for the government's own recent initiatives. The establishment of the high-profile Workload Reduction Taskforce in 2023, explicitly charged with reducing teachers' working hours by five hours per week, represents a policy-level admission of the crisis in teachers' physical opportunity (Department for Education, 2024c). The Taskforce's initial recommendations targeted the removal of administrative burdens (such as Performance Related Pay, a policy that fuels the accountability paradox) in an effort to restore social opportunity by increasing trust and reducing performative pressures (Department for Education, 2024c). The very existence of this Taskforce can be read as consistent with the 'primacy of opportunity' argument: it may signal a governmental recognition that, alongside issues of skill and will, there is a systemic challenge in providing the basic conditions, the professional space, for a sustainable teaching career. In effect, through measures like the Taskforce, can be interpreted as implicitly acknowledging that opportunity is a central condition for meaningful EBP engagement.

6.3 Research Question 3: How can teachers' perceptions and experiences inform future educational policies and professional development programmes to better support the implementation of EBP?

To address Research Question 3, it is necessary to take a two-pronged approach. This involves critically examining how current policies interact with teachers' professional realities and then using those insights to propose clear recommendations for a more effective path forward grounded in the study's findings. In undertaking the critical analysis of contemporary policy, one defining feature of the current English educational landscape, as interpreted in this thesis, is the risk of 'policy churn', whereby multiple initiatives with contradictory aims run concurrently, generating systemic tension and confusion. The conceptual framework developed in this thesis, combining the COM-B model with the notions of an accountability paradox and the 'authenticity test', provides a powerful lens for examining this phenomenon in the latest wave of reforms.

For example, in 2024–2025 Ofsted responded to intense criticism by removing its single-word overall effectiveness judgement (the headline grade given to schools, usually a one-word rating) and replacing it with a more nuanced 'report card' system. Policymakers framed this change as a de-escalation of high-stakes scrutiny, but in practice the reform appears unlikely to fully resolve the accountability paradox. The high-stakes nature of inspection remains intact, schools can still be placed in a 'category of concern', triggering heavy interventions for those deemed underperforming (Fusenich, 2025). As a result, the ever-present fear of failure, a hallmark of performative school culture and a powerful driver of negative automatic motivation, persists. Moreover, moving from a single overall grade to a multifaceted report card (with up to eleven distinct graded areas) risks multiplying the pressure on teachers rather than reducing it (Wood, 2025). There is a risk that teachers could find their agency re-channelled into satisfying a checklist of discrete criteria, which encourages the creation of more complex 'fabrications', inauthentic displays of practice tailored to each metric, instead of fostering holistic professionalism (Fusenich, 2025). In short, a reform intended to give a more rounded picture of school performance may inadvertently intensify surveillance and further constrain the social opportunity (i.e. trust and autonomy) needed for authentic, inquiry-driven practice.

Beyond accountability measures, another major policy initiative illustrates a deep COM-B dilemma. The government's flagship teacher development programme, the Early Career Framework (ECF), now expanded into the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF), represents the state's primary strategy for systematically building teacher capability (Department for Education, 2024a). Analysing this initiative through the COM-B model reveals a fundamental tension inherent in the policy. On one hand, the ECF has successfully built psychological capability by strengthening new teachers' knowledge base and has boosted their automatic motivation by increasing confidence, yielding a 'confidence dividend' (Department for Education, 2022). On the other hand, these gains are directly counteracted by negative impacts on other essential components of teacher support.

Evaluation evidence consistently shows that the ECF/ITTECF significantly increases workload, thereby directly constraining physical opportunity by taking more of teachers' time (Institute for Employment Studies (IES) & BMG Research, 2022). Practitioners further criticise the framework's standardised content as 'generic' and 'inflexible', causing it to fail the authenticity test: in practice, many feel it conflicts with their professional judgment and local context, thus undermining their reflective motivation (Ovenden-Hope & Kirkpatrick, 2024). The net result is that the policy's impact on its primary goal, improving teacher retention, has been modest at best: the gains in capability and confidence have been largely cancelled out by the damage to opportunity and professional autonomy (McLean & Worth, 2025). This outcome illustrates the thesis's argument regarding the primacy of opportunity. Tellingly, the 2025 revisions to the ITTECF (such as efforts to reduce mentor workload and introduce more flexible, teacher-tailored content) are an explicit policy response to these tensions, representing a case of policy learning where the state implicitly acknowledges the very contradictions identified in this thesis (Twiselton et al., 2024).

In parallel, policymakers have also sought to address the workload crisis in teaching more directly. The Workload Reduction Taskforce, as noted, is a direct and welcome intervention aimed at restoring physical opportunity by reducing teachers' working hours. Its existence in 2023–24 can be seen as lending support of this thesis's central argument about the primacy of opportunity. However, the Taskforce's ultimate success is contingent on its ability to mitigate or override the workload-generating pressures of the accountability system and simultaneous Department for Education initiatives like the ITTECF. Without broader systemic changes, one policy that 'gives' time may be negated by others that 'take' time. This overlap creates a significant risk of policy churn: teachers are subjected to contradictory signals, with policies that demand more of their time and effort running alongside policies that purport to relieve workload. Such contradictory signalling can deepen professional cynicism and erode the very trust and reflective engagement needed for any reform to succeed.

Table 15 provides a summary of this policy analysis, juxtaposing the stated goals of these contemporary initiatives with their likely effects on teacher capability, opportunity and motivation.

Table 15

Critical analysis of contemporary English education policy through the thesis's COM-B framework

Policy initiative	Stated goal	Analysis via Thesis Framework
Ofsted reforms (2025)	To reduce inspection-related anxiety and provide a 'fairer, more rounded' picture of school performance.	Fails to resolve the 'accountability paradox'. While changing the format, the high-stakes consequences remain, risking the re-channelling of teacher agency towards a more complex 'performativity' across multiple 'report card' metrics. This constrains social opportunity (trust) and negatively impacts automatic motivation (fear).
ITTECF (from 2025)	To build teacher capability through a coherent, evidence-based, multi-year induction.	Creates a core COM-B tension. Successfully builds psychological capability and can boost automatic motivation ('confidence dividend'). However, documented high workload constrains physical opportunity (time), while generic content can undermine reflective motivation by failing the 'authenticity test'. The 2025 revisions are an attempt to rebalance these components (Twiselton et al., 2024)
Workload Reduction Taskforce	To reduce teacher working hours by 5 hours/week, addressing the primary driver of attrition.	A direct policy intervention to restore physical opportunity. Its existence validates the thesis's 'primacy of opportunity' argument. However, its success is contingent on its ability to counteract the workload-generating pressures of the accountability system and other simultaneous DfE initiatives (e.g. ITTECF), highlighting the risk of 'policy churn'.

Taken together, the analysis summarised in Table 14 indicates that for EBP to become truly embedded in teaching practice, the focus of reform must shift away from 'fixing' individual teachers and towards fundamentally improving the conditions of their work. In essence, the English education system needs to move away from a technocratic, managerialist model of control and compliance and towards a democratic–relational professionalism. This aligns with calls from professional bodies for a 'higher trust' model of education that values teacher agency, professional judgement and collaborative inquiry (Chartered College of Teaching, 2024). Such a shift requires rethinking the accountability paradigm,

moving away from the current high-stakes, low-trust approach and towards a culture that prioritises building professional capacity, trust and responsibility. High-performing systems like Finland demonstrate the power of this model, with high levels of teacher autonomy, trust and professionalism yielding strong educational outcomes (Sahlberg, 2015).

Within this overarching vision, two strategic priorities emerge from the research findings. First, because opportunity has proven to be the primary gatekeeper to evidence use, creating and protecting opportunity should be the principal goal of policy. Tackling the structural barriers that deprive teachers of time and supportive working conditions is essential. As a first step, the initiative of the Workload Reduction Taskforce to reduce teachers' working hours must be fully realised, well-funded and sustained, likely to be a necessary foundation for a sustainable teaching profession. At school level and strongly supported by government policy, leaders should conduct comprehensive reviews of teachers' administrative burdens, including data management requirements, marking and feedback policies and other paperwork, with the aim of stripping back or streamlining non-teaching tasks. One implication is that schools may need to consider increasing guaranteed non-contact time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA). In parallel, it is critical to cultivate a high-trust, low-stakes professional environment in which EBP can flourish. The findings suggest that leaders may have an important role to play in acting as buffers against policy churn and performativity pressures by prioritising integrity, transparency, collaborative decision-making and psychological safety. In practice this means modelling the behaviours expected of staff, openly articulating core values and explaining the rationale behind decisions to build credibility and trust; it also means involving teachers in decisions that shape their day-to-day work to foster shared ownership and mutual respect. Leaders should nurture an atmosphere where teachers can take risks, try new approaches and discuss challenges or failures without fear of punitive judgement. By systematically creating both the time and the trust for teachers to engage with research, policymakers and administrators remove the most significant barriers to an evidence-informed culture (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Second, professional development should be redesigned to honour professionalism. Teachers in this study were clear that PD must be relevant, contextualised and respectful of their expertise, requiring a decisive shift away from generic, top-down models towards approaches that treat teachers as active contributors to knowledge. Effective PD is job-embedded, collaborative and teacher-led and supportive and individualised. Job-embedded learning means integrating development activities into teachers' regular work and focusing on immediate problems of practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In contrast to one-off workshops disconnected from context, PD should be part of routine practice, for example, through on-the-job inquiry projects or reflective exercises built into staff meetings, so that research-informed strategies are applied and tested in real time. Collaborative, teacher-led inquiry should be promoted and funded by policy and school leaders. Approaches such as Japanese Lesson Study provide a powerful model in which teachers identify a pressing instructional

problem, co-plan a lesson, observe each other's practice and then jointly analyse student learning and outcomes (Lewis et al., 2006). While such professional learning communities can be challenging to implement in a high-accountability system, they are often cited as a particularly strong model for the democratic, inquiry-oriented professionalism advocated in this thesis: they enhance teacher agency, foster deep collegial collaboration, generate context-specific professional knowledge and strengthen teachers' reflective motivation to engage with evidence. Alongside this, instructional coaching offers personalised, one-to-one support via cycles of classroom observation, feedback and guided practice. Coaching helps translate new evidence-based ideas into effective classroom routines, can build capability and motivation, often producing the 'confidence dividend' mentioned earlier, and, crucially, is non-judgemental and growth-focused, distinguishing it from evaluative observations and creating a safe space for experimentation (Kraft et al., 2018).

These approaches to professional development are not isolated alternatives but parts of a coherent, integrated ecosystem of professional learning. Instructional coaching provides the individualised support to build teacher capability and confidence. Collaborative inquiry, in learning communities or lesson study groups, creates the social opportunity for teachers to apply new skills, test ideas and co-create knowledge with peers, fostering collective efficacy and deep reflective motivation. The overarching principle of job-embeddedness ensures that all professional learning remains grounded in actual classroom challenges, thereby satisfying the all-important authenticity test. Woven together, these strategies offer a sustainable and respectful alternative to the prevailing PD model, one designed to enhance all three components of the COM-B framework in a balanced way, by simultaneously growing capability, expanding opportunity (time to learn and a supportive culture) and strengthening motivation. In combination, these priorities move the system away from high-stakes performativity and towards a democratic–relational professionalism in which evidence use becomes a natural consequence of time, trust and respect for teacher judgement.

6.4   Contributions and limitations

This thesis seeks to advance the understanding of evidence use in schools by re-situating opportunity, the everyday availability of time and the presence of professional trust, as the gatekeeper of behaviour. Read through teachers' lived accounts, uneven engagement with research is no longer a story about deficits of skill or will; it becomes a story about system design. When time is protected and trust is present, evidence work becomes thinkable and doable; when they are absent, even highly capable, well-intentioned teachers are pushed toward compliance routines and quick fixes. In that sense, opportunity is not a neutral backdrop but a primary enabling constraint that shapes whether capability and motivation can be brought to bear at all.

Building on this reframing, the study names and theorises two practitioner mechanisms that help to explain how evidence actually travels into classrooms. The authenticity test captures teachers' routine

move from the universal 'what works?' to the situated 'what is useful here, with these pupils, this week?'. Far from being anti-research, this heuristic integrates professional knowledge with external evidence to preserve relevance and fit. In turn, when teachers do succeed in making evidence feel authentic, the uptake generates a confidence dividend: small wins compound, professional self-efficacy grows, and motivation to engage with evidence is renewed rather than depleted. Together these concepts offer the field portable, named tools for analysis, design, and future testing.

Methodologically and theoretically, the thesis also adapts COM-B for organisational use in schools. By specifying granular features of physical opportunity (e.g. genuinely protected time) and social opportunity (e.g. low-stakes, high-trust cultures), and by tracing how accountability regimes and policy churn disturb those features, the analysis turns behaviour-change theory into a practical diagnostic for leaders and policymakers. In doing so, it offers a way to read the 'accountability paradox', intensified oversight that weakens professional judgement, not as an abstract complaint but as a pattern that can be identified, discussed, and redesigned.

Finally, the work translates these insights into actionable design principles for professional development and system conditions. It shows how job-embedded, collaborative, teacher-led approaches can be assembled into an ecosystem that grows capability, expands opportunity, and strengthens motivation at the same time, so that evidence-informed practice becomes a natural by-product of well-designed work rather than an add-on performed for audit.

Like all research, this study has limitations that delineate the boundaries of its claims and indicate directions for future inquiry. It employed a qualitative design centred on semi-structured interviews with a small, self-selected sample of teachers. The intention was not to produce statistically generalisable findings; rather, it was to generate an explanatory, theory-building account of a complex phenomenon. The possibility of self-selection bias is acknowledged: participants may have been especially interested in, or invested in, EBP. That same self-selection, however, afforded rich, articulate accounts that were invaluable in developing the nuanced theoretical insights at the core of this thesis. These methodological choices point to several avenues for future research.

First, a large-scale quantitative study could test the 'primacy of opportunity' hypothesis in a nationally representative sample, examining relationships between validated measures of teacher workload and autonomy and key outcomes such as retention and engagement with EBP. Second, a longitudinal study tracking a cohort of new teachers through the implementation of the ITTECF and into the revised NPQS would illuminate how capability, opportunity and motivation evolve over time under these policy initiatives. Third, a comparative analysis of professional culture in a high-trust, high-autonomy system (e.g. Finland) would help to clarify how England's accountability-focused system affects each component of the COM-B model. Finally, there is a clear need for empirical evaluation of

the 2024–2025 Ofsted reforms to determine whether they foster a more developmental, trust-based school culture, or risk an 'intensification of performativity' (Wood, 2025) under a new guise.

6.5   Researcher journey

Undertaking this study has been a sustained process of professional and intellectual development. Working closely with the empirical material, and particularly with teachers' detailed accounts of their working lives, prompted an evolving appreciation of the conditions that surround evidence use in schools. What began as an interest in the apparent inconsistencies in teachers' engagement with research gradually developed into a clearer recognition of the systemic pressures that constrain or enable professional judgement. The stages of designing the study, conducting interviews and engaging in iterative rounds of reflexive thematic analysis each contributed to a more grounded understanding of how capability, opportunity and motivation interact in practice.

The analytic work also shaped the my understanding of the practical significance of the authenticity test and the confidence dividend. Returning repeatedly to the data highlighted how subtle, everyday decisions about time, trust and professional agency shape whether research becomes meaningful in classrooms. The research process therefore mirrored the thesis's broader argument: understanding teachers' engagement with evidence requires close attention to the contextual and relational dynamics that govern their work.

Engaging with participants' accounts further underscored the importance of opportunity as the central enabling condition. As the interviews progressed, the recurring emphasis on time, workload and professional trust made the structural nature of these constraints increasingly clear. The research journey thus reinforced the conceptual contribution of the thesis by demonstrating, through direct engagement with practice, the explanatory power of opportunity as a gatekeeper of behaviour.

Overall, the research journey strengthened my commitment to approaches that honour professional judgement and the contextual realities of schools. The experience of conducting this study has deepened the conviction that sustainable, evidence-informed practice depends not only on disseminating knowledge, but on creating the conditions in which teachers have the space, agency and support to use it.

6.6   Concluding remarks

The journey toward a more evidence-informed teaching profession is not merely a technical matter of disseminating research findings; it is a profoundly human and systemic challenge. The teachers who contributed to this research did not present themselves as resistant to evidence; rather, they described resisting policies and practices that, in their view, devalue professional judgement, disregard context and disrespect time. Read through a COM-B lens, this thesis locates itself within democratic–

relational models of professionalism, showing that opportunity, especially protected time and professional trust, is the primary enabling constraint that determines whether Capability and Motivation can be enacted at all. In these conditions, teachers apply an 'authenticity test', 'what is useful here, for these pupils?' and, when it passes, small wins generate a confidence dividend that renews engagement. Unlocking this potential therefore may require a systemic shift: away from control and standardisation towards high-trust, agency-affirming professionalism. Practically, that means designing job-embedded, collaborative, teacher-led development; simplifying initiatives to reduce policy churn; and re-balancing accountability so that it supports learning rather than performativity. Ultimately, the path to a sustainable, expert and evidence-informed profession may depend less on 'fixing' teachers and more on creating conditions that restore their opportunity to exercise informed judgement. To tap the expertise of its practitioners, the system will need to trust them. Above all, it will need to give them time.

References

Abbott, A. (2014). *The system of professions: An essay on the division of expert labor*. University of Chicago Press.

Achinstein, B., & Ogawa, R. T. (2012). New teachers of color and culturally responsive teaching in an era of educational accountability: Caught in a double bind. *Journal of Educational Change*, *13*(1), 1–39. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-011-9165-y

Ademokun, E. (2025). *Ofsted's Proposed Inspection Framework*. Jigsaw Education Group. https://jigsaweducationgroup.com/teaching-toolkit/articles-updates/ofsted-s-proposed-inspection-framework/

Allen, B., Hannay, T., & McInerney, L. (2025). *Teacher Recruitment and Retention in 2025*. Gatsby Foundation. https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/released-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-in-2025-002-1.pdf

Anderson, R., & Platt, N. (2025). *Ofsted commends EDT for Outstanding delivery of Early Career Framework, citing commitment to quality as "shining strength"*. EDT. Retrieved 23 May from https://www.edt.org/insights-from-our-work/ofsted-commends-edt-for-outstanding-delivery-of-early-career-framework-citing-commitment-to-quality-as-shining-strength/

Anka, A., Thacker, H., Penhale, B., Lloyd-Smith, W., & Booth, B. (2025). *Professional Curiosity in Safeguarding Adults*. Taylor & Francis.

Apple, M. W. (2006). *Educating the "right" Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality*. Routledge.

Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using Zoom Videoconferencing for Qualitative Data Collection: Perceptions and Experiences of Researchers and Participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *18*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596

Armstrong, T. (2020). *5 Things That Are Wrong With Evidence Based Teaching*. American Institute for Learning and Human Development. https://www.institute4learning.com/2020/01/13/5-things-that-are-wrong-with-evidence-based-teaching/

Arterbery, D., & Yavuz, O. (2020). Özel Gereksinimli Öğrenciler ile Çalışan Öğretmenlerin Yeterliliğini Artırmaya Yönelik Mesleki Gelişim Stratejileri [Targeted Professional Development Strategies to Increase Teachers' Efficacy for Educating Students with Special Needs]. *Çağdaş Yönetim Bilimleri Dergisi*, *7*(2), 160–179.

Au, W. W., & Apple, M. W. (2007). Reviewing Policy: Freire, Critical Education, and the Environmental Crisis. *Educational Policy*, *21*(3), 457–470. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904806289265

Ball, S. J. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, *18*(2), 215–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065

Ball, S. J. (2008). Performativity, privatisation, professionals and the state. In B. Cunningham (Ed.), *Exploring Professionalism*. Institute of Education, University of London.

Ball, S. J. (2012). Show Me the Money! Neoliberalism at Work in Education. *FORUM*, *54*, 23. https://doi.org/10.2304/forum.2012.54.1.23

Bambrick-Santoyo, P., & Lemov, D. (2018). *Leverage Leadership 2.0*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119548539

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological review*, *84*(2), 191.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. Worth Publishers.

Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall.

Barshay, J. (2025). *A dismal report card in math and reading* https://hechingerreport.org/naep-test-2024-dismal-report/

Berebitsky, D., & Andrews-Larson, C. (2017). Teacher Advice-Seeking: Relating Centrality and Expertise in Middle School Mathematics Social Networks. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *119*(10), 1–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811711901006

Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, *15*(2), 219–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475

Best, A., & Holmes, B. (2010). Systems thinking, knowledge and action: towards better models and methods. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, *6*(2), 145–159. https://doi.org/10.1332/174426410x502284

Biesta, G. (2007). Why "what works" won't work: Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research. *Educational Theory*, *57*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2006.00241.x

Biesta, G. (2009). Good education in an age of measurement: on the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, *21*(1), 33–46. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-008-9064-9

Biesta, G. (2015). What is Education For? On Good Education, Teacher Judgement, and Educational Professionalism. *European Journal of Education*, *50*(1), 75–87. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12109

Biesta, G. (2025). Turning the arrow: education after the age of the world-view. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2025.2477587

Biesta, G. J. (2012). Giving teaching back to education: Responding to the disappearance of the teacher. *Phenomenology & Practice*, *6*(2), 35–49.

Biesta, G. J. J. (2010). Why 'What Works' Still Won't Work: From Evidence-Based Education to Value-Based Education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, *29*(5), 491–503. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-010-9191-x

Bjerke, A. H., Dalland, C., Mausethagen, S., & Knudsmoen, H. (2025). Negotiating performative and professional accountability in inclusive mathematics education in Norway. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *129*, 102518. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102518

Blumer, H. (1954). What is Wrong with Social Theory? *American Sociological Review*, *19*(1), 3–10. https://doi.org/10.2307/2088165

Bol, J., Grabner, I., Haesebrouck, K., & Peecher, M. (2022). *Well-calibrated professional skepticism: Its benefits on auditor responsiveness to the risk of material misstatement and its roots in culture controls and auditor values*. Foundation for Auditing Research. https://foundationforauditingresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/working-paper-bgkp-aug-2022.pdf

Bonner, A., & Tolhurst, G. (2002). Insider-outsider perspectives of participant observation. *Nurse researcher*, *9*(4), 7–19. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2002.07.9.4.7.c6194

Borgatti, S. P., & Cross, R. (2003). A Relational View of Information Seeking and Learning in Social Networks. *Management Science*, *49*(4), 432–445. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.49.4.432.14428

Bowen, G. A. (2006). Grounded Theory and Sensitizing Concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *5*(3), 12–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500304

Brady, A. M. (2021). Response and Responsibility: Rethinking Accountability in Education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *55*(1), 25–40. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12501

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676x.2019.1628806

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative research in psychology*, *18*(3), 328–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, *24*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597

Brayman, K., Devenney, A., Dobson, H., Marques, M., & Vernon, A. (2024). A review of transitional agreements in the UK. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10787392

British Academy. (2021). *Initial teacher training (ITT) market review - Response from the British Academy*. The British Academy. https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/3411/Initial-teacher-training-market-review-response.pdf

British Educational Research Association [BERA]. (2018). *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 4th edition*. https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethicalguidelines-for-educational-research-2018

Brown, C., & Flood, J. (2020). *The Research-informed Teaching Revolution: A handbook for the 21st century teacher*. Hachette Learning.

Brown, C., & Rogers, S. (2014). Knowledge creation as an approach to facilitating evidence informed practice: Examining ways to measure the success of using this method with early years practitioners in Camden (London). *Journal of Educational Change*, *16*, 79–99.

Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Butterfield, L. D., Borgen, W. A., Amundson, N. E., & Maglio, A.-S. T. (2005). Fifty years of the critical incident technique: 1954-2004 and beyond. *Qualitative Research*, *5*(4), 475–497. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794105056924

Campbell, D. T. (1969). Reforms as experiments. *American psychologist*, *24*(4), 409–429. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0027982

Campbell, D. T. (1979). Assessing the impact of planned social change. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *2*(1), 67–90. https://doi.org/10.1016/0149-7189(79)90048-x

Cann, R. F., Riedel-Prabhakar, R., & Powell, D. (2021). A Model of Positive School Leadership to Improve Teacher Wellbeing. *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*, *6*(2), 195–218. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-020-00045-5

Caplan, N. (1979). The Two-Communities Theory and Knowledge Utilization. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *22*(3), 459–470. https://doi.org/10.1177/000276427902200308

Care, E., & Kim, H. (2018). *From ivory towers to the classroom: How can we make academic research useful in the real world?* Brooking Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/from-ivory-towers-to-the-classroom-how-can-we-make-academic-research-useful-in-the-real-world/

Cartwright, N., & Hardie, J. (2012). *Evidence-Based Policy: A Practical Guide to Doing It Better*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199841608.001.0001

Chaaban, Y., Al-Thani, H., & Du, X. (2021). A narrative inquiry of teacher educators' professional agency, identity renegotiations, and emotional responses amid educational disruption. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *108*, 103522. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103522

Chan, K.-W., & Elliott, R. G. (2004). Relational analysis of personal epistemology and conceptions about teaching and learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *20*(8), 817–831. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.09.002

Chartered College of Teaching. (2024). *Your voice in research and policy*. Chartered College of Teaching,. Retrieved 02 June from https://chartered.college/news-blogs/your-voice-in-research-and-policy/

Chung, J. (2023). Research-informed teacher education, teacher autonomy and teacher agency: the example of Finland. *London Review of Education*, *21*(1). https://doi.org/10.14324/lre.21.1.13

Coburn, C. E., Penuel, W. R., & Geil, K. E. (2013). *Practice partnerships: A strategy for leveraging research for educational improvement in school districts*. William T. Grant Foundation.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as Stance: Practitioner Research for the Next Generation*. Teachers College Press.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.

Colman, A. (2021). School leadership, school inspection and the micropolitics of compliance and resistance: Examining the hyper-enactment of policy in an area of deprivation. *Educational*

Management Administration & Leadership, *49*(2), 268–283.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219898479

Connell, R. (2013). The neoliberal cascade and education: an essay on the market agenda and its consequences. *Critical Studies in Education*, *54*(2), 99–112.
https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2013.776990

Cooper, A., Levin, B., & Campbell, C. (2009). The growing (but still limited) importance of evidence in education policy and practice. *Journal of Educational Change*, *10*(2-3), 159–171.
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-009-9107-0

Cordingley, P. (2008). Research and evidence-informed practice: focusing on practice and practitioners. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *38*(1), 37–52.
https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640801889964

Cordingley, P. (2015). The contribution of research to teachers' professional learning and development. *Oxford Review of Education*, *41*(2), 234–252.

Cordingley, P., Bell, M., Rundell, B., & Evans, D. (2003). *The impact of collaborative CPD on classroom teaching and learning* (Research Evidence in Education Library., Issue. EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit,, Institute of Education,.

Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (2008). *Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind: 16 Essential Characteristics for Success* (A. L. Costa & B. Kallick, Eds.). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Cresswell, J., & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. SAGE Publications.

Cribb, A., & Gewirtz, S. (2007). Unpacking Autonomy and Control in Education: Some Conceptual and Normative Groundwork for a Comparative Analysis. *European Educational Research Journal*, *6*(3), 203–213. https://doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2007.6.3.203

Crook, D. (2008). Some historical perspectives on professionalism. In B. Cunningham (Ed.), *Exploring Professionalism*. Institute of Education, University of London.

Crotty, R. D. (1988). *A Radical's Response*. Poolbeg.

Daly, A. J. (2012). Data, Dyads, and Dynamics: Exploring Data Use and Social Networks in Educational Improvement. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *114*(11), 1–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811211401103

Daly, A. J., & Little, J. W. (2010). *Social Network Theory and Educational Change*. Harvard Education Press.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-Century Teacher Education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *57*(3), 300–314. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487105285962

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute.

Davies, P. (1999). What is Evidence-based Education? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *47*(2), 108–121. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8527.00106

Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2010). The person in the professional: Learning, identity and emotional wellbeing. In *The New Lives of Teachers*. Routledge.

Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. McGraw-Hill.

Department for Education. (2010). *The Importance of Teaching*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf

Department for Education. (2015). *Reading: the next steps*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80aefced915d74e622fd98/Reading_the_next_steps.pdf

Department for Education. (2019a). *Early career framework*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-career-framework

Department for Education. (2019b). *Initial teacher training (ITT): core content framework*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-core-content-framework

Department for Education. (2021). *Research review series: mathematics*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-review-series-mathematics/research-review-series-mathematics

Department for Education. (2022). *Delivering world-class teacher development*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62850bddd3bf7f1f433ae149/Delivering_world_class_teacher_development_policy_paper.pdf

Department for Education. (2024a). *Outcomes of the review of the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework and Early Career Framework*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/661d24ba08c3be25cfbd3e62/Outcomes_of_the_review_of_the_Initial_Teacher_Training_Core_Content_Framework_and_Early_Career_Framework.pdf

Department for Education. (2024b). *Working lives of teachers and leaders: wave 2 summary report*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-lives-of-teachers-and-leaders-wave-2/working-lives-of-teachers-and-leaders-wave-2-summary-report

Department for Education. (2024c). *Workload reduction taskforce: initial recommendations*. London: Department for Education,

Department for Education. (2025a). *Generative artificial intelligence (AI) in education*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/generative-artificial-intelligence-in-education/generative-artificial-intelligence-ai-in-education

Department for Education. (2025b). *School workforce in England 2024*. D. f. Education. https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england/2024

Department for Education. (2025c). *Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England*. D. f. Education. https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/suspensions-and-permanent-exclusions-in-england/2023-24

Díaz-Gibson, J., Zaragoza, M. C., Daly, A. J., Mayayo, J. L., & Romaní, J. R. (2017). Networked leadership in Educational Collaborative Networks. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *45*(6), 1040–1059. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216628532

Diery, A., Vogel, F., Knogler, M., & Seidel, T. (2020). Evidence-Based Practice in Higher Education: Teacher Educators' Attitudes, Challenges, and Uses. *Frontiers in Education*, *5*. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00062

DuFour, R. (2004). What is a" professional learning community"? *Educational leadership*, *61*(8), 6–11.

Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *8*(1), 54–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105

Earl, L., & Katz, S. (2002). Leading Schools in a Data-Rich World. In K. Leithwood, P. Hallinger, G. Furman, K. Riley, J. MacBeath, P. Gronn, & B. Mulford (Eds.), *The Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration* (pp. 1003–1022). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-010-0375-9_34

Education Endowment Foundation. (2024). *New guide to help education professionals to make best use of research evidence* https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/new-guide-to-help-education-professionals-to-make-best-use-of-research-evidence

Education Policy Institute. (2024). *Annual Report 2024*. Education Policy Institute. https://epi.org.uk/annual-report-2024-disadvantage-2/

Education Support. (2023). *Teacher Wellbeing Index 2023*. Education Support. https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/0h4jd5pt/twix_2023.pdf

Elfarargy, H., Irby, B. J., Singer, E. A., Lara-Alecio, R., Tong, F., & Pugliese, E. (2022). Teachers' Perceptions of Instructional Coaches' Practices in Professional Learning Communities. *SAGE Open*, *12*(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221116103

Ellis, N., & Conyard, G. (2024). *Improving Education Policy Together: How It's Made, Implemented, and Can Be Done Better*. Routledge.

Elo, S., Kaariainen, M., Kanste, O., Tarja, P., Kati, U., & Helvi, K. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, 1–10.

Elwood, S. A., & Martin, D. G. (2000). "Placing" Interviews: Location and Scales of Power in Qualitative Research. *The Professional Geographer*, *52*(4), 649–657. https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-0124.00253

Engeström, Y., & Sannino, A. (2011). Discursive manifestations of contradictions in organizational change efforts. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *24*(3), 368–387. https://doi.org/10.1108/09534811111132758

Erez, A., & Grant, A. M. (2014). Separating Data From Intuition: Bringing Evidence Into the Management Classroom. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, *13*(1), 104–119. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2013.0098

Etzioni, A. (1969). *The Semi-professions and Their Organization*. Free Press.

Eurydice Finland. (n.d.). *Key features of the education system*. Helsinki: European Comission Retrieved from https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/eurypedia/finland/overview

Evans, L. (2008). Professionalism, Professionality and the Development of Education Professionals. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *56*(1), 20–38. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2007.00392.x

Feldon, D. F. (2007). Cognitive Load and Classroom Teaching: The Double-Edged Sword of Automaticity. *Educational Psychologist*, *42*(3), 123–137. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520701416173

Finish National Agency for Education. (n.d.). *Bacic information about primary and lower secondary education*. Helsinki: Finish National Agency for Education, Retrieved from https://www.oph.fi/en/education-and-qualifications/bacic-information-about-primary-and-lower-secondary-education

Finlay, L. (2002). "Outing" the Researcher: The Provenance, Process, and Practice of Reflexivity. *Qualitative health research*, *12*(4), 531–545. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129120052

Fitzsimons, S., & Smith, D. S. (2025). 'Don't do anything special for us coming' : the mental health impact of Ofsted inspections on teacher educators in England. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *55*(1), 93–111. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764x.2025.2451280

Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological bulletin*, *51*(4), 327.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research. *Qualitative inquiry*, *12*(2), 219–245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363

Foley, G. (2021). Video-based online interviews for palliative care research: A new normal in COVID-19? *Palliative Medicine*, *35*(3), 625–626. https://doi.org/10.1177/0269216321989571

Frayer, D. A., Ghatala, E. S., & Klausmeier, H. J. (1972). Levels of concept mastery: Implications for instruction. *Educational Technology*, *12*(12), 23–29.

Fricker, M. (2007). Epistemic Injustice. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198237907.001.0001

Friedman, I. A. (2000). Burnout in teachers: Shattered dreams of impeccable professional performance. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *56*(5), 595–606. https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1097-4679(200005)56:5<595::aid-jclp2>3.0.co;2-q

Fullan, M. (2007). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. (2011). Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform. *National Research University Higher School of Economics*(4), 79–105.

Fusenich, S. (2025). Essential Ofsted Insights for 2025. https://nationalcollege.com/news/essential-ofsted-insights-for-2025

Gadamer, H.-G. (1975). Hermeneutics and social science. *Cultural hermeneutics*, *2*(4), 307–316.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation Of Cultures*. Basic Books.

Goddard, R. D., Hoy, W. K., & Hoy, A. W. (2000). Collective Teacher Efficacy: Its Meaning, Measure, and Impact on Student Achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, *37*(2), 479–507. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312037002479

Gremler, D. D. (2004). The Critical Incident Technique in Service Research. *Journal of Service Research*, *7*(1), 65–89. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670504266138

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*, *2*(163-194), 105.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How Many Interviews Are Enough? *Field Methods*, *18*(1), 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822x05279903

Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional Development and Teacher Change. *Teachers and Teaching*, *8*(3), 381–391. https://doi.org/10.1080/135406002100000512

Hairon, S., & Dimmock, C. (2012). Singapore schools and professional learning communities: teacher professional development and school leadership in an Asian hierarchical system. *Educational Review*, *64*(4), 405–424. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2011.625111

Han, Y., & Wang, Y. (2021). Investigating the Correlation Among Chinese EFL Teachers' Self-efficacy, Work Engagement, and Reflection. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.763234

Haney, J. (2024). *From Ivory Tower to Real World: Building Bridges Between Research and Practice in Human Centered Cybersecurity*. National Institute of Standards and Technology. https://tsapps.nist.gov/publication/get_pdf.cfm?pub_id=957675

Hansen, D. T. (1994). Teaching and the Sense of Vocation. *Educational Theory*, *44*(3), 259–275. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.1994.00259.x

Hargreaves, A. (2000). Four Ages of Professionalism and Professional Learning. *Teachers and Teaching*, *6*(2), 151–182. https://doi.org/10.1080/713698714

Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*. Teachers College Press.

Hargreaves, A., & Goodson, I. (1996). Teachers' professional lives: Aspirations and actualities. In I. Goodson (Ed.), *Teachers professional lives* (pp. 1–17). Farmer Press.

Hargreaves, D. H. (1996). *Teaching as a Research-Based Profession: Possibilities and Prospects* Teacher Training Agency, London.

Hattie, J. (2003). Teachers Make a Difference, What is the research evidence? *Australian Council for Educational Research*, *36*(2), 27–38.

Heikkilä, M., Mauno, S., Herttalampi, M., Minkkinen, J., Muotka, J., & Feldt, T. (2023). Ethical dilemmas and well-being in teachers' work: A three-wave, two-year longitudinal study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *125*, 104049. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104049

Hemsley-Brown, J., & Sharp, C. (2003). The use of research to improve professional practice: A systematic review of the literature. *Oxford Review of Education*, *29*(4), 449–471.

Higgins, S., Katsipataki, M., Villanueva-Aguilera, A., Coleman, R., Henderson, P., Major, L., Coe, R., & Mason, D. (2016). *The Sutton Trust-Education Endowment Foundation Teaching and Learning Toolkit*. Education Endownment Foundation. Retrieved 20 May 2021 from https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/

Hodge, L., Cruikshanks, R., Andrews, J., & Gavriloiu, A. (2024). *The Features of Effective School Groups*. Education Policy Institute. https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Effective_school_groups_final-240404-2.pdf

Hofer, B. K. (2000). Dimensionality and Disciplinary Differences in Personal Epistemology. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *25*(4), 378–405. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1026

Hogan, A., Thompson, G., Sellar, S., & Lingard, B. (2018). Teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of commercialisation in Australian public schools. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, *45*(2), 141–160. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-017-0246-7

Hordern, J., & Brooks, C. (2024). Towards Instrumental Trainability in England? The 'Official Pedagogy' Of The Core Content Framework. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *72*(1), 5–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2023.2255894

Hordern, J., & Brooks, C. (2025). The ITTECF and educational research: the next version of a flawed vision? *London Review of Education*, *23*(1). https://doi.org/10.14324/lre.23.1.06

Hoyle, E. (1974). Professionality, professionalism and the control of teaching. *London Educational Review*, *3*(2), 13–19.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2003). *Who controls teachers' work?: Accountability, power, and the structure of educational organizations*. Harvard University Press.

Institute for Employment Studies (IES), & BMG Research. (2022). *Early career framework induction evaluation*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-career-framework-induction-evaluation

Institute for Employment Studies (IES), & BMG Research. (2025). *Evaluation of the national roll-out of the early career framework induction programmes: Annual summary (Year 3)*. Department for Education. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-career-framework-induction-evaluation

Irvine, A., Drew, P., & Sainsbury, R. (2013). 'Am I not answering your questions properly?' Clarification, adequacy and responsiveness in semi-structured telephone and face-to-face interviews. *Qualitative Research*, *13*(1), 87–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112439086

Israel, M., & Hay, I. (2006). *Research Ethics for Social Scientists*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209779

Jackson, K., & Bazeley, P. (2019). *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo*. SAGE Publications.

John, W. S., & Johnson, P. (2000). The Pros and Cons of Data Analysis Software for Qualitative Research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, *32*(4), 393–397. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2000.00393.x

Kaiser, K. (2009). Protecting Respondent Confidentiality in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative health research*, *19*(11), 1632–1641. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732309350879

Karasek, R. A. (1979). Job Demands, Job Decision Latitude, and Mental Strain: Implications for Job Redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *24*(2), 285–308. https://doi.org/10.2307/2392498

Kearney, W. S., & Smith, P. (2018). Student Bullying, Teacher Protection, and Administrator Role Ambiguity. *Journal of School Leadership*, *28*(3), 374–400. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461802800305

Kelchtermans, G. (2005). Teachers' emotions in educational reforms: Self-understanding, vulnerable commitment and micropolitical literacy. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *21*(8), 995–1006. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.009

Kennedy, A. (2005). Models of Continuing Professional Development: a framework for analysis. *Journal of In-service Education*, *31*(2), 235–250. https://doi.org/10.1080/13674580500200277

Kennedy, A. (2014). Understanding continuing professional development: the need for theory to impact on policy and practice. *Professional Development in Education*, *40*(5), 688–697. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2014.955122

Kennedy, H. (1997). *Learning Works - Widening Participation in Further Education*. Retrieved from https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/9063796.pdf

Khalil, A., & Cowie, B. (2020). A research note: Video conferencing interviews. *Waikato Journal of Education*, *25*, 101–107. https://doi.org/10.15663/wje.v25i0.778

Khalilollahi, A., Kasraian, D., Kemperman, A. D. A. M., & Van Wesemael, P. (2023). Application of the COM-B model to the correlates of children's outdoor playing and the potential role of digital interventions: a systematic literature review. *Children's Geographies*, *21*(3), 442–458. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2022.2075692

King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in Qualitative Research*. SAGE Publications.

Kirschner, P. A., Sweller, J., & Clark, R. E. (2006). Why Minimal Guidance During Instruction Does Not Work: An Analysis of the Failure of Constructivist, Discovery, Problem-Based, Experiential, and Inquiry-Based Teaching. *Educational Psychologist*, *41*(2), 75–86. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep4102_1

Kislov, R., Wilson, P., & Boaden, R. (2017). The 'dark side' of knowledge brokering. *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy*, *22*(2), 107–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/1355819616653981

Knight, J. (2007). *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction*. SAGE Publications.

Knight, J. (2009). What can we do to make it easier for teachers to implement new practices? In J. Knight (Ed.), *Coaching: Approaches and perspectives* (pp. 119–129). Corwin Press.

Koch, T. (2006). Establishing rigour in qualitative research: the decision trail. *Journal of advanced nursing*, *53*(1), 91–100. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2006.03681.x

Korthagen, F. A. J. (2004). In search of the essence of a good teacher: towards a more holistic approach in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *20*(1), 77–97. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.10.002

Korthagen, F. A. J. (2007). The gap between research and practice revisited. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, *13*(3), 303–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/13803610701640235

Kraft, M. A., Blazar, D., & Hogan, D. (2018). The effect of teacher coaching on instruction and achievement: A meta-analysis of the causal evidence. *Review of educational research*, *88*(4), 547–588.

Krouwel, M., Jolly, K., & Greenfield, S. (2019). Comparing Skype (video calling) and in-person qualitative interview modes in a study of people with irritable bowel syndrome – an exploratory comparative analysis. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *19*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0867-9

Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: a literature review. *Quality & Quantity*, *47*(4), 2025–2047. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-011-9640-9

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. SAGE Publications.

Larvin, C. (2021). The accountability paradox. *Impact*(12), 10–12.

Leijen, Ä., Pedaste, M., & Lepp, L. (2020). Teacher Agency Following the Ecological Model: How It Is Achieved and How It Could Be Strengthened by Different Types of Reflection. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *68*(3), 295–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2019.1672855

Leithwood, K., & Beatty, B. (2008). *Leading with teacher emotions in mind*. Corwin Press.

Levin, B. (2013). To know is not enough: Research knowledge and its use. *Review of education*, *1*(1), 2–31.

Lewis, C., Perry, R., & Murata, A. (2006). How Should Research Contribute to Instructional Improvement? The Case of Lesson Study. *Educational Researcher*, *35*(3), 3–14. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x035003003

Li, H., Tyson, S., Meyers, E. A., Ada, H., & Jordan, M. (2023). Advancing EBP culture and competencies through an academic-research partnership: Process and outcomes of an EBP scholar program. *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing*, *20*(1), 44–46. https://doi.org/10.1111/wvn.12616

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1982). *Establishing dependability and confirmability in naturalistic inquiry through an audit* Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (66th), New York. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED216019.pdf

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.

Lipsky, M. (1980). Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services. *Politics & Society*, *10*(1), 116–116. https://doi.org/10.1177/003232928001000113

Litz, B. T., Stein, N., Delaney, E., Lebowitz, L., Nash, W. P., Silva, C., & Maguen, S. (2009). Moral injury and moral repair in war veterans: A preliminary model and intervention strategy. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *29*(8), 695–706. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.07.003

Liu, S., & Yin, H. (2024). Opening the black box: How professional learning communities, collective teacher efficacy, and cognitive activation affect students' mathematics achievement in schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *139*, 104443. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104443

Loewenberg Ball, D., Thames, M. H., & Phelps, G. (2008). Content Knowledge for Teaching:What Makes It Special? *Journal of Teacher Education*, *59*(5), 389–407. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487108324554

Lortie, D. C. (2008). Schoolteacher. In *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* (pp. 513–523). Routledge.

Lukins, J. M., Able, H., & Hume, K. (2023). Novice Teachers' Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices in Autism Education: Examining the Roles of Preparation and Perception. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, *38*(1), 5–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/10883576221144734

Lyotard, J.-F., & Van Den Abbeele, G. (1984). Interview: Jean-François Lyotard. *Diacritics*, *14*(3), 16–21. https://doi.org/10.2307/464841

Maher, C., Hadfield, M., Hutchings, M., & De Eyto, A. (2018). Ensuring Rigor in Qualitative Data Analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*(1), 160940691878636. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918786362

Malin, J., Brown, C., & Trubceac, A. (2019). Educational brokerage and knowledge mobilization in the United States 1. In J. Malin & C. Brown (Eds.), *The Role of Knowledge Brokers in Education - Connecting the Dots Between Research and Practice*. Routledge.

Malterud, K., Siersma, V. D., & Guassora, A. D. (2016). Sample Size in Qualitative Interview Studies. *Qualitative health research*, *26*(13), 1753–1760. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444

Mandinach, E. B., & Schildkamp, K. (2021). Misconceptions about data-based decision making in education: An exploration of the literature. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *69*, 100842. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100842

Marian University Libraries. (n.d.). *Artificial Intelligence in Education*. Marian University. https://libguides.marian.edu/c.php?g=1321167&p=10767259

Marks, D. F. (2020). *The COM-B System of Behaviour Change: Properties, Problems and Prospects*. Qeios Ltd. https://dx.doi.org/10.32388/U5MTTB.2

McCroskey, J. C., & Teven, J. J. (1999). Goodwill: A reexamination of the construct and its measurement. *Communication Monographs*, *66*(1), 90–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759909376464

McLean, D., & Worth, J. (2025). *Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report 2025*. National Foundation for Educational Research. https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2025/

McPherson, C., Bayrakdar, S., Gewirtz, S., Laczik, A., Maguire, M., Newton, O., O'Brien, S., Weavers, A., Winch, C., & Wolf, A. (2023). *Schools for all? Young people's experiences of alienation in the English secondary school system*. Edge Foundation. https://www.edge.co.uk/documents/346/DD0940_-_Young_Futures_Young_Lives_FINAL.pdf

Mehta, J. (2013a). How Paradigms Create Politics: The Transformation of American Educational Policy, 1980-2001. *American Educational Research Journal*, *50*(2), 285–324.

Mehta, J. (2013b). The Penetration of Technocratic Logic into the Educational Field: Rationalizing Schooling from the Progressives to the Present. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, *115*(5), 1–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811311500507

Mersha, A. G., Gould, G. S., Bovill, M., & Eftekhari, P. (2020). Barriers and Facilitators of Adherence to Nicotine Replacement Therapy: A Systematic Review and Analysis Using the Capability, Opportunity, Motivation, and Behaviour (COM-B) Model. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(23), 8895. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17238895

Meyrick, J. (2006). What is Good Qualitative Research? *Journal of health psychology*, *11*(5), 799–808. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105306066643

Michie, S., Van Stralen, M. M., & West, R. (2011). The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Science*, *6*(1), 42. https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42

Microsoft. (2025). *Introduction to Teams recording*. https://learn.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoftteams/teams-recording-policy

Mirvis, P. H., Albers Mohrman, S., & Worley, C. G. (2021). *How to Do Relevant Research: From the Ivory Tower to the Real World*. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Müller, L.-M., & Cook, V. (2024). *Revisiting the notion of teacher professionalism: A working paper*. Charter College of Teaching. https://chartered.college/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Professionalism-report_v.2_FINAL-FOR-PUBLICATION_2-May-1.pdf

National Association of Head Teachers. (2025). *Resetting the Relationship: Ofsted Reform*. NAHT. https://www.naht.org.uk/Portals/0/PDF%27s/Reports/Resetting%20the%20relationship%20-%20Ofsted%20reform.pdf?ver=2025-01-17-090549-800

National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification. (2023). *Model code of ethics for educators (2nd ed.)*. NASDTEC. https://www.nasdtec.net/page/MCEE_Doc

National Education Union. (2023). *Control of the curriculum* https://neu.org.uk/latest/press-releases/control-curriculum

National Education Union. (2024). *Majority of teachers considered leaving over Ofsted*. NEU. https://neu.org.uk/latest/press-releases/majority-teachers-considered-leaving-over-ofsted

National Education Union. (2025). *Large multi-academy trusts have the lowest teacher retention rates* https://neu.org.uk/press-releases/large-multi-academy-trusts-have-lowest-teacher-retention-rates

Neale, B. (2020). *Qualitative longitudinal research: Research methods*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Nelson, J., & O'Beirne, C. (2014). *Using Evidence in the Classroom: What Works and Why?* National Foundation for Educational Research. https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/impa01/impa01.pdf

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

Nutley, S. M., Walter, I., & Davies, H. T. (2007). *Using evidence: How research can inform public services*. Bristol University Press, Policy Press.

O'Neill, O. (2002). *A question of trust: The BBC Reith Lectures 2002*. Cambridge University Press.

Ofsted. (2023). *Ofsted Annual Report: Steadily improving picture in education and care, but 'social contract' remains fractured* https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofsted-annual-report-steadily-improving-picture-in-education-and-care-but-social-contract-remains-fractured

Ofsted. (2025a). *Improving the way Ofsted inspects education*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/improving-the-way-ofsted-inspects-education

Ofsted. (2025b). *To what extent has curriculum quality changed in schools since the introduction of the education inspection framework?* Department for Education. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-quality-evaluating-the-impact-of-the-education-inspection-framework/to-what-extent-has-curriculum-quality-changed-in-schools-since-the-introduction-of-the-education-inspection-framework

Ortlipp, M. (2008). Keeping and Using Reflective Journals in the Qualitative Research Process. *The Qualitative Report*, *13*, 695–705. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1579

Ovenden-Hope, T., & Kirkpatrick, H. (2024). The Early Career Framework: Why Context Matters for Teacher Professional Development. *Education Sciences*, *14*(11), 1261. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14111261

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, *42*(5), 533–544. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Patterson, K., Grenny, J., Maxfield, D., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2007). *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything, First Edition: The Power to Change Anything, First Edition*. McGraw-Hill Education.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. SAGE Publications.

Perryman, J. (2006). Panoptic performativity and school inspection regimes: disciplinary mechanisms and life under special measures. *Journal of Education Policy*, *21*(2), 147–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930500500138

Perryman, J. (2009). Inspection and the fabrication of professional and performative processes. *Journal of Education Policy*, *24*(5), 611–631. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930903125129

Perryman, J., Ball, S. J., Braun, A., & Maguire, M. (2017). Translating policy: governmentality and the reflective teacher. *Journal of Education Policy*, *32*(6), 745–756. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1309072

Perryman, J., Bradbury, A., Calvert, G., & Kilian, K. (2023). *Beyond Ofsted Inquiry (2023), Final Report of the Inquiry.* NEU. https://beyondofsted.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Beyond-Ofsted-Report.pdf

Perryman, J., Bradbury, A., Calvert, G., & Kilian, K. (2025). 'A Tipping Point' in Teacher Retention and Accountability: The Case of Inspection. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *73*(2), 181–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2024.2439791

Petrova, E., Dewing, J., & Camilleri, M. (2016). Confidentiality in participatory research. *Nursing Ethics*, *23*(4), 442–454. https://doi.org/10.1177/0969733014564909

Pilat, D., & Krastev, S. (n.d.). *The COM-B Model for Behavior Change*. The Decision Lab. https://thedecisionlab.com/reference-guide/organizational-behavior/the-com-b-model-for-behavior-change

Podsakoff, P. M., Mackenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *88*(5), 879–903. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2010). Generalization in quantitative and qualitative research: Myths and strategies. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, *47*(11), 1451–1458. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2010.06.004

Poulou, M. S., Reddy, L. A., & Dudek, C. M. (2019). Relation of teacher self-efficacy and classroom practices: A preliminary investigation. *School Psychology International*, *40*(1), 25–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034318798045

Priestley, M., Priestley, M. R., Biesta, G., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Race, R., & Vidal-Hall, C. (2019). The BERA/SAGE handbook of educational research – Volumes 1 and 2. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *67*(2), 271–273. https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2019.1578063

Rajagopalan, S. (2021). Inclusive Rationality: Struggle and Aspiration. *Review of Behavioral Economics*, *8*(3-4), 259–283. https://doi.org/10.1561/105.00000142

Right to Read Project. (2019). Teachers Won't Embrace Research Until It Embraces Them. https://righttoreadproject.com/2019/07/19/teachers-wont-embrace-research-until-it-embraces-them/

Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide. *Qualitative research in psychology*, *11*(1), 25–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543

Robinson, V. (2011). *Student-Centered Leadership*. Jossey-Bass.

Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of Innovations, 5th Edition*. Free Press.

Rosman, T., & Merk, S. (2021). Teacher's Reasons for Trust and Distrust in Scientific Evidence: Reflecting a "Smart But Evil" Stereotype? *AERA Open*, *7*, 233285842110285. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211028599

Roth, G., & Weinstock, M. (2013). Teachers' epistemological beliefs as an antecedent of autonomy-supportive teaching. *Motivation and Emotion*, *37*(3), 402–412. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-012-9338-x

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2011). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American psychologist*, *55*(1), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.55.1.68

Sachs, J. (2000). The Activist Professional. *Journal of Educational Change*, *1*(1), 77–94. https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1010092014264

Sachs, J. (2003). *Teacher activism: Mobilising the profession*. British Educational Research Association.

Sachs, J. (2016). Teacher professionalism: why are we still talking about it? *Teachers and Teaching*, *22*(4), 413–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1082732

Sackett, D. L., Rosenberg, W. M. C., Gray, J. A. M., Haynes, R. B., & Richardson, W. S. (1996). Evidence based medicine: what it is and what it isn't. *BMJ*, *312*(7023), 71–72. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.312.7023.71

Sahlberg, P. (2011). Paradoxes of educational improvement: The Finnish experience. *Scottish Educational Review*, *43*(1), 3–23. https://doi.org/10.1163/27730840-04301002

Sahlberg, P. (2015). Finnish Schools and the Global Education Reform Movement. In J. Evers & R. Kneyber (Eds.), *Flip the System* (pp. 162–177). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315678573-19

Saldaña, J. (2003). *Longitudinal qualitative research: Analyzing change through time*. Rowman Altamira.

Santoro, D. A., & Berliner, D. C. (2021). *Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession They Love and How They Can Stay*. Harvard Education Press.

Saunders, M. N. K., & Townsend, K. (2016). Reporting and Justifying the Number of Interview Participants in Organization and Workplace Research. *British Journal of Management*, *27*(4), 836–852. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12182

Schön, D. (1992). Reflective Practice in the Science-Based Professions. In *The Reflective Practitioner*.

Schunk, D. H., & Ertmer, P. A. (2000). Self-Regulation and Academic Learning. In M. Boekaerts, P. Pintrich, & M. Zeidner (Eds.), *Handbook of Self-Regulation* (pp. 631–649). Elsevier EV. https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-012109890-2/50048-2

Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research.* (pp. 118–137). SAGE Publications.

Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative inquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism. In Y. Lincoln & N. K. Denzin (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 189–213). SAGE Publications.

Self, B. (2021). Conducting interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *22*(3).

Sharples, J. (2013). *Evidence for the Frontline - A Report for Alliance for Useful Evidence*. Alliance for Useful Evidence. https://en.testingtreatments.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/01/EVIDENCE-FOR-THE-FRONTLINE-FINAL-5-June-2013.pdf

Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching. *Educational Researcher*, *15*(2), 4–14. https://doi.org/10.2307/1175860

Sidor, M. (2024). *The COM-B Model and Behavior Change*. Sweet Institute,. https://sweetinstitute.com/the-com-b-model-and-behavior-change/

Sims, S., Fletcher-Wood, H., Godfrey-Faussett, T., Mccrea, P., & Meliss, S. (2023). *Modelling evidence-based practice in initial teacher training: causal effects on teachers' skills, knowledge and self-efficacy*. A. Institute.

Skinner, B., Leavey, G., & Rothi, D. (2021). Managerialism and teacher professional identity: impact on well-being among teachers in the UK. *Educational Review*, *73*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1556205

Slavin, R. E. (2002). Evidence-Based Education Policies: Transforming Educational Practice and Research. *Educational Researcher*, *31*(7), 15–21. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x031007015

Spillane, J. P., Kim, C. M., & Frank, K. A. (2012). Instructional Advice and Information Providing and Receiving Behavior in Elementary Schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, *49*(6), 1112–1145. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831212459339

Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy Implementation and Cognition: Reframing and Refocusing Implementation Research. *Review of educational research*, *72*(3), 387–431. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072003387

Sreerama, J., & Krishnamoorthy, G. (2022). Ethical Considerations in AI Addressing Bias and Fairness in Machine Learning Models. *Journal of Knowledge Learning and Science Technology*, *1*(1), 130–138. https://doi.org/10.60087/jklst.vol1.n1.p138

Stacey, M., Gavin, M., Fitzgerald, S., McGrath-Champ, S., & Wilson, R. (2024). Reducing teachers' workload or deskilling 'core' work? Analysis of a policy response to teacher workload

demands. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *45*(2), 187–199. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2023.2271856

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, *7*(4), 221–258.

Sturrock, S. (2024). 'Gaming' in the English primary school: 'do whatever you need to do to make your data look good'. *Journal of Education Policy*, *39*(6), 963–985. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2024.2360993

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2019). Understanding teacher shortages: An analysis of teacher supply and demand in the United States. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *27*, 35. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.3696

Sweller, J., Van Merriënboer, J. J. G., & Paas, F. (2019). Cognitive Architecture and Instructional Design: 20 Years Later. *Educational Psychology Review*, *31*(2), 261–292. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09465-5

Tan, X., Cheng, G., & Ling, M. H. (2025). Artificial intelligence in teaching and teacher professional development: A systematic review. *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence*, *8*, 100355. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeai.2024.100355

Taylor, M. J., Arriscado, D., Vlaev, I., Taylor, D., Gately, P., & Darzi, A. (2016). Measuring perceived exercise capability and investigating its relationship with childhood obesity: a feasibility study. *International Journal of Obesity*, *40*(1), 34–38. https://doi.org/10.1038/ijo.2015.210

Teacher Regulation Agency. (2022). *Framework Document: Teaching Regulation Agency*. London: Department for Education, Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63d165ddd3bf7f3c3e1c08d1/TRA_Framework _Document.pdf

Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed Methods Sampling. *Journal of mixed methods research*, *1*(1), 77–100. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689806292430

Thornton, S. (1989). *Aspiration and Practice: Teacher as Curricular-Instructional Gatekeeper in Social Studies* Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED315347.pdf

Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007). *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration*. Ministry of Education. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/15341

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research. *Qualitative inquiry*, *16*(10), 837–851. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121

Tripepi, G., Jager, K. J., Dekker, F. W., & Zoccali, C. (2010). Selection Bias and Information Bias in Clinical Research. *Nephron Clinical Practice*, *115*(2), c94–c99. https://doi.org/10.1159/000312871

Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W., & Hoy, W. K. (1998). Teacher Efficacy: Its Meaning and Measure. *Review of educational research*, *68*(2), 202–248. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543068002202

Twiselton, S., Ellis, N., Barker, M., & Perry, E. (2024). *An exploratory study of the early career framework*. Teacher Development Trust. https://heyzine.com/flip-book/e39b17b4a8.html

UK Research and Innovation. (2021). *UKRI open access policy*. London: UK Research and Innovation Retrieved from https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/UKRI-14112023-Nov-2023_UKRI-Open-Access-Policy_Version-1.8.pdf

Urhahne, D., & Wijnia, L. (2021). A review on the accuracy of teacher judgments. *Educational Research Review*, *32*, 100374. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100374

Walker, M. (2024). *The Early Career Framework: Key findings for policymakers and school leaders from the early roll-out evaluation*. National Fondation for Educational Reesearch. https://www.nfer.ac.uk/blogs/the-early-career-framework-key-findings-for-policymakers-and-school-leaders-from-the-early-roll-out-evaluation/

Walker, M., Worth, J., Liht, J., Classick, R., Tang, S., Rutt, S., & Straw, S. (2024). *Evaluation of the early roll-out of the Early Career Framework*. National Foundation for Educational Research. https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/evaluation-of-the-early-roll-out-of-the-early-career-framework/

Ward, V., House, A., & Hamer, S. (2009). Knowledge brokering: the missing link in the evidence to action chain? *Evidence & Policy*, *5*(3), 267–279. https://doi.org/10.1332/174426409x463811

Wheeless, L. R. (1974). The effects of attitude, credibility, and homophily on selective exposure to information. *Speech Monographs*, *41*(4), 329–338. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637757409375857

Whitty, G. (2006). *Teacher professionalism in a new era* General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland Annual Lecture, Belfast.

Wiles, R., & Boddy, J. (2013). Introduction to the Special Issue: Research Ethics in Challenging Contexts. *Methodological Innovations Online*, *8*(2), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.4256/mio.2013.009

Wilkins, C. (2011). Professionalism and the post-performative teacher: new teachers reflect on autonomy and accountability in the English school system. *Professional Development in Education*, *37*(3), 389–409. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2010.514204

Williams, D., & Coles, L. (2007). Teachers' approaches to finding and using research evidence: An information literacy perspective. *Educational Research*, *49*(2), 185–206.

Wood, W. (2025). Let's talk about Ofsted: 2025 Ofsted inspection framework. https://www.pmt.education/blog/teachers/2025-ofsted-inspection-framework/

Woodfine, C., & Warner, D. (2023). The identity dilemmas of Early Career Teachers from under-represented groups in the UK. *Teaching Education*, *34*(3), 335–350. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2022.2118704

Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. SAGE Publications.

Zhang, Y., & Wang, P. (2022). Twenty Years' Development of Teacher Identity Research: A Bibliometric Analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.783913

Appendices

6.1   Appendix A – Ethical approval form A

Ethical Approval Form A (version November 2021)

Please tick one:

Staff: ☐   PhD: ☐   EdD: ☒

Name of applicant(s): Andrei Stanescu

Title of project: Exploring the Extent of Teachers' Engagement with Evidence-Based Practice in Secondary Education

Name of supervisor (s) (for student projects): [redacted], [redacted]

Please complete the form below.

Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that	YES	NO	N.A.
a) explains the purpose(s) of the project	✓		
b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants	✓		
c) gives a full, fair, and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used	✓		
d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary	✓		
e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish	✓		
f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention, and disposal	✓		
g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this	✓		
h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them	✓		
i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email. If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included, and their name provided	✓		
j) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants			✓
k) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows: "This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct."	✓		
l) includes a standard statement regarding insurance: "The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request."	✓		
Please answer the following questions:	YES	NO	N.A.
1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on blackboard to ensure this).	✓		
2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants, if they are able to provide it, in addition to 1)?	✓		
3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?	✓		
4) Staff Only – Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/humanresources/PeopleDevelopment/newstaff/humres-MandatoryOnlineCourses.aspx			✓

For all student projects, please tick N.A. and complete the Data Protection Declaration form (which is included in this document) and submit it with this application to the ethics committee.			
5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form (included below with this ethics application)?	✓		
6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?	✓		
7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?	✓		
8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?			
9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent?			✓
10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data[1], or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?	✓		
11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?			✓
12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?		✓	
12b) If the answer to question 12a is "yes", does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?			✓
13a) Does your research involve collecting data in a language other than English?		✓	
13b) If the answer to question 13a is "yes", please confirm that information sheets, consent forms, and research instruments, where appropriate, have been directly translated from the English versions submitted with this application.			✓
14a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?		✓	
14b. If the answer to question 14a is "yes": My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University's insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.			✓
If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below			

- Complete either **Section A** or **Section B** below with details of your research project.
- Complete a **Risk Assessment**.
- Sign the form in **Section C**.
- For all student projects, complete a **Data Protection Declaration form**.
- Append at the end of this form all relevant documents: information sheets, consent forms, and ALL research instruments which may include tests, questionnaires, and interview schedules, and for staff, evidence that you have completed information security training (e.g., screen shot/copy of certificate).
- Email the completed form, as a **SINGLE** document, to the Institute's Ethics Committee for consideration.
Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.

Section A: My research goes beyond the "accepted custom and practice of teaching" but I consider that this project has **no** significant ethical implications. (Please tick the box.)	☐
Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g., teachers, parents, pupils etc.	
Give a succinct description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments, and procedures) of the project in up to 500 words noting:	

---

[1] Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

1. Title of project

2. Purpose of project and its academic rationale

3. Brief description of methods and measurements

4. Participants: Recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria

5. Consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)

6. A clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.

7. Estimated start date and duration of project

Section B: I consider that this project **may** have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute's Ethics Committee.	☒

Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g., teachers, parents, pupils etc.
15-20 teachers

Give a succinct description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments, and procedures) of the project in up to 500 words.
1. Title of project
Exploring the Extent of Teachers' Engagement with Evidence-Based Practice in Secondary Education
2. Purpose of project and its academic rationale
The purpose of this project is to explore how secondary school teachers understand and perceive EBP within the framework of current educational policies. The study aims to identify the barriers and facilitators to implementing EBP and the implications for future educational policy and professional development programmes. By understanding these factors, the research seeks to contribute to the academic discourse on teacher engagement with EBP and provide actionable insights for policymakers and educators to support effective teaching practices.
3. Brief description of methods and measurements
This study employs a qualitative methodology to capture the in-depth experiences and perspectives of secondary school teachers regarding EBP. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with approximately 15-20 participants, including teachers, heads of departments, and senior leaders from secondary schools. Participants will be selected based on their professional development backgrounds and school performance levels to ensure a diverse range of experiences. Interviews are expected to last 45-60 minutes. For face-to-face interviews, a digital voice recorder will be used to ensure accurate data capture. For interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams, video recording will be utilised. All interviews will be transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis guided by the COM-B model (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation-Behaviour). This approach allows for a detailed exploration of the factors influencing teachers' engagement with EBP.
4. Participants: Recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria
Participants will be recruited through purposive sampling methods to ensure a diverse and representative sample of approximately 15-20 individuals from two secondary schools. The sample will include classroom teachers, heads of departments, and senior leaders, selected based on their roles in the school, varying levels of experience with evidence-based practices, range of teaching experience (from early career to veteran teachers), different subject areas, and professional development backgrounds. Additionally, participants will be selected from schools with varying performance levels (e.g., high-performing and low-performing schools) and from both urban and rural contexts to explore how these factors impact EBP implementation. There are no exclusion criteria based on age or gender, but participants must be actively teaching or involved in the educational management of secondary schools. If more participants volunteer than needed, these criteria will be used to prioritise and select participants to ensure a manageable and representative sample size.
5. Consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)
Informed consent will be obtained from all participants through detailed information sheets and consent forms. These documents will explain the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw at any time without any repercussions. After the interviews, participants will be debriefed, and any questions they may have will be addressed. Copies of the information sheet and consent

form are attached to this application. Prior to recruiting participants, formal written consent will be obtained from the headteachers of both schools. The headteachers will be provided with detailed information about the study, including its purpose, methods, and ethical considerations. Their approval will be documented and included in the ethical review process. Research findings will be shared within the school in a summarised format to provide insights and practical recommendations while ensuring confidentiality.

6. A clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.

The primary ethical considerations for this project include ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, obtaining informed consent, and minimising any potential psychological discomfort. To address these considerations:

- Confidentiality: Data will be anonymised and stored securely.
- Informed Consent: Detailed information sheets and consent forms will be provided.
- Right to Withdraw: Participants will be assured of their right to withdraw at any time.
- Respect for Comfort and Well-being: Interviews will be conducted respectfully, with participants having the option to skip questions or terminate the interview if they feel uncomfortable.
- Insider Research: As I will be a new member of staff at one of the schools, steps will be taken to manage potential bias and conflicts of interest. I will not hold any supervisory role over participants, ensuring no influence on their work performance or promotions. Participants will be fully informed about my dual role, emphasising that participation is voluntary and without consequence. Strict confidentiality and anonymity measures will be upheld, with data securely stored and anonymised. To ensure transparency, participants will review and provide feedback on their interview transcripts and preliminary findings. Additionally, I will maintain a reflective journal to document and mitigate any potential biases introduced by my dual role.
- Headteachers' Consent: Prior to recruiting participants, formal written consent will be obtained from the headteachers of both schools. The headteachers will be provided with detailed information about the study, including its purpose, methods, and ethical considerations. Their approval will be documented and included in the ethical review process. Research findings will be shared within the school in a summarised, non-identifiable manner to encourage honest feedback and contribute to broader educational insights.

7. Estimated start date and duration of project

The project is expected to start in September 2024 and will last for 12 months, concluding in September 2025.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Brief outline of Work/activity:	Conducting semi-structured interviews to explore secondary school teachers' engagement with evidence-based practices (EBP). This involves interviewing teachers, heads of departments, and senior leaders to gather qualitative data on their perceptions and experiences with EBP within the framework of current educational policies.

Where will data be collected?	Data will be collected in secondary schools and potentially through the remote video conferencing platform Microsoft Teams. The choice of location will depend on participants' preferences and availability.

Significant hazards:	Psychological discomfort: Participants may feel uneasy discussing their professional practices and experiences, especially if the topics are sensitive or critical of current educational policies or school practices. Measures to address this include ensuring participants are aware that their responses are confidential and anonymised, emphasising that participation is voluntary and without consequence, and providing opportunities for participants to review and provide feedback on their interview transcripts and preliminary findings to ensure accuracy and comfort with the data shared. Additionally, the findings will be presented in a summarised, non-identifiable manner to protect participants' identities and encourage open and honest feedback. Data security risks: Potential risks associated with the storage and transfer of sensitive and personal data collected during the interviews.

Who might be exposed to hazards?	Participants (teachers, heads of departments, senior leaders) Researcher conducting the interviews

Existing control measures:	• Informed Consent: Detailed information sheets and consent forms will be provided to ensure participants are fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time.
	• Confidentiality and Anonymity: Data will be anonymised and stored securely. Identifying information will be kept separate from de-identified research data. Only the research team will have access to the identifying information.
	• Secure Data Handling: Data will be stored on encrypted drives and secure cloud storage solutions with restricted access. Secure transfer protocols, such as file encryption and password-protected files, will be used for data transfer.
	• Psychological Support: Participants will be informed that they can skip any questions they feel uncomfortable with or terminate the interview at any time. Debriefing will be provided after the interviews to address any concerns or questions.
	• Insider Research: Specific measures will be taken to mitigate potential conflicts of interest and bias, including:
	    ○ Transparency: Clearly communicating the dual role of the researcher as both a staff member and researcher.
	    ○ Voluntary Participation: Emphasising that participation is voluntary and that there will be no consequences for choosing not to participate.
	    ○ Confidentiality and Anonymity: Ensuring that all data is kept confidential and anonymised to protect participants' identities and responses.
	    ○ Reflexivity: Maintaining a reflective journal to document and mitigate any potential biases introduced by the researcher's dual role.
	• Headteachers' Consent: Formal written consent will be obtained from the headteachers of both schools. Detailed information about the study, including its purpose, methods, and ethical considerations, will be provided to the headteachers. Their approval will be documented and included in the ethical review process.

Are risks adequately controlled:	Yes

If NO, list additional controls and actions required:	Additional controls	Action by:

Section C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT

Note: a signature is required. Typed names are not acceptable.

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within the project.

Signed: Print Name: [redacted]   Date: 08.06.2024

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE ETHICS COMMITTEE

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

Signed: Print Name: [redacted]   Date: 14/06/2024

(IoE Research Ethics Committee representative) *

* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.

6.2   Appendix B – Data Protection Declaration for Ethical Approval

Information Management and Policy Services

Data Protection Declaration for Ethical Approval (PhD/EdD projects)

This document can be used to provide assurances to your ethics committee where confirmation of data protection training and awareness is required for ethical approval.

By signing this declaration, I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the requirements for data protection within the *Data Protection for Researchers* document located here:

    https://www.reading.ac.uk/imps/-/media/49b402bbe9a74ae59dd8f4f080652123.ashx

- I have asked for advice on any elements that I am *unclear on* prior to submitting my ethics approval request, either from my supervisor, or the data protection team at: imps@reading.ac.uk

- I understand that I am responsible for the secure handling, and protection of, my research data.

- I know who to contact in the event of an information security incident, a data protection complaint or a request made under data subject access rights.

Researcher to complete

Project / Study Title:

NAME	STUDENT ID NUMBER	DATE
Andrei Stanescu	[redacted]	08.06.2024

Supervisor signature

Note for supervisors: Please verify that your student has completed the above actions

NAME	STAFF ID NUMBER	DATE
[redacted]	[redacted]	14/06/24

Submit your completed signed copy along with the other documents pertaining to the ethics application.

Copies to be retained by ethics committee.

1.0	IMPS	Annually	IMPS

6.3   Appendix C – Data Management Plan

DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

Please complete all sections with reference to the *REC DMP Guidance* (download <u>here</u>). Enter N/A if a section is not applicable.

PI name	Andrei Stanescu
Project Title	Exploring the Extent of Teachers' Engagement with Evidence-Based Practice in Secondary Education
Author(s) of DMP	Andrei Stanescu
Version	1.0
Date	8th June 2024

Describe the types of research data that will be collected, providing information about media/formats data will be collected in, and the anticipated scale or quantity of each type of data.

This study will collect qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with secondary school teachers, heads of departments, and senior leaders. The types of research data to be collected include:

Approximately 15-20 recordings, approximately 45-60 minutes each made up of
- **Audio Recordings:**
    - Format: Digital audio files (e.g., MP3 or WAV)

- **Video Recordings:**
    - **Format:** Digital video files (e.g., MP4)

Transcriptions:
Format: Text documents (e.g., DOCX or TXT)
Anticipated Scale: Transcriptions of all audio recordings, resulting in approximately 15-20 text documents, each ranging from 10,000 to 15,000 words, depending on the length and detail of the interviews.

Field Notes:
Format: Text documents (e.g., DOCX or TXT)
Anticipated Scale: Field notes taken during the interviews to capture non-verbal cues, contextual details, and initial reflections. Each interview is expected to generate 2-3 pages of field notes, resulting in a total of 50-75 pages of notes.

Summary:

Total Number of Audio Files: 15-20
Total Number of Transcriptions: 15-20
Total Number of Field Note Documents: 15-20
Total Length of Field Notes: 30-60 pages

██

2.1 Specify the identifying information (personal data) that will be collected (tick all that apply)

☒ **Name**
☐ **Date of Birth/Age**
☐ **Postal Address(es)** (to include postcodes)
☒ **Contact telephone(s)**
☒ **Email address(es)**
☐ **Unique Identifiers** (to include: Student ID numbers, Staff ID numbers, Passport numbers, NHS numbers, National Insurance numbers, ORCID's, unique research participant ID numbers, Unique applicant ID numbers, vehicle reg, driving licence numbers)
☐ **Images of individuals, including CCTV, photos**
☐ **Location Data** (to include any GPS location data)
☐ **Online Identifiers** (to include IP address data)
☐ **Economic/financial data** (relating to an identifiable individual)
☐ **Educational records** including but not limited to records held by the University and other education providers
☐ **Counselling records**
☐ **Pastoral records, including Extenuating Circumstances Forms**
☐ **Disciplinary records**
☐ **Training records**
☐ **Employment records to include CV's, references**
☐ **Nationality/Domicile**
☐ **Dietary requirements or preferences**

☐ **Other – Please specify below**

2.2 Specify any special category or sensitive data that will be collected (tick all that apply)

☐ **Ethnicity**
☐ **Mental Health** (status, medical records conditions, to include disability)
☐ **Physical Health** (status, medical records conditions, to include disability)
☐ **Sexual Orientation/Sexual life**
☐ **Genetic Data** (to include DNA data)
☐ **Biometric data** (such as facial scan, iris scan or fingerprint data used for the purposes of identifying a participant)
☐ **Political opinions**
☐ **Trade Union membership**
☐ **Religious or philosophical beliefs**
☐ **Criminal Convictions and offences** (to include alleged offences and convictions)

☐ **Other – Please specify below**

2.3 Specify any confidential information not specified above that will be collected, e.g. non-public information relating to a business or other organisation.

None

<!-- black bar -->

3.1 Identify all locations where data will be stored, indicating for each location whether it will be used to store identifying information or de-identified research data, and providing details of access controls that will be applied.

Local Encrypted Drives:
- **Purpose**: Temporary storage of both identifying information and de-identified research data immediately after collection.
- **Access Controls**: Only the primary researcher will have access to the encrypted drives, which will be password-protected and stored in a secure location.
- **Procedure for Face-to-Face Interviews:** Face-to-face interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder. Any recordings will be transferred to a secure drive at the earliest opportunity and deleted from the original recording device to ensure security.
- **All files will be deleted from the local drives once transferred to OneDrive.**

University's Secure Server:
- **Purpose**: Long-term storage of de-identified research data.
- **Access Controls**: Anonymised data will be uploaded to the UoR Research Data Archive, which is freely accessible.

OneDrive:
- **Purpose**: Backup storage for both identifying information and de-identified research data.
- **Access Controls**: Access to the cloud storage will be restricted to the primary researcher. The data will be encrypted during transfer and while at rest, ensuring secure access through multi-factor authentication.

3.2 Describe any administrative measures that you will take to control the risks of inappropriate disclosure, e.g. pseudonymisation, and procedures for secure transfer between locations, e.g. using file encryption and encrypted channels.

Pseudonymisation:
- Identifying information will be separated from the research data and replaced with unique codes to ensure anonymity. A key file linking codes to identifying information will be securely stored and encrypted, accessible only to the primary researcher.

Secure Transfer Protocols:
- Data transfers between locations (e.g., from local encrypted drives to OneDrive) will be conducted using encrypted channels such as Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) or encrypted email attachments.

File Encryption:
- All digital files containing identifying information or sensitive data will be encrypted using advanced encryption standards (AES) before transfer. This ensures data protection during transmission and storage.

3.3 Specify who will be able to access the identifying information and how you will ensure they process the information securely, e.g. through training, supervision and adherence to secure data handling procedures.

Access to Identifying Information:
- Only the primary researcher and supervisors will have access to identifying information.

Training and Supervision:

- All research team members are trained in data protection and secure data handling procedures, including understanding the importance of confidentiality and the measures in place to ensure data security.

Data Handling Procedures:
- All data will be handled under strict data handling procedures, which include:
  - Using encrypted devices for storing and accessing identifying information.
  - Following secure login protocols and multi-factor authentication for accessing data.
  - Regular audits and monitoring to ensure compliance with data protection standards.

Supervision:
- The primary researcher will oversee the data handling process, ensuring the established protocols are adhered to. Regular reviews and updates to the data handling procedures will be conducted to address any emerging risks or issues.

4.1 Identify the research data that will be preserved and shared at the end of the project by deposit in a public data repository or other archiving solution.

- **Anonymised Transcriptions**: Text documents (DOCX) of the interview transcriptions with all identifying information removed.
- **Field Notes**: Anonymised text documents (DOCX) of the field notes taken during the interviews.

4.2 Describe the measures that will be taken to ensure data are suitable for sharing, e.g. securing consent, anonymising data prior to deposit/sharing, and sharing confidential or high-risk information using a controlled access repository.

- **Securing Consent**: Participants will be informed during the consent process that their anonymised data may be preserved and shared for future research. Explicit consent will be obtained for this purpose through a signed consent form or a recording (stored separately) for virtual interviews.
- **Anonymising Data**: All collected data will be thoroughly anonymised before being deposited. This includes removing or altering any information that could identify participants, such as names, locations, or specific contextual details.

4.3 Identify data repositories or other solutions that will be used to preserve and share data.

UoR Research Data Archive

5.1 State how long you plan to retain personal data/confidential information after the end of the project.

Personal data and confidential information will be disposed of securely at the end of the project.

5.2 Specify under whose authority this information will be maintained and disposed of after the project.

The primary investigator, Andrei Stanescu, will have the authority to maintain and dispose of personal data and confidential information. This responsibility includes ensuring data retention and disposal comply with all relevant data protection regulations and university policies. Secure disposal methods, such as data shredding and deletion from all storage devices, will be employed to ensure the permanent removal of personal and confidential information.

6.4   Appendix D – Participant information sheet (teacher)

Research Project: Exploring the Extent of Teachers' Engagement with Evidence-Based Practice in
Secondary Education
Project Team Members: Andrei Stanescu

Dear

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study I am undertaking.

What is the study?

This study aims to explore how secondary school teachers understand and perceive EBP, defined as teaching methods and strategies that are grounded in systematic research evidence, within the framework of current educational policies. It seeks to identify the barriers and facilitators to implementing EBP and understand the implications for future educational policy and professional development programmes. By gathering insights from teachers, heads of departments, and senior leaders, the study aims to contribute to the academic discourse on teacher engagement with EBP and provide actionable recommendations for supporting effective teaching practices.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to take part in this study because you are a secondary school teacher, head of department, or senior leader involved in the educational management of a secondary school. Your role and experience are valuable for providing insights into how educational policies impact the engagement with evidence-based practices in your school. The sample for this study is being selected through purposive sampling methods to ensure a diverse and representative group of participants who can offer a range of perspectives on the topic.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether you give your consent to participate. You may also withdraw your consent to participation at any time during the project, without any repercussions to you, by contacting Andrei Stanescu, E-mail: [redacted]

What will happen if I take part?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Here is what you can expect:

Interview Schedule: You will be asked to take part in a single interview session at a time that is convenient for you. The interview can be conducted in person at your school or remotely via the video conferencing platform Microsoft Teams, depending on your preference.

Duration: The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

Interview Content: During the interview, you will be asked questions about your understanding and perceptions of evidence-based practices (EBP), your experiences with implementing EBP in your teaching, and the factors that facilitate or hinder your engagement with these practices. You will also be asked about your views on current educational policies and how they impact your professional judgment and autonomy.

Recording: The interview will be audio-recorded to ensure that all your responses are accurately captured. The recordings will be transcribed for analysis.

Confidentiality: All information you provide will be kept confidential. Your responses will be anonymised, and any identifying information will be removed from the transcripts. The data will be securely stored on encrypted drives and secure cloud storage solutions with restricted access limited to Andrei Stanescu and his supervisors.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. If you choose to withdraw, any data collected from you up to that point will be securely destroyed.

Debriefing: After the interview, you will have the opportunity to ask any questions or express any concerns you may have. A summary of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

The information given by participants in the study will remain confidential and will only be seen by the research team listed at the start of this letter. Neither you nor the school will be identifiable in any published report resulting from the study. Information about individuals will not be shared with the University.

Risks
- **Psychological Discomfort**: Some questions may touch on sensitive topics related to your professional practices and experiences with educational policies. There is a possibility that you might feel uncomfortable or uneasy discussing these topics. However, you are free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer and can terminate the interview at any time without any repercussions.
- **Data Security**: There is a minimal risk related to the security of the data collected. However, strict measures will be taken to ensure that your data is stored securely and confidentiality is maintained.

Benefits
- **Contribution to Research**: By participating in this study, you will contribute valuable insights that can help improve understanding of the barriers and facilitators to implementing evidence-based practices in secondary education. Your input will inform recommendations for policymakers and educators to support effective teaching practices.
- **Professional Reflection**: The interview may provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your own practices and experiences with evidence-based practices and educational policies, which could be beneficial for your professional development.
- **Informing Policy and Practice**: The findings from this study have the potential to inform school-level policies and professional development programmes, ultimately benefiting teachers and students. By providing insights into the barriers and facilitators of evidence-based practices, the research can help schools to better support their staff in implementing effective teaching methods. This may lead to improvements in teaching practices and student outcomes within the participating schools.

What will happen to the data?

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The audio recordings of the interviews will be transcribed and anonymised, meaning that any identifying information will be removed or replaced with pseudonyms. The anonymised transcripts will be used for data analysis and included in the study's findings. For face-to-face interviews, a digital voice recorder will be used to ensure accurate data capture. For interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams, video recording will be utilised.

All original audio and video recordings will be securely stored during the transcription process. Once the interviews have been transcribed and anonymised, the original recordings will be permanently deleted. The anonymised transcripts will be securely stored and used for data analysis and in the study's findings, ensuring that all data is handled in accordance with ethical guidelines and standards. This approach allows for a detailed exploration of the factors influencing teachers' engagement with EBP while maintaining strict confidentiality and data protection.

In line with the University's policy on the management of research data, anonymised data gathered in this research may be preserved and made publicly available for others to consult and re-use. All anonymised research data will be retained indefinitely, whereas any identifying information, such as consent forms, will be disposed of securely after the research findings have been written up. The results of the study will be presented at national and international conferences, and in written reports and articles. We can send you electronic copies of these publications if you wish.

Who has reviewed the study?

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

What happens if I change my mind?

You can change your mind at any time without any repercussions. If you change your mind after data collection has ended, we will discard your data.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact my supervisor, [redacted], Tel: [redacted], E-mail: [redacted]

Where can I get more information?

Andrei Stanescu, [redacted]

If you are happy to take part, please complete and return to Andrei Stanescu the attached consent form.

Yours faithfully
Andrei Stanescu

DATA PROTECTION FOR INFORMATION SHEETS

The organisation responsible for protection of your personal information is the University of Reading (the Data Controller). Queries regarding data protection and your rights should be directed to the University Data Protection Officer at imps@reading.ac.uk, or in writing to: Information Management & Policy Services, University of Reading, Whiteknights, P O Box 217, Reading, RG6 6AH.

The University of Reading collects, analyses, uses, shares, and retains personal data for the purposes of research in the public interest. Under data protection law we are required to inform you that this use of the personal data we may hold about you is on the lawful basis of being a public task in the public interest and where it is necessary for scientific or historical research purposes. If you withdraw from a research study, which processes your personal data, dependant on the stage of withdrawal, we may still rely on this lawful basis to continue using your data if your withdrawal would be of significant detriment to the research study aims. We will always have in place appropriate safeguards to protect your personal data.

If we have included any additional requests for use of your data, for example adding you to a registration list for the purposes of inviting you to take part in future studies, this will be done only with your consent where you have provided it to us and should you wish to be removed from the register at a later date, you should contact Andrei Stanescu, E-mail: [redacted].

You have certain rights under data protection law which are:
- Withdraw your consent, for example if you opted in to be added to a participant register
- Access your personal data or ask for a copy
- Rectify inaccuracies in personal data that we hold about you
- Be forgotten, that is your details to be removed from systems that we use to process your personal data
- Restrict uses of your data
- Object to uses of your data, for example retention after you have withdrawn from a study

Some restrictions apply to the above rights where data is collected and used for research purposes.

You can find out more about your rights on the website of the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) at https://ico.org.uk

You also have a right to complain the ICO if you are unhappy with how your data has been handled. Please contact the University Data Protection Officer in the first instance.

Research Project: Exploring the Extent of Teachers' Engagement with Evidence-Based Practice in Secondary Education

Please complete and return this form to: Andrei Stanescu

1. I have read the information sheet about the project and received a copy of it.   ☐

2. I understand the purpose of the study and what you want me to do. All my questions ha been   ☐
answered.

3. I agree to attend an interview.   ☐

4. I agree to the interview being audio-recorded.   ☐

5. I agree to the interview being video-recorded.   ☐

6. I agree to the interview being transcribed for analysis.   ☐

7. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes from my transcript in publications.   ☐

Name:

Signed:

Date:

6.5 Appendix E – Participant information sheet (headteacher)

Research Project: Exploring the Extent of Teachers' Engagement with Evidence-Based Practice in Secondary Education
Project Team Members: Andrei Stanescu

Dear

I would like to invite you to give consent for your school to participate in a research study I am conducting.

What is the study?

This study aims to explore how secondary school teachers understand and perceive EBP, defined as teaching methods and strategies that are grounded in systematic research evidence, within the framework of current educational policies. It seeks to identify the barriers and facilitators to implementing EBP and understand the implications for future educational policy and professional development programmes. By gathering insights from teachers, heads of departments, and senior leaders, the study aims to contribute to the academic discourse on teacher engagement with EBP and provide actionable recommendations for supporting effective teaching practices.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to give consent because you are the headteacher of a secondary school where the research is intended to be conducted. Your consent is crucial for allowing the participation of your staff in this study, ensuring a diverse and representative group of participants who can offer a range of perspectives on the topic.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether you give your consent to participate. You may also withdraw your consent to participation at any time during the project, without any repercussions to you, by contacting Andrei Stanescu, E-mail: [redacted]

What will happen if I take part?

If you give consent, the following will occur:
- **Recruitment of Participants:** Teachers, department heads, and senior leaders from your school will be invited to participate in semi-structured interviews.
- **Interview Schedule:** Participants will be asked to take part in a single interview session at a convenient time. The interview can be conducted in person at your school or remotely via Microsoft Teams, depending on the participant's preference.
- **Duration:** Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.
- **Recording:** Interviews will be audio-recorded for face-to-face sessions and video-recorded for Microsoft Teams sessions to ensure accurate data capture.
- **Confidentiality:** All information provided by participants will be kept confidential. Responses will be anonymised, and identifying information will be removed from transcripts. Data will be securely stored on encrypted drives and secure cloud storage solutions with restricted access limited to Andrei Stanescu and his supervisors.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

The information given by participants in the study will remain confidential and will only be seen by the research team listed at the start of this letter. Neither the participants nor the school will be identifiable in any published report resulting from the study. Information about individuals will not be shared with the University.

Risks
- **Psychological Discomfort**: Some questions may touch on sensitive topics related to professional practices and experiences with educational policies. Participants are free to skip any questions they do not wish to answer and can terminate the interview at any time without repercussions.
- **Data Security:** There is a minimal risk related to data security. However, strict measures will be taken to ensure that all data is stored securely and confidentiality is maintained.

Benefits
- Contribution to Research: By consenting to this study, you enable valuable insights that can improve understanding of the barriers and facilitators to implementing evidence-based practices in secondary education.
- Professional Reflection: The interview process may provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on their practices and experiences with EBP and educational policies, which could benefit their professional development.
- Informing Policy and Practice: The findings from this study have the potential to inform school-level policies and professional development programmes, benefiting teachers and students. Insights from the research can help schools better support their staff in implementing effective teaching methods, potentially improving teaching practices and student outcomes.

What will happen to the data?

Any data collected will be held in strict confidence, and no real names will be used in this study or in any subsequent publications. The audio and video recordings of the interviews will be transcribed and anonymised, meaning that any identifying information will be removed or replaced with pseudonyms. The anonymised transcripts will be used for data analysis and included in the study's findings. Once the interviews have been transcribed and anonymised, the original recordings will be permanently deleted. The anonymised transcripts will be securely stored and used in accordance with ethical guidelines and standards.

All original audio and video recordings will be securely stored during the transcription process. Once the interviews have been transcribed and anonymised, the original recordings will be permanently deleted. The anonymised transcripts will be securely stored and used for data analysis and in the study's findings, ensuring that all data is handled in accordance with ethical guidelines and standards. This approach allows for a detailed exploration of the factors influencing teachers' engagement with EBP while maintaining strict confidentiality and data protection.
In line with the University's policy on the management of research data, anonymised data gathered in this research may be preserved and made publicly available for others to consult and re-use. All anonymised research data will be retained indefinitely whereas any identifying information such as consent forms will be disposed of securely after the research findings have been written up. The results of the study will be presented at national and international conferences, and in written reports and articles. We can send you electronic copies of these publications if you wish.

Who has reviewed the study?

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

What happens if I change my mind?

You can change your mind at any time without any repercussions. If you change your mind after data collection has ended, we will discard your data.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact my supervisor, [redacted], Tel: [redacted], E-mail: [redacted]

Where can I get more information?

Andrei Stanescu, [redacted]

If you are happy to take part, please complete and return to Andrei Stanescu the attached consent form.

Yours faithfully
Andrei Stanescu

DATA PROTECTION FOR INFORMATION SHEETS

The organisation responsible for protection of your personal information is the University of Reading (the Data Controller). Queries regarding data protection and your rights should be directed to the University Data Protection Officer at imps@reading.ac.uk, or in writing to: Information Management & Policy Services, University of Reading, Whiteknights, P O Box 217, Reading, RG6 6AH.

The University of Reading collects, analyses, uses, shares, and retains personal data for the purposes of research in the public interest. Under data protection law we are required to inform you that this use of the personal data we may hold about you is on the lawful basis of being a public task in the public interest and where it is necessary for scientific or historical research purposes. If you withdraw from a research study, which processes your personal data, dependant on the stage of withdrawal, we may still rely on this lawful basis to continue using your data if your withdrawal would be of significant detriment to the research study aims. We will always have in place appropriate safeguards to protect your personal data.

If we have included any additional requests for use of your data, for example adding you to a registration list for the purposes of inviting you to take part in future studies, this will be done only with your consent where you have provided it to us and should you wish to be removed from the register at a later date, you should contact Andrei Stanescu, E-mail: [redacted].

You have certain rights under data protection law which are:
- Withdraw your consent, for example if you opted in to be added to a participant register
- Access your personal data or ask for a copy
- Rectify inaccuracies in personal data that we hold about you
- Be forgotten, that is your details to be removed from systems that we use to process your personal data
- Restrict uses of your data
- Object to uses of your data, for example retention after you have withdrawn from a study

Some restrictions apply to the above rights where data is collected and used for research purposes.

You can find out more about your rights on the website of the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) at https://ico.org.uk

You also have a right to complain the ICO if you are unhappy with how your data has been handled. Please contact the University Data Protection Officer in the first instance.

Research Project: Exploring the Extent of Teachers' Engagement with Evidence-Based Practice in Secondary Education

Please complete and return this form to: Andrei Stanescu

1. I have read the information sheet about the project and received a copy of it. ☐

2. I understand the purpose of the study and what you want me to do. All my questions have been answered. ☐

3. I give consent for the staff at my school to be invited to participate in this study. ☐

Name:

Signed:

Date:

6.6　　　Appendix F – Semi-structured interview questions

Section 1: Understanding of Evidence-Based Practice

1. In your own words, what does "evidence-based practice" mean to you as a teacher?
2. How familiar are you with teaching methods that are based on research evidence?
3. How do you see the role of evidence-based practices in your everyday teaching?
4. How do you keep up-to-date with the latest research and teaching strategies?
5. What are your main sources of information for evidence-based practices (e.g., training sessions, educational websites, colleagues)?

Section 2: Application of Evidence-Based Practice

1. Can you share an example of a research-based teaching method you have used in your classroom? What motivated you to use this method?
2. (CIT) Can you describe a specific incident where using an evidence-based practice made a significant difference in your teaching? What were the outcomes?
3. What factors influence your decision to use a particular teaching method? Can you discuss any specific instances?
4. How do government policies, such as curriculum guidelines and performance targets, impact your use of evidence-based practices?
5. Have you ever chosen not to use an evidence-based practice? If so, why?
6. (CIT) Can you recall an incident where you faced challenges in implementing an evidence-based practice? What were the barriers and how did you address them?
7. What challenges have you encountered when trying to implement research-based methods in your teaching?
8. How do you balance the demands of policies with the need to use research-based practices in your classroom?

Section 3: Support and Barriers for Evidence-Based Practice

1. What kind of support or resources does your school provide to help you implement evidence-based practices?
2. Have you attended any training or professional development sessions that helped you use research-based methods in your teaching? If so, can you describe them?
3. How do you collaborate with your colleagues to share and discuss research-based teaching methods?
4. (CIT) Can you think of an incident where collaboration with a colleague significantly impacted your use of evidence-based practices? What happened and what was the result?

5. What role do your school leaders (e.g., headteacher, senior leadership team) play in supporting the use of evidence-based practices in your school?

6. What additional support or resources would help you use research-based teaching methods more effectively?

7. What are the main barriers you face in implementing evidence-based practices? How do you think these could be addressed?

Section 4: General Reflection

1. How has your understanding and use of evidence-based practices evolved over time?

2. What do you think are the main benefits of using evidence-based practices in teaching?

3. What do you think are the biggest barriers to using research-based methods in secondary schools?

4. How do you think the use of evidence-based practices could be improved in your school or in the education system as a whole?

5. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences with evidence-based practices?

Conclusion

Thank you for your time and insights. Your responses will contribute significantly to our understanding of how evidence-based practices are implemented in secondary education. If you have any further thoughts or questions, please feel free to contact me.

6.7   Appendix G – Field notes

David – 19th July 2024 3.05pm

① Research, pure research, original
EEF (twisted) Experience.
Evidence – cohort
link.

② Pretty familiar → developed over time.
journal clubs – geeky clubs.
ECF → ITTECF
starting poin

③ influence cogsci!
↳ cognitive theory

Habitual

④ Edu Twitter
Discussions
EEF – useful
Southampt Uni.
Research-lead
↳ network

⑤ Engage. → Disagree.

① .2015 → linear. → review + reading + research.
recall
examples.
② Structuring revision → *outcomes?
forgetly curve speed ∝ motivated?
& interfere

6.8 Appendix H – Reflexive diary entry

Date	Participant	School	Entry
14/08/2024	Michael	A	Interviewed Michael today. Calm, practical. Called themself a 'magpie', happy to pick up ideas from anywhere, from a big study to a quick corridor chat, if it solves the problem in front of them. Switched easily between talking as a teacher and as a leader. Said staff should have freedom to try things, but also that you still have to watch 'the 10% who take advantage'. I stayed in analysis mode because the tone was measured. I might have taken their confidence at face value and read it as 'good leader' rather than something more personal. Note to self: Check if other leaders show the same push–pull (encourage trying things vs keeping control). Listen for the metaphors they use about evidence.
17/9/2024	Ben	B	Spoke with Ben (science). Very different (heavier). Said their mentor used them as a 'guinea pig' to try a technique the mentor already thought wouldn't work (like a professional betrayal). That hit me. I felt angry for them and caught myself wanting to take sides.

			Ben now says they only trust their own department (their tribe), Anything from senior leadership is 'always history', which they read as a dig at their teaching. This feels about respect and identity, not just methods. Note to self: My own issues with top-down CPD make me nod along too quickly. Make sure I'm recording Ben's story, not slipping in mine. Track this 'tribe' language across other interviews.
8/3/2025	Ben Michael	B A	Put Ben and Michael's interviews side by side. Both are pragmatic, 'does it work in my classroom?' Both say time is the biggest barrier. But they relate to leadership differently. Ben has pulled into a defensive shell, trusting only close colleagues. Michael, helped in the past by a supportive Head of Department, seems able to work the system with confidence. Same idea, evidence-based practice, lands as a threat for one and a toolkit for the other. I like the neatness of that contrast, but that's risky, it can turn people into cartoons. Action: Look for messy middle cases and for context (department history, trust levels) before I settle on this contrast.
9/4/2025	Eleanor	A	Spent the evening puzzling over COM-B. Eleanor said, 'The children are the motivation for everything I do'. I tried to file that as reflective or automatic

			motivation; it doesn't sit cleanly in either box. I keep writing 'vocational' in the margin. It feels right, but it might be me bringing my own teacher identity. Plan: Keep 'vocational' as tentative. Look for signs in other interviews (words like calling, duty, service, or stories that show it). Also look for cases that don't fit, so I'm not forcing it.