

THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR IN FINLAND

A qualitative research study

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International Business
Bachelor's Thesis
Supervisor: Russell Warhurst
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Objectives

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between flexible working hours and work-life balance in the educational sector in Finland. Furthermore, researching this main objective was done by analyzing and critically reviewing the literature on the flexibility and work-life balance, by interviewing teachers about their work flexibility and by theoretically analyzing and by interpreting the data gathered from the interviews.

Summary

This study examines the perceived impact of flexible working hours on work-life balance in the educational sector in Finland. The literature review explains the history and development of work-life balance practices and flexible working arrangements. It talks about teaching as a profession and reveals the perceived teacher workload and work-life balance. Furthermore, a qualitative research was conducted in Finland which aimed to provide new, in-depth information and understanding about the relationship between flexible working hours and work-life balance.

Conclusions

The findings of the research indicated that the perceived teacher work-life balance in Finland is satisfactory. However, teacher workload has increased significantly. Teachers' work is also very seasonal since there are busier periods such as exam weeks, which increase considerably work, stress and pressure. Therefore, work-life balance fluctuates as well as the amount of flexibility. One finding is that teachers perceived flexible working hours to be a positive thing. However, it was found that flexibility is more beneficial for the work life than for the non-work life. Flexible working hours can be risky since flexibility can easily lead to work colonializing the other aspects of life. Therefore, flexible working hours do not necessarily affect positively work-life balance. In addition, strategies were found to have a decisive role when utilizing flexible working hours to maintain a good work-life balance.

Key words: *work-life balance, flexibility, flexible working hours, teachers*

Language: English

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Work-life balance has always been a common topic among the ones interested in quality of life and quality of work. After industrialization, socio-demographic changes such as increased number of women and employees with families in the workplace and the ageing work force have affected the work culture. The retirement age of employees has also risen and work days/hours have become longer (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). These changes have affected peoples work life and non-work life. They have to cope with multiple role demands and because new technology has also made it possible to communicate and work wherever and whenever, also pressure of work has increased. Constant availability and the struggle of balancing between work and personal life have increased employee stress. Because of these issues and rapid changes, employee wellbeing and work-life balance have become a contemporary discussion topic (Wheatley, 2016).

This is a topic which concerns teaching as a profession. Because of rapid social changes, teachers are expected to manage larger group sizes, still maintaining high quality and standardized education. Teacher workload has increased significantly. Teaching as a profession includes much more than just teaching others to read and write. Teachers need to do many different administrative tasks such as planning, evaluating and attending to meetings. They need to react to all the social and technological changes and to be up to date. In addition, teachers are often expected to perform tasks which are excluded from their job description. Teachers simply do not have time to perform all the tasks outside the classrooms. They are overloaded and the occupational stress and burnout have increased significantly (Göksoy and Akdağ 2014). Often, teacher work-life balance is poor and the work pressure is high. There is a need for work-life balance practices and policies in order to increase satisfaction, organizational commitment and moreover, balance between work and non-work life (Miryala and Chiluka 2012).

Flexible work arrangements have been introduced in order to respond to the needs and expectations of employees. Flexibility helps employees to combine work and non-work life and to schedule and organize their life according to their own preferences.

Flexible working hours are usually arrangements between an employer and an employee in which they agree to schedule the work flexibly, gaining benefits to both parties (Galea, Houkes & De Rijk, 2013). In the best case, flexibility helps employees to attain better work-life balance. Employees can perform better at work when they are not tied to very strict working times. Flexible working hours can also give time to implement aspects of personal life. For example, teachers can use flexible working hours choosing when they will do the other work besides lessons. Therefore, one can make time for hobbies but perform the duties when it is most suitable for them. Employer can benefit too since satisfied employees work more efficiently. Even though flexible working hours are commonly used and quite extensively studied the results of the perceived influence of flexible working hours on work-life balance have been ambiguous. For example, teachers often end up using all of their time working because the workload is overwhelming. In this case, flexible working hours may benefit employer since the work will be done but the employee may suffer from poor work-life balance since the work takes all the time.

1.2 Research Problem

Work-life balance is an issue in the modern, globalized world. Technology and flexible work arrangements have given the opportunity to work flexibly around the clock. It gives employees the opportunity to organize their lives as they wish. However, this creates pressure to be constantly available and to perform the duties without any time-off. It has an effect on peoples' wellbeing and the relationship between flexible work arrangements and work-life balance needs to be examined further.

1.3 Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to answer to the following question: to what extent are flexible working hours perceived to influence work-life balance?

1.4 Research Objectives

The research objectives of this thesis are the following:

1. To examine the relationship between flexible working hours and work-life balance.
2. To analyze and critically review the literature on the flexibility and work-life balance.
3. To interview teachers about their work flexibility.
4. To theoretically analyze and interpret the data gathered from the interviews.

1.5 Definitions

Work-life balance – satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict (Clark, 2000:751)

Flexible working hours – arrangements between employer and employee in which they agree to schedule the work flexibly, gaining benefits to both parties (Galea, Houkes & De Rijk, 2013)

Work-life conflict – negative interference between work and non-work responsibilities (Beauregard & Henry, 2009)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will focus on examining the perceived impact of flexible working hours on work-life balance. This research will critically analyze the existing literature on the flexibility and work-life balance and attempt to find an answer to what extent are flexible working hours perceived to influence work-life balance. The paper will provide explanations of the key terms such as work-life balance and flexible working hours narrowing the context down to more particular aspects. The paper will explain the nature of teaching as a profession and why teachers are particularly prone to WLB compromises since the focus of this study will be on the educational sector in Finland. This literature review will also analyze the perceived benefits and disadvantages of flexible working hours and how they are perceived to influence on work-life balance. It will discuss the relationship within the theoretical framework, using border/boundary theory and resource theory. Finally, the conclusion of the findings will be presented within conceptual framework in a diagram form. In addition, the relevance of the two theories to explaining teachers' flexible working will be explained.

2.1 Work-life balance

Work-life balance has always been a common topic among the ones interested in quality of life and quality of work (Guest, 2002). After industrialization, technology has evolved immensely. Structure of the societies and job descriptions have also changed significantly. Due to these quick changes, pressure of work has increased. Globalization, competition and constant availability have affected people's life (Galea, Houkes & De Rijk, 2013). High expectations and multiple roles in life have increased employee stress and had a negative impact on their well-being (Valli & Buese, 2007).

Work-life balance has become a contemporary topic in public discussion and it is commonly linked to better performance (Wheatley, 2016). Work-life balance has also gained an important role in workplace regulation (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). However, Carlson, Grzywacz and Zivnuska (2009) claims there is only a little empirical research supporting the benefits of work-life balance. On the contrary, later study of Lunau et al. (2014) shows the importance of work-life balance. Therefore, in the

European Union, combining work and personal life successfully is a new priority (Lunau et al., 2014).

2.1.1 Defining work-life balance

The term 'work-life balance' is a complex, since the word 'balance' itself has a great variety of meanings (Guest, 2002). Therefore, there are many different explanations of the concept of work-life balance in the published literature (Zülch, Stock & Schmidt, 2012).

Prior to the turn of the century, the existing research focused more on the work-family balance. Voydanoff (2005) cited in Carlson, Grzywacz and Zivnuska (2009:1462) defines work-family balance as 'a global assessment that work resources meet family demands, and family resources meet work demands such that participation is effective in both domains.' However, this puts the emphasis on family life and it is not sufficient to fully understand the topic which deals with other aspects of personal life in addition to family life (Zülch, Stock & Schmidt, 2012).

One way of defining work-life balance according to Clark (2000:751) is 'satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict.' Other definition of Saikia (2011) cited in Saeed and Farooqi (2014) is 'the degree to which an individual is involved in and satisfied equally with their job and personal roles.' The definition goes beyond just family life and role in a family, since it covers the whole private life outside work. Employees need to combine and manage their work and non-work aspects in a way which is satisfactory for them (Sturges, 2012). This an important matter, since a poor work-life balance is a stressor which may cause health issues, such as cardiovascular disease and mental-ill problems (Lunau et al., 2014).

2.1.2. Defining more specific terms of work-life balance

Other common concepts of work-life balance are work-life interference and work-life conflict (Carlson, Grzywacz & Zivnuska, 2009). Work-life interference occurs when work and private life intersect (Kelly et al., 2014). There are many aspects which may cross. Family, leisure and health may interfere work, but it also can be the other way

around, when work interferes aspects of personal life (Guest, 2002). This interference can be a beneficial work-life enrichment (Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012).

However, often this interference is not positive but it hampers either work or personal life. This negative work-life interference is usually called as work-life conflict (Carlson, Grzywacz & Zivnuska, 2009). When this conflict is mainly an interference between family and work, it is a work-family conflict. According to Allen et al. (2012), work–family conflict occurs when the responsibilities and demands of one role uses individual’s resources and there are not enough resources left to perform the other roles. These conflicts are mainly due to lack of time, energy and attention (Allen et al., 2012). As a consequence, poor work-life balance and work-life conflict may lead to lower job satisfaction, stress and burnout (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). Personal life may also suffer and one can not attend to interesting activities. In the worst-case scenario, this may lead to depression and mental health problems (Sturges, 2012). Since these negative outcomes are linked to limited resources, in order to avoid these conflicts, employees need to be able to control and structure their schedules flexibly (Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

2.2 Teaching as a profession

Fast social, demographical and technical changes have affected the educational sector immensely. The role of the teachers is very different from what it was 20 years ago (Eacute & Esteve, 2000). Naturally, teachers help students to learn the basic skills such as reading and writing. However, the job description includes significantly more (Bates, 2014). According to Robards (2008), teachers help students to accomplish their identity and the importance of caring for others and themselves. They educate students and help them to become good citizens (Bates 2014). Teachers also encourage students to strive for their dreams (Robards, 2008).

Because of the rapid social changes, teachers are expected to manage larger group sizes, still maintaining high quality and standardized education (Eacute & Esteve, 2000). The society values education (Janks ,2014), but often, the media shows teachers and schools in a negative light (Robards, 2008). Bates (2014) highlights the intellectual intensity of teaching which is often underestimated. Valli and Buese (2007) identified changes which occurred in the tasks of teachers. Valli and Buese (2007:519)

discovered that 'role expectations increased, intensified, and expanded in four areas: instructional, institutional, collaborative, and learning.' Often the changes are difficult to predict but they may cause negative issues to teachers. They can complicate relationships with students and pedagogy. Moreover, the wellbeing of teachers may suffer (Valli & Buese, 2007).

2.2.1 Perceptions of teacher workload

According to Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt and Vanroelen (2014), teachers are overloaded. They need to do many different administrative tasks such as planning, evaluating and attending to meetings. Teachers simply do not have time to perform all the tasks outside the classrooms.

The study of Göksoy and Akdağ (2014) examines perceptions of primary and secondary school teacher's workload and discover that the workload has increased. Teachers are expected to perform tasks which are excluded from their job description. In order to find enough time, they need to prioritize which are the most important tasks they need to manage. Similarly, Antoniou, Ploumpi and Ntalla (2013) state time pressure, business requirements and workload as aspects which cause occupational stress. According to Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt and Vanroelen (2014) teaching-related factors which cause stress and burnout are for instance, increased high-stakes accountability demands and administrative tasks. In addition, non-teaching-related factors such as relationships cause emotional exhaustion.

2.2.2 Teacher work-life balance

The research of Miryala and Chiluka (2012) examines work-life balance practices' necessity for teachers at different levels. They discover the need for work-life balance practices in order to increase satisfaction, organizational commitment and moreover, balance between work and non-work life. Similarly, Saeed and Farooqi (2014) acknowledge the importance of work-life balance among university teachers when avoiding job stress and increasing satisfaction.

2.3 Flexible working arrangements

At first, flexible work time arrangements such as shift-work and mandatory overtime were introduced because they were beneficial to organizations (Nijp et al., 2012). Nowadays, flexible work arrangements have become an essential part of today's work culture because of socio-demographic changes, but the organizations benefits are still one of its major driving forces (Masuda et al., 2011). Examples of the socio-demographic changes are increased number of women and employees with families in the workplace, as well as ageing work force. The retirement age of employees has risen and work days/hours have become longer (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). People have to cope with increased role demands and new technology has also made it possible to communicate and work wherever and whenever. Managing multiple roles as individuals has become even more difficult (Rothbard, Phillips & Dumas, 2015). Also, the possibility and expectation to work unusual times has created health risks (Greubel et al., 2016). These changes have enhanced the demand of work-life balance. Organizations adopt more flexible work arrangements in order to respond to the needs and expectations of employees which have increased because of these socio-demographic changes. In reality however, flexibility favors more organizations than employees since with flexible working hours, employees may spend more time working (Wheatley, 2016). Therefore, companies and organizations want to provide flexible work arrangements.

It has been understood over the years, that flexible work arrangements can be advantageous both for organizations and employees and it can help achieving work-life balance (Nijp et al., 2012). However, flexible working arrangements are often applied in a way which benefits organizations more than employees. The organizations may not provide the same amount of flexibility to its employees as it demands from them (Wheatley, 2016). The agenda has been to help employees to combine their work and personal life as easily as possible with minimal conflict (Wheatley, 2016). This is however, mainly due to the incentive of satisfied employees being more productive and therefore, more profitable. Furthermore, flexible work arrangements can give the possibility to control own schedules and to attain better employee wellbeing and work-family enrichment (Rastogi, Rangnekar & Rastogi, 2015).

2.3.1 Flexible working hours

Flexible working hours, flextime or flexible schedules are commonly used and quite extensively studied. Flexible working hours are usually arrangements between employer and employee in which they agree to schedule the work flexibly, aiming to gain benefits to both parties (Galea, Houkes & De Rijk, 2013).

There have been many studies about impact of flexible working hours on individuals and organizations (Coenen & Kok, 2014). They have shown results of both employee and company benefits such as job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions (Masuda et al., 2011). However, the studies of the impacts of flexible working hours on work-life balance have been vague (Galea, Houkes & De Rijk, 2013). Especially, the benefits of flexible working hours are often more in favor for the organization than the employee. As Pedersen and Lewis (2012:464) argue 'the impacts of flexible working time structures were complex and double-edged'. Even though flexible working hours give freedom and control to structure work and personal life according to own preferences, preserving the boundaries between these two might be challenging (Pedersen & Lewis, 2012). Often, employees end up working too much which is bad for their work-life balance but the organization still benefits from the work done. Since these findings are ambiguous, a closer examination of this relationship's benefits and drawbacks is needed (Galea, Houkes & De Rijk, 2013).

2.3.2 Perceived benefits of flexible working hours

2.3.2.1 Win-win situation

Coenen and Kok (2014) claims that in many cases, flexible working hours are adopted by employers because employees simply want flexibility. This gives an employer the possibility to create a good work place where people want to work. It is beneficial because employee satisfaction and wellbeing leads to reduced turnover and increased productivity (Masuda et al., 2011). In addition, it reduces absenteeism and accommodation costs (Wheatley, 2016). However, flexible working may lead to the employees' economic loss since one is not paid for all the done work (Nijp et al., 2012).

Again, since flexible working arrangements aim to provide a win-win situation both for employers and employees, also employees may benefit from flexible working hours. They get to control their day, which gives them flexibility to adjust their family- and personal time, hobbies, exercise and things like doctor's appointments (Coenen & Kok, 2014). However, the employee benefits may not be as great as the employer benefits. The employer may expect flexibility from the employees but may not provide it for them when they would need it (Wheatley, 2016).

2.3.2.2 Work-family enrichment

Flexible working hours are strongly linked to work-family enrichment (Rastogi, Rangnekar & Rastogi, 2015). As Zülch, Stock & Schmidt (2012) state, employees perceive flexible working hours essential when striking a good work-family balance. Flextime fosters employee's work-life balance and wellbeing because it reduces work-life conflict, pressure and stress (Wheatley, 2016). This is due to the alleviation of flexible working hours which enables to get the job done without compromising different aspects of life (Kelly et al., 2014). These ameliorations lead to healthier and happier workers (Wheatley, 2016).

Flexible working hours also help employees to adapt to new life changes such as new child or retirement (Drago, Wooden & Black, 2009). In addition, flexible working hours enable full time working alongside household responsibilities since it facilitates managing them more flexibly according to own schedules (Wheatley, 2016). However, this might be challenging and consuming since one easily ends up working too much and the work-life balance suffers.

2.3.2.3 Better social relationships

Pedersen and Lewis (2012) highlight the importance of friendship and relationship as a source of social glue, integration and wellbeing. Flexible working hours and blurred boundaries may lead to enrichment and better work-life balance because co-worker and friendship boundaries become also blurred. Therefore, colleagues are seen more commonly as friends. In addition, flextime helps teams at work to cooperate and build relationships since they do not have to follow strict working hours. On the contrary,

they can communicate and work according to their preferences (Coenen & Kok, 2014). However, this is not the case necessarily with face-to face meetings because the appointments are bound to the presence of employees. Coenen and Kok (2004) states that overall, this benefit may actually be caused by telework and not directly by flexible working hours.

2.3.2.4 Better work-life balance

The study of Hayman (2009) explores the relationship between flexible work schedules and work-life balance among 710 office-based employees. Direct linkages between work-life balance, moreover, between integration of work, family, and personal life and flexible working schedules were discovered. The employees who used flexible working schedules, had positive experiences and better work-life balance than the employees who did not use them. However, Hayman (2009) states that the results showed more positive relationship when attaining work-life balance for many office-based employees than for individuals, for whom the benefit did not seem to be as significant.

2.3.2.5 Work-life integration

In addition, as a qualitative study of Pedersen and Jeppesen (2012) indicates, flexible schedule opportunities contribute to work-life integration and enrichment. According to Pedersen and Jeppesen (2012:354) employees 'experienced a stronger sense of agency, both with respect to mindset (i.e. thinking and feeling agentic) and behavior (i.e. acting agentic).' They had both, personal life benefits and benefits when engaged and performed in work roles. Nevertheless, the benefits were formed basically on the basis of workers' boundary management and levels of family flexibility.

A qualitative study by Galea, Houkes and De Rijk (2013:1108) explores 'how employees experience the usage of flexible working hours and how this affects their work-life balance'. The study shows that flexible working hours are a useful tool when managing transition between personal life and work. Commonly, flexible working hours were beneficial when prioritizing and enabling implementation of family or personal needs over organizational needs. However, the organizational needs go often ahead

of the employee needs. Moreover, in order to achieve a good work-life balance, flexible working hours were seen as a necessity rather than an extra benefit.

2.3.3 Perceived disadvantages of flexible working hours

Despite the benefits of flexible working hours, there are still some disadvantages and differences how people feel about flexible working hours (Zülch, Stock & Schmidt, 2012).

2.3.3.1 Flexibility more beneficial to organizations

Firstly, flexible working may not be as beneficial for the employees as it is for the organization. The organization may provide possibilities to use flexible working arrangements but employees may not be encouraged to use them. Employers may not provide the kind of flexibility to the employees compared to what they expect from them (Wheatley, 2016). The given flexibility may actually lead to longer working hours and work intensification which is actually a disadvantage to the employee but a benefit for the employer (Coenen & Kok, 2014).

2.3.3.1.1 Economic loss

In addition, sometimes employees feel that using flexible working hours may hinder their career. According to Wheatley (2016), sometimes an employee may lose an advancement or promotion opportunity because he or she is using flexible work arrangements. The employee is not as visible and does not appear to be as hard-working as the ones who stay at the work place. The employee suffers mentally, but also indirectly economically since one has lessened promotion prospects and does not have the possibility to earn more.

In addition, it is a common problem that flexible working hours may directly leave the employees in a worse economic situation since they are paid less (Drago, Wooden & Black, 2009). The employer may claim that the employee gets benefits and easier work and therefore, will be paid less. Often, employees work in a way for free, since they are encouraged to work flexibly which often means that the employees work more than

they are paid for (Nijp et al., 2012). The employer does not pay as much because if the work would be performed without flexible working hours, it would take more time to execute the task and the employer would need to pay for overtime.

2.3.3.2 Increased stress and poorer work-life balance

Since flexible working hours enable employees to control their day and schedules, it may not be necessarily a positive thing (Pedersen & Lewis, 2012). It requires individuals to make decisions and to negotiate how they want to divide their time managing the demand of work and personal life. For some people, this might be challenging, stressful and overall, not beneficial to work-life balance (Hayman, 2009). This occurs especially, if an organization administers flexible working policies inconsistently.

2.3.3.3 Negative spillover

The study of White et al. (2003) discusses negative job-to-home spillover which deals with work demands such as work pressure, working hours and intensity of work, which may affect non-work life. Although flexible working hours are perceived to reduce negative job-to-home spillover and work-life conflict (Wheatley, 2016), work related matters may be on employee's mind outside work too (Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012). Additional work hours are taken from personal and family life and work intensity may cause fatigue occurring non-work (White et al., 2003). However, the study discovered flexible working hours reduced negative job-to-home spillover to some extent, at least for women.

2.3.3.4 Blurred boundaries and work-family conflict

In addition, individual control over work schedules puts employee under pressure with high responsibility which is demanding for work-life balance (Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012). According to Galea, Houkes and De Rijk (2013), another aspect which has a negative impact on work-life balance is taking work thoughts and stress to home. Flexitime does not put clear boundaries on work times and these work thoughts and

worries create negative work–home interference. The boundaries between work and personal life may become blurred and according to Brown and Pitt-Catsouphes (2015), perceived flexibility control might be associated with work-family conflict.

2.3.3.5 Reduced interaction and worse relationships

According to Coenen and Kok (2014), one negative impact of flexible working hours might be reduced interaction between employees. Interaction creates trust and helps cooperation with co-workers, but when employees may adjust their working times according to their own preferences, they might interact less with others. In addition, flexible scheduling may create problems and conflicts with meetings since employees are allowed to work flexibly and meetings may restrict this control over own work schedules (Wheatley, 2016).

Since relationships and interaction with others are important, flexible working hours are one way to try to accomplish and maintain friendship (Pedersen & Lewis, 2012). Blurred boundaries affect co-worker relationships and more commonly, co-workers are seen as friends also outside of work. However, this is not only a positive thing because friendships in the workplace can be complicated and affect the work itself. Also, despite of flexible working hours, employees do not necessarily find time for friend outside work (Pedersen & Lewis, 2012).

2.3.3.6 Health risks

The study of Greubel et al. (2016) indicates higher risks when working unusual times. Flexible working hours enable employees to work during evenings, Saturdays and Sundays which seems to increase work-related health complaints, occupational accidents and moreover, higher risk of low work-life balance. This may be due to the fact that these are the times when people usually interact with others and implement personal desires.

2.4 Theoretical framework

2.4.1 Work-family border and boundary theory

Nowadays, it might be challenging to achieve good work-life balance due to the major changes in technology, increased flexibility, individual roles and responsibilities in multiple domains (Galea, Houkes & De Rijk, 2013). According to family-border theory of Clark (2000:748) 'people are border-crossers who make daily transitions between two worlds - the world of work and the world of family.' The theory tries to explain this complex transition and interaction between two different worlds which may have different cultures, languages and uses of vocabulary. The purpose of these domains is different and acceptable behaviors may also differ. Clark (2000) states that in order to find balance, people manage, negotiate and shape the borders of work and home and they might even change the nature of these domains to some extent.

Another theoretical framework which attempts to understand and explain people's ways of finding work-life balance and reduced work-family conflict is boundary theory. Boundary theory is very similar to border theory but it has still some differences (Qiu and Fan, 2015). Border theory (Clark 2000) suggests that relationship between to different domains is human and not only emotional. It emphasizes also physical things such as people and place, and not only people's emotions which may conflict. The boundary theory of Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) focuses to a large extent the segmentation and integration continuum. People rarely choose to only segment and separate or integrate and blur their different domains since there are different advantages when using different strategies (Rothbard, Phillips & Dumas, 2005). For instance, integration facilitates the role transition between work and home but segmentation helps to focus on one role, and as a result, perform better (Ashforth, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000).

Guest (2002) questioned the desirability of borders and considered when they would be beneficial. However, Rothbard, Phillips and Dumas (2005) examined the level of usability and desire of individuals to use segmentation and integration between their work and non-work lives. A survey of 460 employees showed that people were more committed and satisfied when they wanted segmentation and they could use for example, flextime. On the contrary, people who wanted segmentation but had access to integration policies, were less committed and satisfied. Nonetheless, the study of (Ferguson, Carlson & Kacmar, 2014) which had larger sample size (survey of 503 spouses), found that work boundary flexibility was facilitated with the help of

organizational segmentation support and supervisor instrumental support. The study took into account also family outcomes in addition to work outcomes and therefore brought something new to the research.

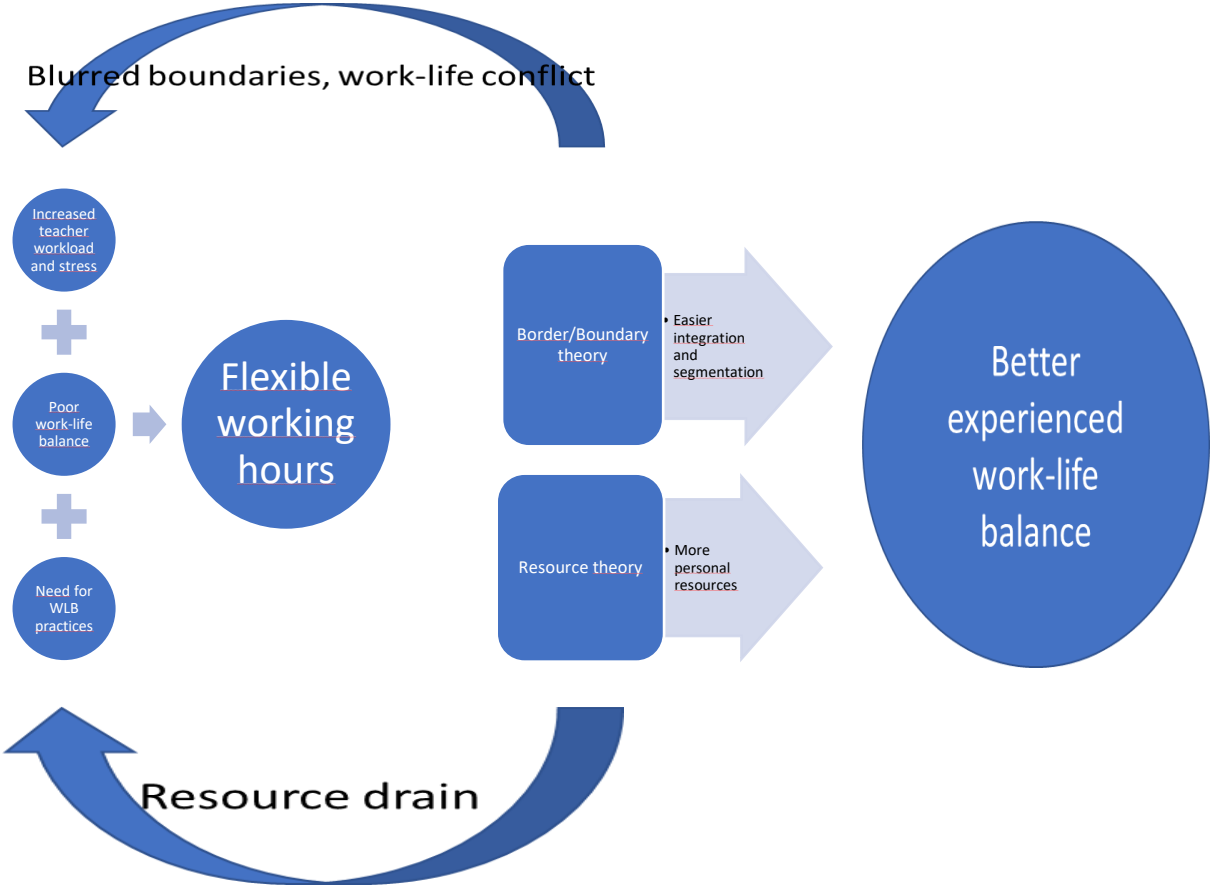
2.4.2 Resource theory

Resource theory, Edwards and Rothbard (2000) hints there might be benefits when using flexible working arrangements. Since work-life balance deals with the resource drain (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000), problem of limited resources such as time and energy, which have to be distributed between different domains of life, flexible working hours may help to manage these issues. According to resource theory, by transferring personal resources between competing roles and domains, it is easier to achieve work-life balance (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). Employees who now that they can control their schedules according to their preferences are less worried and stressed. They know it is possible to take care of issues dealing with non-work since work can be scheduled. Therefore, flexibility and flexible working hours are a valuable resource which help to transfer personal resources to meet the demands of different domains (Allen et al., 2012). Other supporting resources can be workplace associated resources such as organizational segmentation support and supervisor instrumental support which help to achieve balance between work, family and personal life (Ferguson, Carlson & Kacmar, 2014).

2.5 Conceptual framework

As the framework shows, increased teacher workload, expectations and stress lead to poorer work-life balance. There is a need for work-life balance practices such as flexible working hours. When analyzing flexible working hours within border theory and boundary theory, flexible working hours can help to integrate and segment work and non-work life which will reduce work-life conflict, increase work-family enrichment and probably lead to better work-life balance. Same happens when flexible working hours are perceived as a resource which will help to manage time and energy issues between competing roles and domains.

However, not everybody perceives the relationship in the same way. Some people may perceive increased flexibility as an extra task and stressor because they need to make decisions. Flexibility is not perceived as a helping resource but rather as an extra duty which drains personal resources. Same can happen within border theory or boundary theory when people perceive blurred boundaries as a disadvantage. Flexibility does not help to integrate or segment work and non-work life, but it increases work-life conflict when transitions between different domains become more difficult. In addition, resource drain may occur because flexible working arrangements often lead to economic loss. The employee may earn less and have less resources available. It might be challenging to take care of work-life balance if one earns less since one can not necessarily purchase all the necessary goods and services. The stress of economic problems affects the perceived work-life balance and especially, the perceived amount of personal resources. Because of these reasons, flexible working hours are not perceived to lead a better work-life balance.



2.5.1 The theories in teachers' flexible working

The border and boundary theory is relevant to explaining teachers' flexible working since teachers can use flexible working hours in their work outside the determined lesson hours. Because teacher workload is challenging they need to find strategies to how they can integrate and segment their work and non-work life. By integrating and segmenting these domains, it may be possible to minimize work-life conflict. However, without boundaries, flexible working hours may lead to work colonializing the whole life. Therefore, border and boundary theory is useful when analyzing the relationship of teachers' flexible working hours and work-life balance.

The resource theory is relevant when explaining teachers' flexible working since teachers have a limited amount of resources such as time and energy, which have to be distributed between different domains of life. Flexible working hours may help to manage these issues since flexibility allows planning and organizing which helps to make time for multiple tasks and important things. Flexible working hours help to use time more efficiently which is really important with the pressures in teacher's work. With flexible working arrangements, it might be possible to attain better work-life balance. However, it is possible that flexibility may lead to resource drain because of economic loss and lack of personal resources.

These border/boundary theory and resource theory are relevant when investigating teacher's work flexibility and work-life balance also because the theories are not distinct. One can segment or integrate work and personal life while taking care of the limited resources. In fact, when utilizing border theory, segmentation and integration, it is easier to transfer the resources in favor for work-life balance. Therefore, these theories are complementary.

3. METHODOLOGY

In addition to secondary research and critically analyzing and reviewing the existing literature on work-life balance and flexibility in the educational sector in Finland, primary research was conducted. Since this paper aims to answer to what extent are flexible working hours perceived to influence work-life balance, a qualitative approach was chosen. Qualitative research is an efficient way when trying to find answers how people actually feel about different things (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). It helps to understand feelings, values and the reasons behind human behavior. It also provides in-depth information and understanding about the topic and in this case, about the relationship between work-life balance and flexibility.

3.1 Method

A qualitative research was conducted by interviewing teachers. The interviews were semi-structured, individual in-depth, face-to-face interviews, which allowed to be flexible, ask follow-up questions and focus on interesting aspects that occurred. Therefore, truly new, in-depth understanding and qualitative data could be discovered (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). The validity and reliability of the research was established first by acknowledging and preventing the possible researcher's biases that might affect findings. Critical analysis was used during the whole research process and all the data and findings were recorded and reported in order to generate consistent and transparent data. In addition, the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants was guaranteed in order to generate and find truthful data. By providing detailed information of all the stages of the research, dependability could be reached. In order to establish validity, the semi-structured interview question base was planned carefully to measure what was intended. In addition, the questions were checked by an outside specialist and the translation of the questions and participant answers was verified by two colleagues.

3.2 Sample and data collection

In order to find participants who would give a valuable insight and data for this topic, purposive and snowball sampling was used. In total of 10 Finnish middle school and high school teachers were interviewed. The participants were contacted by email and the purpose and explanation of the study was given. The interviews were conducted between the February 13th and the February 17th 2017. The language of the interviews was Finnish, because the interviewees weren't comfortable with answering in English. The questions and answers were therefore freely translated by the author.

The semi-structured interview question base was created on the basis of the existing literature, theories, concepts and findings. The questions were devised by combining occurring themes in the literature and applying interesting questions from the previous studies. In addition, the questions were formulated in a way that they would provide descriptive and deep understanding of the topic. The questions dealt with work-life balance, flexibility, work-life conflict and enrichment, work-home spillover, resource theory and border/boundary theory. Possible cultural aspects and co-worker influences on flexibility were also asked. However, the topics were not limited to these and the interviews were shaped according to the answers of the interviewees.

3.3 Data analysis

All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. After that, the interviews were transcribed. The data was coded thematically using some prior codes that were also the basis of the interview questions. These came from existing theories and concepts and were recurring concepts also in the interview answers (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In addition, inductive codes which occurred frequently were used when analyzing the data. With deductive and inductive coding, main concepts and categories of the data were found. Then the answers were compared with each other as well as the results of the existing literature. In addition, existing theories and concepts were utilized when interpreting and analyzing the results. The purpose of providing objective, deeper in-depth understanding of the topic was taken into account. In addition, causes and consequences of the results were analyzed.

4. FINDINGS

This section will provide the main findings of the research. It was found that the perceived teacher work-life balance is satisfactory. On the surface, the interviewees were pleased with their current work-life balance and flexibility. However, after deeper descriptions and analyses, it was revealed that the workload has increased significantly and the pressures of the work depend a lot on the season. Teacher's work and flexibility are very seasonal since there are for example, exam weeks which increase the workload tremendously. Therefore, the results are contradicting depending on the season. Another finding is that the influence of flexible working hours on work-life balance is relatively positive. However, flexibility is more beneficial for the work life than non-work life and it can be risky. In essence, flexibility is a double-edged sword and work can easily colonialize the other aspects of life. Therefore, strategies were found to have a decisive role when utilizing flexible working hours to maintain better work-life balance. The following table will provide an introduction to experienced pluses and minuses of teachers' flexible working. Later, more detailed, in-depth findings will be presented.

Table 1-The number of participants of pluses and minuses of teachers' flexible working

Forms of flexibility in teachers' work	The number of participants with positive comments	The number of participants with negative comments
Working at the school premises before or after the lessons	9	1
Working during the free time between the lessons	10	0
Homeworking (outside the lessons)	4	6
Working during the weekends	2	8
Overall, working or not working whenever and wherever outside the lessons	8	2
Autonomy and flexibility how to teach and what techniques to use in one's work	10	0

4.1 Teacher work-life balance

Teachers described their work-life balance to be adequate. When they were asked to rate their work-life balance on a scale 1-5, 1 being really poor work-life balance and 5 being really good, teachers, on average said their work-life balance to be 3,5. Many of the participants said that their work requires a lot of their time but they still have time to relax and spend some time doing their own activities. Overall, they told that they are satisfied with their situation and they enjoy their work. Teachers stated that they have a lot of work but they like it and they would not want to do major changes. However, the answers varied and when one participant told that her work-life balance was almost perfect and everything was like it was supposed to be (#6), another interviewee stated:

It is really poor. I could cite The Shining: "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" (#3)

This shows the individual differences how people feel about this relationship but also, how positively they want to describe their work. Interestingly, almost all of the participants first stated that their work-life balance is satisfactory, but after being asked to describe their work-life balance more deeply, the answers were not as positive. This also explains the results of the rating on the scale since it is easy and convenient to say that own work-life balance is a bit over the median of the scale. Therefore, the descriptive comments reveal better the real situation. One participant for example told:

Work takes so much of my time that sometimes I feel guilty when I think about my family. (#4)

This shows how challenging and heavy the teacher workload is. The word guilty reflects the result of difficult choices between work and personal life. When work takes so much time that one feels guilty, work-life balance can not be good or even satisfactory. Therefore, the actual work-life balance seems to be worse than the participants first implied. Another participant described the difficulty of work-life balance by saying:

I have to try really hard to be selfish enough so that I would not be working all the time. (#1)

Again, this indicates the issue of work-life balance because the work requires a significant amount of time and especially, when flexibility leads easily to working too

much. Therefore, teachers need to put a lot of effort on not working too much and they still have problems with work-life balance.

4.1.1 Teacher workload

The interviews showed the same finding as existing literature that the teacher workload has increased during the last 30 years. Technology and the internet has changed the job description a lot. Teachers are encouraged to use technology in teaching which requires constant practicing and participating in training courses, especially among the older teachers. In addition, marking all the absences and comments to the internet and answering to emails have increased the workload significantly. However, technology is seen also as an advantage since it alleviates communication between students and teachers and it also brings versatility to work. But technology is not the only thing that changes teacher's work. Government and the ministry of education develops new curricula and teachers have to follow the changing guidelines.

Teachers who had been working in this field about 30 years mentioned increased accountability. Everything needs to be written down and recorded. Also, all kinds of meetings with parents and co-workers happen much more frequently than before. Also, these need to be written down which doubles the workload. In addition, the work is so much more than teaching since the teachers are a part of student's life and want to help them with their problems. One teacher told that she had even visited a student's home when there had been problems. One participant also stated:

I feel sorry for the younger teachers because the workload has increased and the work requires much more both physically and mentally than 30 years ago. This work is tough. (#2)

The word choice tough and the phrase I feel sorry, reveals the true feelings about the workload. The work is so demanding that the participant felt pity for the younger teachers who will work in the field for many years.

4.1.2 Seasonal work

In addition to increased workload, teachers described their workload to be huge, challenging, hectic and fluctuating. Overall, there is a lot of work and usually it takes more time than teachers would want. However, because teachers love their job, they described it to be also compelling, controllable and clear. These descriptions are a bit controversial which is due to the different nature of some subjects. For example, language teachers stated that their workload is endless, whereas physical education teachers were more satisfied with their work and work-life balance. However, teachers of some subjects such as physical activities have more required lessons to teach and therefore, they don't have as much flexibility as for example, language teachers. Moreover, these contradicting workload and work-life balance descriptions may depend on the seasonality of teacher's work. They usually need to compromise when there are test weeks or matriculation examinations when there is an enormous amount of work and the pressures are higher. During normal work days, teachers don't feel as much pressure and they are more satisfied. However, there is still a lot work to do. Table 2 will show comments of these contrasting cases.

Table 2-Teachers' comments on seasonality of work

Exam weeks, matriculation examinations or the end of the course	Everyday work without special events or extra duties
<p><i>“Exam weeks mess up the normal rhythm of my life and take time of my spare time. It is annoying but I can get going since I know the work is kind of project based.” (#1)</i></p> <p><i>“The work is cyclical. Sometimes there is more or too much work which forces to work late. It is mentally heavier” (#2)</i></p> <p><i>“Sometimes I cross my limits and work too much” (#4)</i></p> <p><i>“Deadlines create stress and pressure, not the work itself” (#3)</i></p>	<p><i>“Usually, the workload is manageable and the work is inspiring” (#4)</i></p> <p><i>“My work is clear and controllable but still challenging” (#6)</i></p> <p><i>“My workload is reasonable. It runs on its own but it can be numbing since reviewing essays is quite similar from day to day” (#7)</i></p> <p><i>“My work is hectic and busy because I have to pass between different school where I teach” (#8)</i></p>

<p>“The workload is fluctuating. Matriculation exams increase workload tremendously. I would enjoy a steady workload” (#5)</p> <p>“During exam weeks, work comes to home and affects my family life” (#7)</p> <p>“The ends of the courses are busier and sometimes stressful. However, it is a good thing since it helps to get the job done.” (#10)</p>	<p>“At the moment, I have 25 lessons in a week which is a lot. Therefore, there is a lot of work which is physically heavy. But it is manageable.” (#9)</p> <p>“My workload is quite suitable for me, and I get my work done well. I like when I have things to do” (#10)</p>
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As the table 2 shows, teachers’ work is seasonal. The pressure of the work is much heavier for example, during exam weeks and teacher work-life balance suffers. They have to work long hours and sacrifice their spare and family time and personal plans in order to perform the needed tasks before deadlines. In the column and row one, the phrase “exam weeks mess up the normal rhythm” really describes the feeling that work affects negatively non-work life. Also, the words stress and pressure reveal the true feeling of the demands and pressure of teachers’ work. However, some individuals do not experience this as negatively and the experienced stress, if it is reasonable, helps to perform the job.

Although the participants first described their work-life balance to be adequate and poor only during these certain seasons, when analyzing these comments, it seems that there is still a significant amount of work every day. Comments and words like challenging workload, hectic work days and 25-hour lessons per week do not sound as positive as the interviewees first implied. These imply that the teachers feel busy and overloaded. The workload seems to be heavier and the work-life balance poorer than the personal evaluation demonstrated.

4.2 Flexibility in teacher’s work

The interviewees defined their work to be quite flexible. Although teachers have lessons which must begin and end at certain times but for the rest, they can decide when, where and how they work. Flexible working hours are used since the lessons

might not cover even the half of the work they do. All the preparations, planning, reviewing exams and meetings with the students' parents and co-workers can and in a way, must be done using their own scheduling. One interviewee said:

You can do, or not do your work whenever you want. The best thing is that you can choose your working methods and topics what you want to emphasize using your own strengths. (#9)

Therefore, flexible working hours are perceived to be a positive thing. However, many teachers noted their job lacks flexibility in a sense that it is very difficult and expensive to get vacation or a day off because of the mandatory lessons. In addition, as stated before, different subjects have different amount of lessons demanded and the workload of the teachers might be different. Therefore, the amount of flexibility varies.

4.2.1 Autonomy

As the table 1, column two and row 7 shows, teachers appreciate flexible working hours because they give them autonomy. The opportunity to schedule work and non-work outside the lessons enables them to use their imagination and creativity and to live in a moment. One teacher said:

Flexible working gives me a lot and it affects my wellbeing and coping and work. (#10)

In addition, one participant described that the autonomy of flexible working allows building and implementing work flexibly since you can prepare and plan everything whenever you want and how you want. This freedom is a positive thing which supports mental wellbeing. (#8)

4.3 The perceived influence of flexible working hours on work-life balance

At first glance, the perceived impact of flexible working hours on teacher work-life balance seemed quite positive. Teachers stated that flexibility is a benefit which helps them to organize work and non-work in a way which allows them to perform better in work but also find time to do other things. Flexibility was the key when something surprising occurred and it was important to react quickly. However, the answers varied

and after the first comments participants described some risks and negative aspects of flexibility as well. The following table indicates findings how interviewees perceived the relationship of flexible working hours, work life and non-work life.

Table 3- The perceived impact of flexible working hours on work life and non-work life

	Flexibility as a positive thing	Flexibility as a risk
Work life	<p>“My work requires creativity, thinking and contemplation. It is better to let some things dwell and get back to it later. This is possible with flexible working hours” (#2)</p> <p>“Flexibility is essential. It helps to plan and organize things. In addition, it helps to react to unforeseen matters” (#3)</p> <p>“Flexible working hours enable working when it is most suitable for me. Therefore, I can work more efficiently and the quality is better” (#9)</p>	<p>“Sometimes flexible working hours may lead to laziness and postponing” (#5)</p> <p>“When I started my job, I had to spend a lot time on planning and preparing. It was sometimes difficult to schedule everything and to do my job with flexibility.” (#6)</p>
Non-work life	<p>“Flexibility allows me to make time for myself and for things that are important to me” (#1)</p> <p>“Flexible working hours allow me to run errands that can only be done during business hours” (#7)</p> <p>“Flexible working hours are extremely important for mental well-being. I would feel much worse if I had fixed working hours” (#8)</p>	<p>“Because teachers have endless amount of work, flexible working hours may lead to working all the time” (#3)</p> <p>“It is annoying when for example exam weeks require a lot of time and flexible working takes time from my non-work life” (#1)</p> <p>“Flexible working might make the transition between work and non-work more difficult. Even if I wasn’t working at the moment, my mind is nevertheless working. Especially, constant availability and information via e-mail is often stressful.” (#4)</p>

4.3.1 Flexibility as a positive thing

4.3.1.1 Work-life enrichment

It was found that teachers feel that flexible working hours may lead to work-life enrichment (see the previous table, row two, column three). Because of flexibility, it is possible to combine different roles in life and attain better work-life balance. As the table 3 shows, (see row three, column two), flexible working hours allow people to run important errands during the day. The participants said that usually, teachers have a few hours daily when they do not have any lessons during the business hours. This is a great time to work, but if they have other important errands or just something they would like to do, it is a good opportunity to combine non-work life to the work day. Since the time available can be used efficiently, it releases time from the evening. Therefore, flexible working hours help to balance and combine different demands and one can for example, spend the evening with one's family.

4.3.1.2 Flexibility as a resource

The study found that teachers believe that they have a limited amount of personal resources such as time and energy, which have to be allocated between the demands of work life and non-work life (see table 3, row three). One teacher stated:

Flexible working hours help me to use my resources in a rational way which allows me to work or spend leisure time more efficiently. I feel that in a way, flexibility brings me more personal resources. (#7)

As the comments in the table 3, column two show, flexible working hours are perceived to be useful because they help planning and making time for important things such as exercising. However, even if the interviewees usually stated enjoying flexibility and its benefits to work-life balance and personal life, almost everybody mentioned the risk of flexible working hours. Often, at least at some point in their career work goes before personal life and the leisure time is used working. Therefore, resources do not actually lead to a better work-life balance since the work takes a significant role in life.

4.3.1.3 Better work quality

One finding is that flexibility increases work quality (see table 3, row and column two). Because of the possibility to plan and schedule one's day and work, one can work when it is most suitable for them. One teacher stated:

Flexible working hours definitely improve the quality of my work. I can work when my alertness is high and I have enough time to perform the task.
(#8)

Therefore, work can be done more efficiently and it may allow the teacher to do other things too. There might be time for one's family and own hobbies because the planning releases time to multiple interests. In addition, when one knows that the work is done well, it is easier to push work thoughts out of the mind and to enjoy other interests.

4.3.1.4 Flexibility as a necessity

One interesting finding is that teachers described flexibility to be essential and necessary in their profession. Many of the participants said that they have always been teachers and have worked using flexible working hours and they would not be able to perform all the needed tasks with fixed or stable working hours. One participant said that she would still have to take a lot work home in order to cope with the duties. Another participant stated:

Flexible working hours are essential for everything in this job. I don't think one could cope without them. However, there is a risk if one is as work oriented and conscientious as I am, work can take everything. (#3)

As the participant stated, flexible working hours are necessary for teachers because they have a huge workload. Flexibility may help them to do their job better but often it happens at the cost of the non-work life. Therefore, flexible working hours may not necessarily help to get a better work-life balance.

4.3.2 Flexibility is a double-edged sword

It was found that even if the participants find flexible working beneficial, they acknowledge all the risks it brings (see table 3, column three). If one doesn't have the strategies or boundaries on how to use flexibility, it can be risky and harmful for work-life balance. Because the teacher workload is challenging, it is common that work requires a huge amount of their time. Many participants told that when they started their career, time management was difficult and they ended up working for long hours. One teacher said:

I remember when I started working, I spent much more time on everything. It required a lot of thinking and everything had to be done as it was instructed. The hours in a day were not enough and time management got out of control and it backfired. (#6)

It may be difficult to maintain work-life balance especially if one likes one's job and wants to be good at it. The majority of the interviewees said that they were conscientious and had problems of being selfish enough. Teachers want to be good at their job and to be up-to-date. It was very common that they mentioned the need of being more selfish and to learn to do the job with less effort. Often, teachers work for free because they need to spend significantly more time with their duties than they are paid for. Also, because the workload has increased and it includes a lot more than just teaching, but the workload does not take this strain into account, teachers work for free.

4.3.2.1 Work-life conflict

It was found that sometimes teachers feel that flexible working hours may lead to work-life conflict (see table 3, row and column three). As mentioned before, heavy workload and the desire to be a good teacher and help the students as well as possible can easily lead to constant working. Since flexible working hours allow teachers to work whenever they want outside the lessons, work-life conflict may occur. As the table 3 shows, one interviewee stated:

It is annoying when for example exam weeks require a lot of time and flexible working takes time from my non-work life. (#1)

Work responsibilities interfere with non-work life taking time from it. The word annoying describes well the feeling that the work affects negatively personal life. Also, even if flexibility allows planning and scheduling time for own activities, often this means working up to twice as much at another time. The work does not disappear, it needs to be done. One participant stated:

It feels that I can't take time off. If I had plans for the weekend I start to think oh no, how do I have time for this since I have work to do. I need to work more during the week or skip the plans. (#3)

Therefore, flexible working hours do not necessarily reduce the interference between work and non-work but it transfers it from one time to another. When you use the time for personal interests, it may seem that flexibility helps to attain better work-life balance. But when you need to compensate the used time and work, flexibility leads to work-life conflict since you have to ignore the non-work life in order to perform the work. In addition, social interaction is an important part of the teacher's job. Teachers mentioned that because of the social strain, they do not have the energy to be with their family. The demands of the work interfere with the demands of non-work and conflict occurs.

4.3.2.2 Negative spillover

It was found that depending on the season and its workload, work spills over to non-work life (see table 2, column one). When teachers had a higher number of lessons, they felt tired and the transition between work and non-work was more difficult. One participant told that even though she was at home spending time with children, she was not mentally present because her mind was still working. Flexibility may create blurred boundaries which can lead to negative spillover when the work is in the mind also in the leisure time (see table 3, row and column three). The phrase of constant availability and information via e-mail and the description of it being stressful reveals the teachers' feeling that in their job, the transition between work and non-work is difficult. In addition, when there is a lot of stress and the body is in overdrive, it is difficult to sleep and relax. Many interviewees also mentioned that the most difficult student welfare problems are the ones that spillover to non-work life. Teachers want the best for their students and it is difficult to see if they have problems in which teachers cannot

influence. One interviewee mentioned that sometimes she sleeps poorly and wakes up at night because of these difficult matters.

Negative spillover also occurs when there is undone work. Teachers said that it is difficult to enjoy leisure time when you know that you have for example exams to be reviewed and you know that you could be doing it right now. If you could do the work only at certain times it would possibly be easier to attain work-life balance. One teacher stated:

It would be clearer if I hadn't flexibility, I envy people who work from 8 am to 4 pm. (#5)

In addition, even if teachers were not working or thinking about working, some of the participants told that when they see something interesting on the news or in the internet, they want to use it in next day's class and in a way, they start working accidentally. Also, constant availability via e-mail was seen as a major factor which complicates finding a balance between work and personal life.

4.4 The importance of strategies

Overall, teachers described their current work-life balance satisfactory and the relationship between flexible working hours and work-life balance relatively positive. The risks of flexibility are present but the participants indicated that with experience and different strategies it is possible to utilize flexibility and to prevent the negative influence on work-life balance.

However, some participants said that they would prefer fixed working time since it would force them to work at certain times and there would not be undone work. It would also help in a sense that one would automatically have clear boundaries between work and non-work and it would be easier to find work-life balance. These interviewees said that they use clear boundaries in their work. Usually they tried to perform all the job-related tasks in the work premises and not to bring anything home. This was not always possible but was found to be useful. One participant even told that she leaves all the books and papers at school and reads her e-mails between 8-16. Therefore, flexibility did not create any problems and flexibility was kind of positive thing since it enabled

her to work as if she had fixed working hours but she had still the possibility to reschedule things if needed.

4.4.1 Boundaries

Creating own boundaries was common with all the participants even if they said they really found flexibility useful. Own deadlines and goals helped to work faster and effectively. Afterwards, it was also easier to relax and do other things because the work was done or the goal was achieved. Some did not notice that they used any clear strategies because organizing things was easy and the strategies and scheduling was done in their minds. Others segmented their day using clear timetables in which certain hours were used working and certain hours doing other things. Some participants created clear psychological boundaries between work and home and preferred doing all the work within the school premises even if it would take the whole day.

4.4.2 Integration

Some teachers preferred working at home because it was easier to concentrate there. In addition, if the participant had a family and small children they wanted to go home as soon as possible to be with them. It was beneficial to integrate work and personal life and the flexibility helped to balance the different roles in life. One participant also said that the work is a part of life and it is useful to be present at home and to work at the same time. It is not necessary to draw clear boundaries because it is natural to find time for both and integrate things.

4.4.3 Restricted use of technology

However, one common matter on which almost everybody said to use some strategies and boundaries was technology. Reading emails and other work-related things was usually restricted somehow. Some did not read them during the lessons because they wanted to focus on teaching. Some did not read or respond if they knew they would not have enough time to react or answer to it. Others did not read the messages at home or during the weekends etc.

The strategies differed significantly between individuals and even between the various stages of life. However, they were the things that were seen as the key when taking the advantage of flexible working hours and using it to finding a better work-life balance. The interviewees, who had good organizing skills and a vision of how they would want to work, perceived influence of flexible working hours on work-life balance more positively.

4.5 Summary of the findings

Table 4-The types of flexible working experienced and their perceived impact on work-life balance

The types of flexible working	Overall assessment
Working at the school premises before or after the lessons	Positive
Working during the free time between the lessons	Positive
Homeworking (outside the lessons)	Negative
Working during the weekends	Negative
Overall, working or not working whenever and wherever outside the lessons	Positive
Autonomy and flexibility how to teach and what techniques to use in one's work	Positive

As seen in the table above, teachers experienced different types of flexible working opportunities in their work. The types which were perceived to be most helpful and positive in regards to attaining better work-life balance are displayed in dark green. The next positive types are presented in lighter green. The types of flexible working which were perceived to affect work-life balance negatively are presented in red, in the same style as the positive ones.

Teachers believed that the most useful and positive ways of flexible working were working during the free time during the day, between the lessons. This flexibility helped them to perform the tasks better but it did not take any time of their personal life. Therefore, it was extremely positive for work-life balance. Autonomy and flexibility how to teach and what techniques to use in one's work and in work flexibility, were perceived to have as positive impact on work-life balance as the previous type. They increased the feeling of accomplishment but did not believe to have negative attributes. Working at the school premises before or after the lessons was perceived to be almost as positive as the previous ones since it was easy to keep work life and non-work life apart and maintain a good work-life balance. It was viewed slightly less positively since sometimes, one may stay at the school premises too long which takes time from the personal life. Overall, the possibility of working (or not working) whenever and wherever outside the lessons was seen as a positive thing because it enabled scheduling and organizing different aspects of life. However, it had also negative consequences for work-life balance since teachers easily ended up working too much.

The two types of flexible working which were believed to be negative compared to work-life balance were homeworking and working during the weekends. Homeworking was useful in some situations, for example with small children, but overall, teachers told that they began to avoid homeworking because it led to work colonializing the non-work life and the work pressure and stress was present at home. Even more negative type was working during the weekends. Sometimes it was necessary and even useful to perform some tasks during the weekends but since the work was usually done from home, it had the negative effects of homeworking. Also, it consumed the teachers' valuable personal relaxing time, which they do not have much and complicated the relationship between work and personal life.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This research investigated the perceived impact of flexible working hours on work-life balance in the educational sector in Finland. A qualitative study was carried out and 10 teachers were interviewed. After analyzing in-depth, semi-structured interviews it was found that on the surface, teachers were pleased with their current work-life balance and flexibility. However, after deeper questions and descriptions it was revealed that the teachers' work-life balance might not be as good as the participants first implied and flexibility does not necessarily help to achieve better work-life balance.

5.1 Teacher work-life balance

5.1.1 Seasonal work and stress

The teacher's work is very seasonal and there are times when they need to work almost all the time in order to perform all the duties they have. For example, during the exam weeks, teachers have a huge amount of papers to review and they need to work until midnight if they want to return the exams within a reasonable time. Teachers described that during these times, they do not have time for themselves and it is annoying that the work confuses the rhythm of personal life. In line with the existing literature (Göksoy & Akdağ 2014), in order to find enough time, teachers need to prioritize the most important tasks they need to manage. This seems to be an international problem since the results of this study in Finland, the results of Göksoy and Akdağ (2014) in Turkey, as well as the results of Antoniou, Ploumpi and Ntalla, (2013) in the United States show the lack of time and occupational stress of teachers throughout the world.

In addition, it was said that the work itself is not stressful but the deadlines such as giving grades within time limits creates pressure. Similarly, Antoniou, Ploumpi and Ntalla (2013) provide deeper understanding of time pressure, business requirements and workload which are the aspects that cause occupational stress. However, it seems that in Finland, the principal and the school community is to some extent flexible and understanding. Even if there are certain strict deadlines, teachers said that they have

a lot freedom when they want to return regular exams etc. and they do not have as strict deadlines.

5.1.2 Work-life balance challenges

Even if the teacher work-life balance might be satisfactory at least when there is not anything special happening, it was found that teachers need to make an effort in order to find time for non-work life. Therefore, it is not easy to achieve a good work-life balance and teachers create own strategies and practices to cope. This is in line with the literature, for example the research of Miryala and Chiluka (2012) examined work-life balance practices' necessity for teachers in order to balance between work and non-work life and to increase satisfaction.

5.1.3 Increased workload

It was found that the teacher workload has increased significantly. The interviews showed the same finding as existing literature that the teacher workload has increased during the last 30 years (Eacute & Esteve 2000). Teachers need to do many different administrative tasks such as planning, evaluating and attending to meetings. One participant who had worked as a teacher for 40 years emphasized the increased accountability and the fact that everything needs to be somehow recorded. Similarly, Valli and Buese (2007) stated that we live in the era of high accountability which increases the workload significantly and often, teachers are overloaded. This shows that the increased teacher workload is present in Finland and in the United States, and it is a problem internationally.

5.1.4 Problems with work-life balance

All in all, it seems that the interviewees wanted to give a more positive picture about their work, workload and work-life balance. Researcher effect might have appeared since the participants described their current work-life balance to be quite good but admitted that other colleagues might suffer from poor work-life balance because of tremendous workload and pressures of work. In addition, many admitted that at some

point in their career, they had had a poor work-life balance when they had been working all the time but the current situation was better. They said that even if they were working hard, they liked what they were doing and in a way, they were giving a better picture of their work-life balance than the later descriptions of their situation implied.

In addition, there were some differences who found their work-life balance to be better and who found it to be worse. Many of the teachers who had been in the field for over 20 years, stated that their work-life balance is better than it was when they started working. Nowadays, they understand the importance of other things in life and want to focus more on their well-being. Younger teachers who had also family responsibilities, had a bit poorer work-life balance. This is in line with the research by Galea, Houkes and De Rijk (2013).

Even though there is a big workload and pressure in teacher's work in Finland, it seems that the situation and the work-life balance is not as poor as in some other countries. It is needed to take care of teachers' work-life balance and wellbeing but as (Onnismaa, 2010) found, teacher's wellbeing is better in Finland than it is in many other countries such as in the United Kingdom.

5.2 Teacher's work flexibility

One finding is that the teacher's work is quite flexible. Although teachers have lessons which must begin and end at certain times, for the rest, they can decide when, where and how they work. Flexible working hours are used since the lessons might not cover even the half of the work they do. All the preparations, planning, reviewing exams and meetings with student's their parents and co-workers can and in a way, must be done using their own scheduling. In line with the literature (Robards 2008), teachers do a significant amount of their work outside the specified lesson times. Teachers can do planning, preparations, meetings and for example e-mail contacting using flexible working hours. One teacher even stated that the job is more flexible than other jobs. However, many teachers noted that their job lacks flexibility in a sense that it is very difficult and expensive to get a vacation or a day off because of the mandatory lessons. In addition, different subjects have different amount of number of lessons demanded and the workload of the teachers might be different. Therefore, the amount of flexibility varies and the work might not be as flexible after all.

5.2.1 Flexibility as a positive thing

One finding is that teachers perceive flexibility relatively positively. Teachers told that flexible working hours help to organize and plan work related tasks as well as personal life. Autonomy is viewed positively since people can work according to their own preferences. Coenen and Kok (2014) found similar results.

It was also found that teachers with multiple responsibilities such as family and work, found flexible working hours more useful for work-life balance since it helps to integrate work and personal life. Teachers said that because of flexibility, it is possible to combine different roles in life and attain better work-life balance. The possibility of working at home and being with the family at the same time could lead to work-life enrichment. Hayman (2009) found also that flexible work schedules increased work-life balance, moreover, integration between work, family, and personal life.

5.2.1.1 Flexible working in favor of work

However, after interviewing the participants for a while, it was found that the reality may not be as good as the idea and the possible benefits of flexible working hours on work-life enrichment. Sometimes, flexibility can be used in favor of personal life but because of a large amount of work, especially during the exam weeks and end of the modules, flexible working hours mean that one can and almost needs to work all the time. Therefore, flexibility is a positive thing if one analyzes things from the perspective of one's work or one's employer. However, it does not help to attain better work-life balance. Similarly, Coenen and Kok, 2014 revealed that the given flexibility may actually lead to longer working hours and work intensification which is actually a disadvantage for the employee but a benefit for the employer. Flexible working hours give more time to perform the duties and one can also work when the state of alertness is best for it. Therefore, the quality of work is better and one simply can do all the needed tasks.

When interviewing the participants, most of the benefits of flexible working hours dealt with their work-life and not non-work life. In addition, in line with the study by Galea, Houkes and De Rijk (2013) it was found that flexible working hours are a necessity

rather than extra benefit. Without flexibility, it would be impossible to perform all the work-related tasks. Of course, if one completes the work in time or it is essential to take care of some personal things, flexible working hours allow that. However, it is common that flexibility is utilized working and it does not necessarily increase work-life balance.

5.2.1.2 Flexibility as a resource

Teachers admitted having a problem of limited resources such as time and energy, which have to be distributed between different domains of life. According to the resource theory, by transferring personal resources between competing roles and domains, it is easier to achieve work-life balance (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000). The interviews showed supporting results since flexible working hours are perceived to be useful, because they help organizing and planning, which helps to make time for multiple tasks and important things. Some teachers told that in a way, flexible working hours create more resources or at least they help to spend time more efficiently.

5.2.3 Flexibility as a risk

It was found that even if the participants find flexible working beneficial, they acknowledge all the risks it brings. Teachers emphasized the importance of creating boundaries or strategies how to use flexibility, because it is easy to let the work take all the time they have. Therefore, work-life conflict may occur since one uses all personal resources working all the time. In line with the existing literature (Brown & Pitt-Catsouphes 2015), work-life conflict was found to be more likely if you decide to work at home because it is then more difficult to create boundaries and focus on the personal life. It is also possible that the teacher's work is so intensive that one does not have any energy left for personal life even if one would have time. Similarly, it was stated that additional working hours are often taken from personal and family life and work intensity may cause fatigue, which occurs during non-work hours (White et al., 2003). Moreover, teachers' work intensification and the resulting stress seems to be a problem internationally. Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt and Vanroelen (2014) studied Flemish teachers and this was an issue. In addition, Bates (2014) reported intellectual complexity of teaching and its heaviness in the United States.

5.2.3.1 Negative spillover

It was found that flexibility may create blurred boundaries which can lead to negative spillover when work is in mind also in the leisure time. When one could work whenever they want, it is very hard to not be thinking about work if one has undone tasks. This is in line with the existing literature since work related matters may be on the employee's mind outside of work too (Pedersen & Jeppesen, 2012). Many teachers also mentioned that the most difficult student welfare problems are the ones that spillover to non-work life. It was found that internet, and constant availability via e-mail were seen as major factors which complicate finding a balance between work and personal life. The problem with constant availability has been discussed also in the existing literature (Zülch, Stock & Schmidt, 2012).

5.3 The use of strategies

Since teachers highlighted that flexibility may bring both benefits and disadvantages, strategies were found to have a decisive role when utilizing flexible working hours to maintain better work-life balance. Every participant had slightly different strategies on regulating their work and leisure time. However, in line with the literature Galea, Houkes and De Rijk (2013), it was found that two main strategies were most commonly used, integrating and segmenting work and non-work life.

The border and boundary theories by Clark (2000) and by Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000), are probably the best when explaining teachers' attitudes towards flexibility. Teachers found using segmentation and integration essential when using flexible working hours and therefore, the theories help to explain the believes and feelings of teachers in the most useful way. However, since the border/boundary theory and resource theory by Edwards and Rothbard (2000) are complementary, one can segment or integrate work and personal life while taking care of the limited resources. Therefore, utilizing resource theory along with the border/boundary theory, teachers' attitudes towards flexibility can be more thoroughly understood.

5.3.1 Segmentation

Many teachers told that they use flexible working hours working within the school premises as much as possible. They went to school early in the morning to prepare the day's lessons and used the hours between the lessons to work. They also stayed at school until they had done the needed work in order to avoid taking the work home. As Ashforth, Kreiner and Fugate (2000) described the segmentation part in boundary theory, often segmentation helps to focus on one role and to perform better. Many teachers told that they segmented work and non-work because it was easier to focus on the job-related tasks at school. Moreover, it was easier for them to enjoy leisure time and to balance between work and non-work.

5.3.2 Integration

Contrarily, as discussed in the findings section previously, it was found that some participants preferred homeworking when using flexible working arrangements since it gives the opportunity to be with their family while working since they can integrate these domains. As Clark (2000) stated that in order to find balance, people manage, negotiate and shape the borders of work and home and they might even change the nature of these domains to some extent. Teachers told that they need to reshape the borders and strategies in order to respond to the demands of work and personal life. With flexibility, it was possible to integrate these domains when needed since if one has for example exams to be reviewed but one needed to be with the children at the same time, one does not have to stay at the school the whole evening but one could come home and do both. Integration was more common with teachers who had family and small children.

5.4 The impact of culture on one's attitude towards flexibility

The study revealed that an individual's personality and set of values affect how they use flexibility since for some people, work comes first and for others, personal life is the priority. Overall, people in western countries or in Scandinavia, tend to prefer separating these two domains whereas in Asia, people have less boundaries (Qiu & Fan, 2015). Interestingly, older teachers told that they focus more on their work-life

balance since they had learned from working too much that personal time is important. However, it was more common that they did not create borders between work. They said that work is part of life and the domains do not need to be fully separated. Of course, some boundaries were found to be beneficial but it was common that there were not clear boundaries between work and non-work life. Probably, this was due to the Lutheran upbringing which the participants brought up. They said that for their generation, Lutheran moral, the importance of work and the fact that everything needs to be done as well as possible, has affected their working habits. However, what individuals found important differed between the various stages of life. Younger generation teachers did not mention this Lutheran upbringing and they seemed to prefer clearer boundaries.

5.5 The impact of colleagues on one's attitude towards flexibility

The existing literature mentions that managers or colleagues may affect the individual's attitude towards flexibility. For example, sometimes an employee may lose an advancement or promotion opportunity because he or she is using flexible work arrangements. The employee is not as visible and does not appear to be as hard-working as the ones who stay at the work place (Wheatley 2016). However, teachers did not find others affecting their attitudes that much since they do not have many promotion opportunities. Although, one participant noted that in bigger schools there might be competition who can teach certain courses and therefore, it might be better to seem hardworking and stay within the school premises. In addition, during the exam weeks and for example special ceremony days, colleagues could resent if one would not be present or overall, would repeatedly slip extra duties. The school principal also encourages teachers to be present or available at least by phone or via e-mail during exam weeks. Still overall, the effect of others on attitudes towards flexibility seemed to be smaller than in some other professions or in other countries. For example, Qiu and Fan (2015) studied Chinese full-time employees and since the Asian culture is more collectivistic than the culture in Finland, the impact of others on one's attitude towards flexibility might therefore be greater there than in Finland.

However, the positive impact of managers and colleagues on flexibility in this study was found. In line with the literature (Ferguson, Carlson & Kacmar, 2014), support by

supervisors helped to use flexible working hours more successfully. The teachers told that working atmosphere was supporting and trusting and helped them to cope with work demands.

5.6 Limitations of the research

However, this research is not without limitations. Although, for an undergraduate dissertation, the sample size was adequate, one needs to be careful when generalizing these results because of the small sample size. Overall, qualitative research does not provide as generalizable results as quantitative research but it gives valuable in-depth understanding and detailed information if the study is conducted well. Despite the benefits of purposive and snowball sampling, it is possible that the respondents may not represent the population realistically. In particular, snowball sampling in this study did not consider gender, background or age differences. However, purposive and snowball sampling provided valuable insights and data for this topic because they enabled exploring the topic with the right participants. Therefore, truly relevant and credible information about work-life balance and workplace improvements could be found. When interviewing face to face, the researcher effect may occur. The interviewees may give a more positive image about themselves and the data may be distorted. In addition, there is a risk of mistranslation when interviewing participants in a different language and overall, working alone, especially with qualitative research, increases the possibility of errors in the data. However, by establishing validity and reliability with the means mentioned in the methodology section, a strong qualitative research could be conducted, and again, depth of detail and relevant information about better work-life balance and workplace practices could be found.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Main Findings

The findings of the research indicated that the perceived teacher work-life balance in Finland is satisfactory. However, the teacher workload has increased significantly. A teachers' work is also very seasonal since there are busier periods such as exam weeks, which increase considerably work, stress and pressure. Therefore, work-life balance fluctuates as well as the amount of flexibility. One finding is that teachers perceived flexible working hours to be a positive thing. However, it was found that flexibility is more beneficial for the work life than for non-work life. Flexible working hours can be risky since flexibility can easily lead to work colonializing the other aspects of life. Therefore, flexible working hours do not necessarily affect work-life balance positively. In addition, strategies were found to have a decisive role when utilizing flexible working hours to maintain good work-life balance.

6.2 Implications for International Business

This research provides deeper understanding of how flexible working hours are perceived to influence work-life balance. Since flexible work arrangements are commonly used internationally and the employee wellbeing is a contemporary topic of interest, it is important to know how people feel about the relationship between flexibility and work-life balance. The findings of this study can be used to develop the flexible working hours and work-life balance practices further. Since the study investigated the educational sector in Finland, Finnish schools and the educational sector may use the findings to improve teachers working conditions. In addition, the findings can be used internationally, to understand the differences in cultures and societies and to learn from them how things should or should not be done.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

Further research could investigate in more detail the perceived impact of flexible working hours in the educational sector in Finland. Since this study helps to understand this relationship but does not provide wide enough research in order to generalize the

results, further investigation is needed. Future research could analyze any gender, age or cultural differences between how people feel about flexibility and work-life balance. Research could examine what causes these differences and to what extent does the stage or situation of life and family affect this relationship. In addition, the research could compare the results internationally on how do different educational systems affect teachers' flexibility and work-life balance and how could the situation be improved.

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APPENDICES

Semi-structured interview base

1. What is your usual work day like?
2. What 3-4 words would you use to describe your workload and why have you chosen those words?
3. How would you rate your current work-life balance on a scale of 1-5: can you please explain your rating?
4. It is said that people in your profession, teachers, have lots of flexibility in their work. For example, there is only a short number of hours per day when you actually need to be on the work premises.

To what extent and in what ways would you describe your work as flexible?
What do you think about this flexibility (or lack of)?

How managers or colleagues affect your attitude towards flexibility?

To what extent does flexible working or flexible working hours affect your work atmosphere or your career?

How does flexible working hours affect your ability to perform your job-related tasks/ non-work tasks?

5. To what extent does your work spillover into your non-work life?

To what extent do you prefer to have boundaries between your work and non-work life and why?

6. How does flexible working help to combine/balance the demands of your work and personal life?
7. How do you manage to integrate your work and personal life? What strategies do you use and why?
8. To what extent does flexibility help you to manage your personal and limited resources such as time and energy?

Translation:

1. Millainen on tavallinen työpäiväsi?
2. Millä 3-4 sanalla kuvailisit työmäärääsi ja miksi valitsit nämä sanat?
3. Millaiseksi arvioisit työn ja elämän välisen tasapinon tällä hetkellä asteikolla 1-5? Voisitko selittää/perustella arviotasi?
4. Sanotaan, että ammatissasi olevilla, eli opettajilla, on paljon joustavuutta työssään. Esimerkiksi, vaadittu tuntimäärä varsinaisissa työtiloissa rajoittuu itse oppitunteihin ja muun työn voi hoitaa usein myös esim. kotoa käsin.
Missä määrin ja millä tavoin kuvailisit työtäsi joustavaksi? Mitä ajattelet tästä joustavuudesta (tai sen puutteesta)?

Miten johtajat tai työkaverit vaikuttavat asennettasi joustavuutta kohtaan?

Missä määrin joustava työskentely, tai työajat, vaikuttavat työilmapiiriin tai uraasi?

Miten joustavat työajat vaikuttavat kykyysi suoriutua työtehtävistäsi ja muun elämän askareistasi?

5. Missä määrin työsi läikkyy yli/vaiuttaa muuhun elämääsi?

Missä määrin suositt rajojen asettamista työsi ja muun elämäsi välille ja miksi?

6. Miten joustava työskentely auttaa yhdistämään/tasapainottamaan työn ja henkilökohtaisen elämän vaatimukset?

7. Miten onnistut yhdistämään työsi ja henkilökohtaisen elämäsi? Mitä strategioita käytät ja miksi?

8. Missä määrin joustavat työajat auttavat sinua hallitsemaan henkilökohtaisia ja rajallisia resursseja, kuten aikaa ja energiaa?

