



**“There Is No Up!”  
A Corpus-Assisted, Critical Thematic Analysis of  
Perceptions of Teachers in the Privately-Run  
English-Language Teaching Sector in the  
Republic of Ireland**

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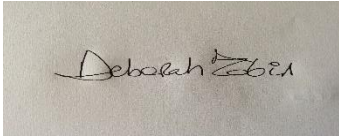
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**Abstract**

This study focusses on primary themes arising from interview and survey data discourses of English Language Teacher (ELT) participants. It reflects their evaluations and perceptions of privately-run, Irish-based, ELT school workplaces, as well as perceptions believed to be held of them by sector outsiders. Data are examined through a Corpus-Assisted, Critical Thematic Analysis lens. The research is undertaken against a backdrop of a global expansion of English as an international language, which has created increased demand for suitably qualified, experienced teachers. The ELT industry in Ireland is worth €2.3 billion per annum. Irrespective, Irish-based ELT teachers have, until recently, been something of a voiceless and invisible cohort within both ELT and the wider Irish, teaching profession. This mixed-methods study thus explores attitudes held by English-language teachers with direct experience of working in the Republic of Ireland, how teachers perceive their role within Irish-based ELT, and how workplace conditions impact this. Of key interest is metaphor that teachers use. Critical and corpus analysis of data saw motivation for entry to the sector emerge in a metaphorical ELT AS PATH, with a historical TEACHER AS BACKPACKER identity remaining pervasive in the contemporary, Irish ELT context. Thematic sector descriptions additionally found ELT AS PROFESSION consistently offset by ELT AS BUSINESS, necessitating a novel TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR identity. Finally, wider societal and ELT discourses saw cross-cohort language choices realised thematically and metaphorically in a sense of not being valued societally as a ‘real teacher’.

**Declaration**

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy represents my own work.



Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Deborah Mary Tobin

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my family, without whose unwavering love and constant support it would simply not have happened.

Thank you Mom, Dad, Eamon, Aaron and Devon. You are the rock upon which my life is built. I love you all.

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## **Glossary / List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

**ACELS** – Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services

**BrEng** – British English

**BNC** – British National Corpus

**CACDA** Corpus-assisted, Critical Discourse Analysis

**CADS** - Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies

**CDA** – Critical Discourse Analysis

**CELT** - Certificate in English Language Teaching

**CELTA** – Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults/Certificate in English Language Teaching to Speakers of Other Languages

**CL** – Corpus Linguistics

**C-MELT** – Corpus of Meetings of English Language Teachers

**DELTA** – Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

**EEL** – English Education Ireland

**EIL** – English as an International Language

**EFL** – English as a Foreign Language

**ELT** – English Language Teaching

**ESOL** – English to Speakers of Other Languages

**IrEng** – Irish English

**MEI** – Marketing English in Ireland

**MIP** – Metaphor Identification Procedure

**NS** – Native Speaker

**NNS** – Non-native Speaker

**PCN** – Progressive College Network

**QQI** – Quality and Qualifications Ireland

**SaFGELT** – Survey and Focus Group English Language Teacher Corpus

**SCDS** - Socio-Cognitive Discourse Studies

**SFL** - Systemic Functional Linguistics

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# **Chapter 1 Introduction**

## **1.0 Introduction**

An estimated two billion people speak English, one in every three worldwide using some variety of the language in diverse, sociocultural environments (Kachru 2015). Key driving factors in the creation of this global diaspora include the combined goals of Great Britain's desire for colonial expansion, coupled with cultural dissemination on the part of the post-Second World War US (Kachru 2015). British and American English models have hence been adopted as a lingua franca, the primary tool of global communication, administration, elitism and linguistic control (Phillipson 1992; Pennycook 1994, 1998; Kachru 2015, pp. 9-10; Jordan and Long 2022; Gazzola 2023; Alejo-González 2024 pp. 30-31).

The desire for English mastery among non-native speakers to fulfil personal and professional aspirations has seen increased, international demand for suitably-qualified, experienced English-language teachers (Kelly-Holmes and Wallen 2006, Murphy 2011; Copland, Garton and Burns 2014; Copland, Mann and Garton 2020; Jordan and Long 2022, pp. 244-245). The majority of students who learn English as an additional language do so via some sort of school system, with therefore little doubt about the central role played by teachers and educational institutions as key mediators in how English is dispersed worldwide (Seargeant 2012, p. 65; Jordan and Long 2022; Gazzola 2023). Schooling varies hugely from country to country, depending on local policy (Seargeant 2012, pp. 100-115; Chan and Walsh 2024). Many wishing to learn will opt for a study experience in a country considered a native, English-speaking land within 'inner-circle' parameters, a construct historically including the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Kachru 2015, pp. 154-159), and within which Ireland has become firmly positioned (Crystal 2003, pp. 62-63; Gazzola 2023).

## **1.1 Background and rationale**

Education is "a ritualization of the world" (Foucault 1972, p. 227). The international ELT sector has attempted to achieve such through focus on two objectives: English-language instruction for learners in outer- and expanding-circle countries, and as students enrolled in ELT courses in inner-circle countries (Pennycook 1994; Kachru 2015; Jordan and Long

2022). ELT has been one of the great growth industries of the past eighty years (McArthur 1998; Crystal 2003, p. 112; Jordan and Long 2022 pp. 236-239). The number of students in China alone exceeds the United States' population, with Chinese ELT valued at \$70 billion (Bryson 1991, p. 3; Jordan and Long 2022, p. 238). From such unprecedented expansion, issues have arisen. These range from availability of appropriate resources and English variety taught (Chatwin 1987, p. 184) to the cultural politics determining whether a native-speaking, or non-native-speaking teacher is best for given learners (Seargeant 2012; Hernandes 2018; Combe 2020; Nolan 2020; 2022). Kachru questions the "evangelical zeal" (1990, p. 15) behind certain developing world, ELT practices, with "weak theoretical foundations...of doubtful relevance to the sociological, educational and economic contexts of the Outer Circle". Similar concerns are raised within a European Union context:

Language policy and education function in a world which is increasingly dominated by market economies, even if exclusive reliance on market forces has shown itself to be theoretically, politically and economically suspect.

(Phillipson 2003, p. 145)

Scepticism on ELT theory and true motivation driving the sector globally has been voiced by Jordan and Long (2022). Perceptions of its teaching professionals also vary widely: Seargeant views ELT teachers as the "embodiment of the diversity of the language" (2012, p. 69), yet Pennycook has criticised stress placed on monolingualism and native-speaker bias in ELT classrooms, "closely tied to the political economy of global EFL<sup>1</sup>" (1994, p. 176). From such statements, one can conclude that contemporary ELT poses contradictory problems which "go to the very heart of how human language operates, and of the role it plays in lived experience" (Seargeant 2012, p. 179). Part of the dilemma lies in perceptions of where, precisely, the ELT sector is situated. Pennycook observes it "firmly located within a capitalist, market-oriented philosophy" (1994, p. 164), Yorio (1986, p. 670) painting a corporate picture of the sector and those within:

Second language programs can be viewed within this marketing framework...we [within the ELT industry] are suppliers of a product (or service) which consumers need...students are consumers who pay for our product directly (from their own pocket) or indirectly (through subsidies given to them or us)...we advertise the product...we hire personnel to

---

<sup>1</sup> English as a Foreign Language, the acronym often used when English is taught in Outer Circle countries.

deliver the product (teachers), and we build and administer the locations where the product changes hands.

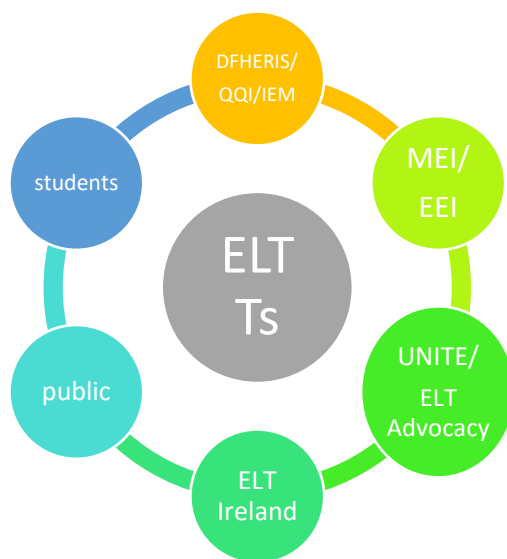
In contrast, in professional ELT circles English has been regarded “an incontrovertible boon” (Phillipson 1992, p. 8). For the majority of today’s learners, the process begins not long after infancy, a product of institutional education (Graddol 2006; Copland, Garton and Burns 2014; Gazzola 2023; Copland, Garton and Barnett 2023). Not only does this deem English “an essential cornerstone of the global capitalist system” (Phillipson 1992, pp. 8-10), creating huge demand for the language and its teachers, but also raises ELT’s status. The reality for many learners, particularly in the Third World, is that English-language competence remains “one of the fastest ways of escaping poverty” (Jordan and Long 2022, p. 239). Nonetheless, ELT has political, military, economic and cultural ramifications owing historically to British colonialism, and more contemporarily to what has, thus far, been the USA’s uncontested, superpower status (Phillipson 1992, pp. 23-24; Kachru 1997; 2015, pp. 139-141). Pennycook contends contemporary focus on English as an International Language (EIL), more accepting of regional varieties, has nevertheless “obscured the underlying political, cultural and ethical questions around English and English language teaching” (1994, p. 5).

Within the EU, Brock and Tulasiewicz (1994, p. 17) highlight language skills as reinforcing smoother socio-political, cultural integration between member states. Maastricht Treaty Article 126 outlined commitment among emergent, European Community member states to promoting a multi-cultural ethos through prioritisation of language instruction (Brock and Tulasiewicz 1994, p.131; Gazzola 2023). For example, the 1991 Lingua Project adopted by the Council of Ministers aimed to improve foreign-language competence through in-service teacher-training, tertiary foreign-language training, and professional, educational and vocational programme exchanges. This has led to Peck’s assertion that “Education is big business in Europe” (1998, p. 41), Bolognesi and Werkmann Horvat (2023, p. 80) adding how, “in an increasingly multilingual world, language learning has become even more important.”

## **1.2 The development of the ELT industry in the Republic of Ireland**

The English Language Education, or ELE2 sector, has existed in Ireland for over 50 years. It includes diverse providers and products, ranging from small, family-run, summer centres to multinational chains, such as Berlitz. Until late 2020, there were three ELE representative associations in Ireland: Marketing English in Ireland (MEI), Independent Language School Group (ILSG) and Progressive College Network (PCN); in early 2021 ILSG merged with MEI (ICEF Monitor 2021). Current estimates place over 150 English Language Teaching Organisations (ELTOs) in Ireland, the preferred term used by MEI to describe privately-owned and operating ELT language schools (English Language Education Ireland 2021). In August 2024, MEI rebranded itself as ‘English Education Ireland’ (MEI Ireland 2024), but for this study purposes, ‘MEI’ will remain the reference term. The Irish ELE sector regards itself “a proud ambassador for brand Ireland around the world” (English Language Education Ireland 2021, p. 9). For this study, the term ‘ELT’ will be employed rather than ‘ELE’, and ‘school’ preferred over ‘ELTO’.

In addition to ELE representatives, regulatory bodies fulfil ELT stakeholder needs in Ireland, illustrated in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1 Diagrammatic representation of where teachers are positioned within Irish ELT, amidst stakeholder and regulatory bodies, and members of the public.**

These include the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the Accreditation and Coordination of English Language Services (ACELS), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and the International

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<sup>2</sup> This is a more recent term adopted by the Irish-based ELT industry, particularly by Marketing English in Ireland (MEI), now English Education Ireland (EEI), going forward in the post-pandemic world.

Education Mark (IEM) regarding curriculum development, standards and delivery. Furthermore, ELT Ireland promotes Continuous Professional Development for ELT teachers, while ELT Advocacy Ireland, and the UNITE ELT Branch represent teachers on workplace issues. Necessary to include are students as stakeholders, and members of the general public, whose perceptions of ELT, and its teachers, feature strongly in this study.

The economic value of international students is worth a minimum €2.38 billion per annum to the Irish exchequer (Indecon 2019). The ELE industry is positioned firmly within this wider education sector, Ireland being the number one world destination for learners of English as a foreign language per capita in 2016 (O'Halloran 2018). An estimated student population of 106,000 in 2014-15 had a beneficial financial impact of €390 million to the Irish economy (Department of Education and Skills 2016, p. 56); this climbed to 204,000 international students staying an average of 6.5 weeks in 2019, proving that sector value had increased year-on-year. That same year, “combined direct, indirect and induced value of the sector exceeded €800 million” (English Language Education Ireland 2021, p. 4). Despite a pandemic-caused 73% drop in student numbers in 2020, MEI offers figures of 150,000 international students still attending ELTOs in Ireland per annum, placing the total sector value to the Irish economy, at time of writing, at “roughly €900 million” (ICEF Monitor 2021a).

Ascertaining how many teachers are directly employed in Irish-based ELT schools is challenging owing to the often seasonal, transient nature of the work, a fact reflected internationally (Jordan and Long 2022, p. 245). A consistent, yet conservative guesstimate lies somewhere around 1,350 (Willoughby 2019, pp. 2-3). The *ELE Sector Report* subsumes Irish teachers under “a wide range of highly-trained staff” of approximately 8,000 (English Language Education Ireland 2021, p. 14), hence ‘staff’ does not exclusively reference teachers. ELT schools employ student welfare administrators, host family liaison officers, marketing and management personnel, also influencing “thousands of additional jobs ranging from supply chain employees to workers in shops, transport, tourist attractions and other places where students and their overseas visitors spend money” (ibid, p. 4). Teachers must have at least an undergraduate degree in any discipline, in addition to a certificate in English language teaching (CELTA, CELT or equivalent), with “those in higher academic positions” holding a diploma in

English language teaching, typically DELTA (ibid, p. 14). Of central relevance to this study is the following:

The English language education (ELE) sector in Ireland goes largely unnoticed and is often poorly understood and under-appreciated. However, it is a significant export industry, bringing monetary, cultural, soft power and educational benefits to the country *with few, if any, negative impacts on the economy, jobs or services.*

(English Language Education Ireland 2021, p. 4; emphasis added)

Such a claim is in contradiction of media reportage over the past decade of substandard work practice, and sudden school closures, within the Irish ELT sector (Griffin and Donnelly 2015; Ní Aodha 2016; Hutton 2018; Pollack 2018; Thomas 2019; Malone 2023), the primary impetus for this study. The same document does, however, acknowledge that the sector has functioned with “no real support from successive governments and in a regulatory vacuum” (English Language Education Ireland 2021, p. 5).

### **1.3 Research questions**

This study aims to give voice to Irish-based ELT teachers, exploring perspectives and evaluations they hold of the sector, their workplace conditions, and how such conditions influence their views of their sectoral roles. The three research questions guiding it present as follows:

**RQ1:** What are primary themes arising from perceptions and concerns that English language teachers have of their workplace conditions within the private ELT school sector in Ireland?

**RQ2:** What language do these teachers use to describe their position within Irish ELT and the wider Irish teaching profession?

**RQ3:** How do variables of age, gender, or years of teaching experience influence how these ELT teachers use language to express their workplace status?

This study addresses complex issues governing absence of ELT teacher voice in the Republic of Ireland on concrete issues surrounding work conditions in privately-run

schools, teacher perceptions of Irish ELT, themselves, and their position within the wider ELT sector.

#### **1.4 Originality and relevance of study**

In a post-Brexit context, Ireland and Malta remain the two English-speaking, EU jurisdictions (O'Brien 2016, p. 9). This positions Ireland favourably for European and non-European nationals seeking English-language instruction (O'Grady in ICEF 2018; English Language Education Ireland 2021). Despite its lucrative nature (Section 1.2), teachers have not reaped equitable financial rewards, irrespective of fulfilling employer demands for postgraduate qualifications, consistent adherence to standards of excellence in pedagogical delivery, and expectations of participation in Continuous Professional Development (North, Mateva and Rossner 2007; Edwards 2017; Jordan and Long 2022, p. 205). Subsequent media revelations exposed what had been, in truth, ongoing causes of concern in ELT school workplaces (Doble 1997; De Verdon Cooney 2000; O'Keefe 2001; Walsh 2019, pp. 460-461), placing these issues firmly, for the first time, in the public arena.

Marchi and Taylor believe research begins not simply with collected data, such as the media coverage in Section 1.2, or academic observations on ELT (explored in Chapter 2), but “way before then...we need to pay more attention to what is often overlooked, in the ‘blind spots’ and the ‘dusty corners’ (2018, p. 585). Direct ELT teacher voice on work conditions in Ireland has been largely absent from academic discourse, while internationally there has been little appetite within the sector itself at school level, on ELT teacher-training courses, or among organisations promoting teacher professional development to enter discussion or debate on these issues (Jordan and Long 2022, pp. 245-250). This fact will be investigated in Chapter 2.

The illumination media sources offered from the mid-2010s (Barry 2015; Ní Aodha 2016; Hassey 2017) of ‘blind spots’ such as low, non-incremental pay rates, and airing of ‘dusty corners’ such as zero-hour contracts and overnight school closures gained such attention that the sector could no longer publicly deny issues pertaining to teacher job insecurity and precarity (Walsh 2019; Jordan and Long 2022). In response, then-Minister for Education, Mary Mitchell-O'Connor, sanctioned an independent investigation. The findings of this government-appointed mediator concluded that work conditions in

privately-run, Irish ELT schools were, for many of the teachers he had interviewed, indeed substandard (King 2019). Media focus had thus placed the serious issue of below-par work practice on public record, emphasising the pivotal contribution made by the press in raising public awareness of such inequality, whilst the Minister's response in calling for impartial examination of the sector reflects how changing public discourses, chronicled in news stories, may ultimately influence political action (Taylor 2022, p. 605). It is hoped that this study may go some way toward influencing both policymaking in regulation, and public perceptions of Irish-based ELT.

### **1.5 Personal observations instigating and influencing this study**

In addition to being a PhD researcher, I worked as an ELT teacher in the private sector for thirty years, in Ireland and abroad. My personal experience of substandard work conditions in the Irish context equated to issues being discussed in hushed whispers among teachers themselves. It was largely perceived and dismissed at official level as hearsay, anecdote, or the exceptional experiences of a handful of disgruntled employees, rather than a serious, widespread, sectoral reality on academic record. This has, in part, been due to what Jordan and Long identify as the difficulty in sourcing "reliable data" on these issues on any international scale (2022, p. 245); what findings they do garner paint "a sad picture of teachers' pay and working conditions" (ibid). Over the past ten years, however, such issues have reached crisis proportions in this country, culminating in aforementioned, multiple school closures and teacher job loss (Barry 2015; Ní Aodha 2016; Hassey 2017). The aim to investigate, first-hand, what ELT teachers themselves had to say about their work conditions is therefore timely, relevant, and necessary.

Two circumstances prompted this study, the first being the media revelations of school closures discussed above. As a senior teacher who was employed in a well-established, privately-run ELT school which strived for and adhered to standards of excellence in its practice towards both its student body and teachers, the media coverage was met with genuine shock. That fellow ELT teachers had, through lack of regulation, been subjected to such treatment prompted me to embark on action research, or reflective practice (Walsh and Mann 2015) at PhD level to contribute to what was a limited, existing body of knowledge.

Second, the study focus on metaphor was instigated by an ELT-school staffroom exchange. One breaktime, a dedicated, highly-experienced, middle-aged teacher and colleague of twenty years quite spontaneously uttered: “I just have to accept that in this business, there IS NO UP.” A sigh of resignation, and strong intonation placed on the final, capitalised phrase exemplified what Vaughan identifies as ‘backstage’ discourse, i.e., that which lies beyond classroom instruction parameters, “where professional successes and failures are discussed, critiqued and laughed about and the bonds of community and professional identity are forged” (2022, p. 478). It was a clear statement of indication that this co-worker saw no possibility of upward progression in their ELT teaching career. The same teacher, not long after, left ELT permanently.

From a metaphorical perspective, upward motion and mobility depict that which is positive, desirable and good (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Goatly 1997; Kövecses 2010; Bolognesi and Werkmann Horvat 2023, p. 37; Alejo-González 2024). My teacher-colleague’s words had struck me profoundly. As ELT teachers, much of our classroom interaction deals with idiomatic aspects of the English language (Moon 1997; Cameron and Low 1999; Hedge 2000, p. 114; McCarthy and O’Dell 2002; Harmer 2007, pp. 36-37; Kövecses 2010, pp. 231-249; McNamara 2019). Nevertheless, metaphor use, from a Cognitive Linguistics perspective as opposed to its more traditional, “decorative”, literary application, has until recently been under-researched in corpus linguistics (Deignan 2005; Alejo-González 2024, p. 1). That this teacher chose a metaphorical term through which to express and share something so personal tallied with Cameron’s observation that metaphors frequently appear as vehicle terms (in this instance, UP) in spontaneous talk, and typically present in emotionally-charged, discourse events (2012, p. 345). The statement was a prelude to what was ultimately a lifechanging decision taken and acted upon: the teacher’s ELT exit.

Vaughan (2022, p. 470) advocates strongly for focus on professional language in the workplace, as “a site of research that language teaching professionals are uniquely positioned to conduct”. This study strives to ascertain how ELT teachers themselves voice their position within the ELT sector, answering Walsh and Mann’s (2015) call for practitioner-driven, and data-led, reflective practice. Through conducting a survey to gather data on their experiences of workplace conditions in privately-run schools in the Republic of Ireland, exploring corpus-assisted, emerging themes produced in focus group interviews, and critiquing metaphorical language they used, this study aims to build a

picture of direct, lived, workplace experiences of these teachers. How these conditions impacted their language choices, and how these critiqued metaphors and their related themes express how empowered or disempowered they feel within Irish-based ELT is the primary focus. It hence seeks to satisfy scholarly recommendations for more ELT-teacher-driven studies, reminding us that “the classroom is not necessarily, nor should it be, the sole end of any ‘teaching-related’ research” (Vaughan 2022, p. 469).

## **1.6 Thesis overview**

This study is, at its core, a Corpus-Assisted, Critical Thematic Analysis of Irish ELT teacher perceptions and evaluations of their workplace conditions, focusing on what has been an under-researched area of academic investigation. It examines how ELT teachers either currently employed in, or with prior employment experience in privately-run schools in the Republic of Ireland perceive their status, and position themselves within wider Irish ELT. It explores direct, lived experiences of ELT teacher participants through a mixed-methods approach, drawing on complementary domains of enquiry to analyse what themes emerged from teachers’ discourse contributions, particularly metaphorically, and provides an account of what they said to address its three research questions.

The late Jan Blommaert identified a zeitgeist when “an event becomes ‘a problem’”, necessitating discursive work (2005, p. 4). For Blommaert, the object of critical investigation in contemporary society is the *voice*, “the way in which people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so” (ibid; italics Blommaert’s). Critical questions can suddenly emerge, influencing how data are collected, recorded, treated, and situated in time, place and occasion (Blommaert 2005, pp. 64-65). From such timing, *contact* or a forum in which stories can be circulated unfolds, and narratives become more finely-tuned through repetition (Hymes 1998; italics Hymes’s). Circumstance creates a unique opportunity, allowing access to previously invisible participants to come forward and be heard, “[forcing] all kinds of ‘hidden transcripts’ to the surface” (Scott 1990); visible and salient only temporarily, these stories index their place in wider, socio-political environments (Blommaert 2005, p. 66). The intense media attention from 2014 highlighting problematic, ELT workplace practices (Sections 1.2 and 1.4) led to a metaphorical ‘strike while the iron is hot’ response in the collection and analysis of study data, explored in depth throughout this thesis, structured into nine chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on international ELT teacher work conditions, while

Chapter 3 gives a breakdown of the theoretical framework of the study, including Critical Thematic Analysis, Corpus Linguistics, and Metaphor Analysis. Chapter 4 outlines who the study participants were, datasets collected, methodology employed and study limitations. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 each present detailed, thematic analyses of the different datasets, while Chapter 9 provides comment, conclusions and recommendations for further research.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.0 Introduction

This literature review presents prior studies about the ELT sector, internationally and in an Irish context. Historically, much academic attention has been given to how ELT teachers position themselves within ELT pedagogy and ELT as a community of practice. Teacher motivation and development tend to have dominated ELT-teacher-related literature: to illustrate, advanced searches reveal ‘teacher motivation’ examples in the *ELT Journal* scoring 1,478 articles dedicated to this subject, with ‘teacher development’ scoring 3,442. Significant work has been done on language teacher education (Bowers 1987; Stern 1991; Bowen and Marks 1994; Ur 1999; Hedge 2000; McKay 2002; Thornbury 2006; Harmer 2007; Scrivener 2011; Larsen-Freeman 2011; Walsh 2011; Lightbown and Spada 2013; Walsh 2013; Brown 2014; Farr, Farrell and Riordan 2019; Nguyen 2019; Copland and Donaghue 2019; Mann and Walsh 2019; Walsh and Sert 2019; McCarthy and Walsh 2024), language teacher identity (Varghese *et al.* 2005 ; Motteram 2016; Barkhuizen 2017; Escobar Urmeneta and Walsh 2017; Gray and Morton 2018; Yazan and Lindahl 2020; Copland, Mann and Garton 2020), reflective practice (Walsh 2013; Mann and Walsh 2017), and metaphors that describe teachers in their actor role of teaching (Munby 1986; Marchant 1992; Martinez *et al.* 2001; Cameron 2003; Harmer 2007; Allen 2015; Wright 2016; Choi and Liu 2020). In departing from pedagogical performance or Continuous Professional Development, attempts to conduct the type of “transformative research” that can bring about change to broader societal structures, especially “in neoliberal times, and within contexts of inequitable schooling practices” (Barkhuizen 2017, p. 10), thus requiring greater critique of how ELT discourses impact society and vice versa, have nevertheless mostly limited their scope to language teacher identity.

### 2.1 Historic lack of focus on teacher work-related issues

To begin, this review chapter takes a keen interest in workplace-related, ELT-teacher literature for very particular reasons. Academic studies exploring teacher perceptions of their work conditions in privately-run ELT schools have been scarce in an Irish context, despite gaining traction internationally (c.f. Pennington 1990; Wickham 2015; Stanley 2016; Codó 2018; Mercer 2021; Stainton 2018; 2021, p. 19; Strong 2022). Vaughan ’s

(2007) corpus-assisted analysis of teacher-talk within the Irish ELT community of practice is a notable exception, with Aherne (2014), Willoughby (2019) and UNITE ELT Branch (2020a; 2020b) making recent contributions on teacher perceptions and evaluations of privately-run, Irish ELT school workplaces. An advanced search of ELT teacher work conditions in Ireland in the *ELT Journal* garnered only 21 results, most noteworthy Walsh's (2019) critical examination of workplace precarity. Despite having global repercussions, "how workers subjectively process the insecurity that precarity brings remains somewhat unexplored" (Walsh 2019, p. 460). While unsurprising that *ELT Journal* should focus on 'frontstage', classroom activity rather than 'backstage', teacher-teacher discourse, and how characteristics and concerns of same are realised linguistically (Vaughan 2009; O'Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 242), it is, nevertheless, worth noting the publication's website aim: "The Journal links **the everyday concerns** of practitioners with insights gained from relevant academic disciplines" (Oxford University Press 2023, bold emphasis added). It is the present study's contention that workplace conditions are of primary concern to ELT teachers worldwide, acknowledging increased, contemporary emphasis on research findings having direct and beneficial societal impact (Copland and Creese 2015, p. 187).

Jordan (2021) is critical of leading, international teacher professional organisation IATEFL for its primary focus on teacher identity, ignoring "decent working condition and pay". Although studies by Farr *et al.* (2019) and Farr (2021) on ELT student-teacher identity did not find identifiable precarity in Irish ELT despite media reports to the contrary (Salisbury 2021; Section 1.4), this could have been due to their trainees' inexperience of, or full-time exposure to privately-run ELT workplaces. This in turn prompts claims that ELT professional discourses may not reflect ELT on the whole (Canagarajah 2016, p. 31; Breshears 2019, p. 27; Copland, Mann and Garton 2020). In an Irish context, Vaughan's (2009) 'backstage' ELT teacher discourse in meeting fora (i.e., outside classroom, 'frontstage' parameters) directly addresses this gap, acknowledging such hidden discourses to have not "thus far received as much attention" as merited (2007, p. 173). She identifies a tension between ELT research and practice, which has, to date, viewed examination of teacher frontstage discourse as more valid (*ibid*), mirroring Canagarajah's observation of previous sector discourses following a "somewhat circular history" (2016, p. 8).

Such omissions are key to this study. In particular are those examined by Breshears (2019), linking ELT teacher employment conditions with broader social, economic, and political factors. She identifies a decline in wealthier countries since the 1980s in the ‘standard employment relationship’ (SER) regulating post-war labour practice to generate economic growth and stability, providing workers with a full-time contract, and social benefits supported by policy and legal frameworks (Breshears 2019, p. 29). This positions ELT in the realm of precarious employment, i.e., temporary, part-time and low-paid, lacking benefits and collective representation (ibid, pp. 27-28; Walsh 2019; Jordan and Long 2022, pp. 246-248). It also sees ELT embedded within a wider, neoliberal system that commodifies language “as a skill which, in effect, can be bought and sold in job markets” (Block 2017, p. 44).

More research is required to ascertain from ELT teacher professional discourse what it is that they “actually *do*”, as opposed to “what teachers *should* be doing” (Vaughan 2007, p. 186, italics Vaughan’s). Teachers must be given an opportunity to honestly express their views on how and where they position themselves within the sector, meriting more discourses heard beyond classroom confines, something the present study has aimed to address. Precise details of its outline and locations are provided in Chapter 4. The study research questions focus specifically on Irish teachers at “the chalk face of language school ELT” (Stanley 2016, p. 2), complementing Phillipson’s belief that if ELT can contribute to greater social equality, a good place to start would be with the teachers within its ranks (1992, p. 319). Butler (2020) reiterates: “the one thing you need to teach English, even online, is, in fact, teachers”. An examination, therefore, of international research conducted on how lived experience of ELT teacher workplace conditions influences self-perceptions makes a worthwhile start, beginning with observed advantages of working in ELT.

## **2.2 Why ELT attracts teachers within its ranks**

Research has identified a number of positive reasons for choosing ELT as a career. For instance, the sector has been described as ever-evolving, yet progressive: one which will “borrow, appropriate and revise its discourses in response to changing social and intellectual contexts”, advocating ethical, inclusive language learning to empower the marginalized (Canagarajah 2016, pp. 31-33). Stanley’s (2016) study of Australian ELT concluded that, by and large, teachers were not driven primarily by money or job security,

supported by Longmate (2001, pp. 13-14), who observed part-time, US and Canadian teachers to have considered teaching a “calling” offering “rich non-monetary rewards”. Sun (2010) discovered similar, intrinsic motivation among internationally-surveyed ESOL/ELT teachers who loved their profession despite daily challenges, a recurring theme strongly reflected in the Irish context (King 2019; UNITE ELT Branch 2020a). Breshears (2019, p. 35) notes part-time or temporary ELT employment as “desirable” for teachers whose life circumstances permit, while Pennington (1990) found ESL/ELT teaching a popular choice among a range of teacher-types. From volunteers and short-term to longer-term career teachers, ELT was found to offer travel opportunities (a theme closely correlating with present study findings in Chapter 5), and a chance to teach language creatively. Pennington noted strong links between aspirations held by those who chose to enter the field, and what their work required of them, with practitioners “basically satisfied” (1990, pp. 59-60), aligning with Australian findings of TESOL/ELT as an attractive, “horizontal career movement into the adult [teaching] sector” for primary and secondary school teachers (McKnight 1992, pp. 20-21). Given increased focus on equity policies in Australia, McKnight identified an “indispensable” role for TESOL/ELT teachers to fill (*ibid*), while Edstam’s exploration of US public school ESL/ELT teachers found participants empowered by refusal to be “bound to outdated notions” (2004, p. 2), which perceived their ELT role as limited in scope (explored in Chapter 8).

Many Australian-based teachers held ‘portfolio careers’, ELT contributing only one strand to their income stream (Stanley 2016). The phenomenon of entrepreneurship, from the identified keyword ‘entrepreneur’ in Chapter 4, is significant in the Critical Thematic Analysis of this study in Chapter 7. Others had migrated to ELT from highly-paid jobs, or were of independent means (Stanley 2016), similarly observed in this study at key points. Teachers appreciated the flexibility ELT offered (McKnight 1992, p. 24; Stanley 2016, pp. 3-4), were intrinsically motivated, and appreciated interaction with “diverse, interesting and sometimes well-travelled students and colleagues”, expressing a joy in feeling that students needed them (Stanley 2016, pp. 3-4). For many in these fortunate circumstances, ELT as a career choice was a source of great pleasure, and fun.

There is an added opportunity of being supported by ELT professional networks. Proliferation in the growth of groups and associations has increased a focus on professionalisation of the sector internationally, such as the British-based IATEFL and CELTA in Cambridge, the US-based TESOL, the Australian-based ELICOS (Varghese

*et al.* 2005, p. 27; Harmer 2007, pp. 421-422; Jordan and Long 2022, p. 193) and ELT Ireland in an Irish context. What is more, schools are increasingly organising on-site workshops for teachers to enhance their pedagogy in a supportive, CPD-driven environment, strong commitment to which has emerged thematically in an Irish context (Tobin and Bennett 2023). This is described in Chapter 6 among the study cohort. IATEFL (2023) promotes itself as “a global professional membership association”, encouraging ELT practitioners to “make contact with one another and share ideas”, demonstrating commitment to providing local and international professional support.

Wright (1988) and Edstam (2001, p. 18) highlight an empowerment felt among teachers when they themselves create a strong, professional identity, in turn enabling learners to reach their maximum potential. A British Council survey found positive support among IATEFL members and non-members for conference attendance, and the strong contribution this makes towards professional development (Borg 2015). CPD focus is believed “key to sustaining and enhancing teacher quality” (*ibid*, p. 35), and explored in present study findings in Chapter 6. Edstam (2004, pp. 2-3) highlights increased ELT professionalism as particularly beneficial to female teachers, encouraging autonomy. King (2019, pp. 20-21) describes dedication Irish-based ELT teachers held, the sense of reward felt when students “flourish” and the “enjoyable, stimulating career” that ELT is, themes given further critique in the analysis chapters of this study. Davis (1999) suggests formation of teacher peer groups at the exclusion of management, in bestowing and maintaining enhanced professional status; the teacher-led ELT Ireland, explored in Chapter 6, equates to this in an Irish context (O’Keeffe in Ragsdale 2020, p. 33; Lahiff 2020).

The literature in this section reflects research that paints a positive picture of ELT teacher perceptions of their chosen career. There are, nevertheless, aspects of the same sector that have been highlighted as challenging, in some respects, detrimental to teacher work lives, now investigated.

### **2.3 How ELT sector challenges impact teacher work-life**

Research demonstrates how historic difficulties both within the sector and wider society continue to impact teachers. As an example, a pilot study on the career paths of UK-based, ELT teachers identified a sectoral boom between the 1970s and mid-1980s,

coinciding with increased numbers of international schools within the EU, resulting in a demand “explosion” for practitioners (Kennedy and Phillips 1989). This would suggest, particularly in high-season, summer months where teacher shortages reach crisis-point, a “seller’s market” work environment. On the contrary, salaries decreased substantially at this time (ibid, p. 22), ascribed to a collapse in what had once been a lucrative, Middle Eastern, ELT market triggered by late 1970s, regional unrest (O’Clery 2008, pp. 29-38). This worldwide plunge in previously elevated, ELT salaries has not, to date, appeared to have readjusted (Kennedy and Phillips 1989, pp. 23-24; Jordan and Long 2022). The issue of ongoing low pay and its impact is now discussed, broadening out to wider, identified ELT workplace issues, such as precarity.

### 2.3.1 Low remuneration and social status

Consistently low, ELT salary observations tally with McKnight’s “horizontal rather than vertical mobility” findings in Australian TESOL (1992, p. 30). It could not be ascertained if this were due to genuine lack of opportunities, or if ELT attracted teachers less inclined to seek promotion (ibid, p. 23). Johnston (1997) found discursive life histories of Polish-based teacher, study participants to have interacted in equally complex ways with wider social, economic and political discourses. Breshears further observes marginalization of Canadian-based ESL teachers, rendered “lowest of the low” among the teaching community, a metaphor explored further in Chapter 8, reflecting wider, complex, societal influences which prompted her challenge of assumptions that “professionalism is primarily the responsibility of the teacher” (2004, pp. 23-24). The fact is that this situation has existed since first highlighted in the 1990s (Auerbach 1991, p. 1; Breshears 2019, p. 27), with many teachers found to be operating in “difficult physical and psychological conditions”, without job security or benefits, in a profession that did not enjoy the status of more established ones, like medicine or law (Johnston 1997, p. 682). The juxtaposition of ELT as a profession, and ELT as a business, is a core issue examined thematically and metaphorically in Chapters 6 and 7.

Stanley (2016) observes a “shelf-life” for Australian teachers, with low, non-incremental salaries a core problem, mirroring McKnight’s (1992) revealed landscape twenty-five years previously. A well-intended, ‘step-system’ remuneration model, aimed at rewarding expertise, culminated in doing “more harm than good”, with experienced teachers dismissed when they became too expensive for schools to keep (Stanley 2016,

pp. 5-8). Such a fact relates directly to this Irish-based study context, explored in Chapter 7. Market forces, rather than governing bodies, have ended up controlling hiring standards (Lortie, 1975, pp. 23-24; MacLeod 2004); such deregulation demonstrates teacher workplace challenges when schools alone are responsible for ensuring pay is “sufficient and appropriate” at every level of teaching experience (Roberts 2020, p. 8). Furthermore, Pennington (1990), Crookes and Arakakai (1999), Breshears (2004) and Roberts (2020) have all critiqued how poor working conditions and low pay hinder good professionalism, or “internal quality of teaching” (Englund 1996, p. 77).

There are identifiable reasons for this. Nunan (2001b), for example, highlights a quartet of specific problems impeding professionalism in paid TESOL employment: 1) irregular advanced, sector-specific training; 2) inconsistent standards of practice and certification; 3) theoretical and empirical bases that are not teacher-led; and 4) advocacy that has “little power or influence over public opinion” (ibid, p. 8, numbers added). Combined, these four factors have dogged ELT on an international scale. Further influences are significant from a CDA perspective. Johnston *et al.* (2005) identify a tendency for studies on professionalism to focus solely on teacher knowledge of subject matter, attitude to CPD, and classroom performance, historically restricting and rooting teacher needs within these sole parameters at academic level. In delivery of post-lesson-observation feedback, Copland and Donaghue (2019, pp. 411-413) note a passivity induced by teacher-trainers, leaving their trainees “little opportunity for discussion, reflection and professional growth”. Pennington sees professional recognition as key to ensuring work satisfaction, favourable career conditions being something ESL educators “desire and deserve” (1990, p. 59). Action research, whereby problems are investigated and solutions found by teachers themselves (Harmer 2007, p. 414; Walsh 2013) has traditionally been positioned within confines of curricula and classroom delivery, to the exclusion of social, political and cultural contexts in which teachers find themselves (Johnston *et al.* 2005, pp. 53-56; Sun 2010; Breshears 2019, p. 27; Section 1.2). Breshears (2019, p. 27) challenges such limitation, and takes a wider, more critical approach to ELT workplace discourses, stating action research should primarily focus on “conditions that enable instructors to perform the job of English language teaching well and for the occupation to gain greater credibility”.

Thus poor remuneration, job insecurity, and low social status have been consistently identified over a thirty-year, ELT timeline (Wright 1988, p. 23; Kennedy and Phillips

1989; Pennington 1990; Auerbach 1991; McKnight 1992; Johnston 1997; O’Keeffe 2001, p. 15; Parsons 2001; Longmate 2001; Breshears 2004, 2019; Wickham 2015; Wright 2016; King 2019; O’Keeffe in Ragsdale 2020, p. 33; Jordan and Long 2022). This has led to increasing numbers of researchers’ convictions of ELT’s firm positioning within the realm of ‘precarious employment’ (UNITE ELT Branch 2020b; Walsh 2019; Jordan and Long 2022, pp. 246-248), calling for greater, in-depth examination of the sector from critical discourse perspectives.

### 2.3.2 ELT workplace conditions and issues surrounding precarity

ELT has undeniably contributed to economic precarity for many of its teachers (see Section 1.2). Workplace precarity is “characterized by uncertainty, insecurity and a lack of control over how work is performed” (Lewchuk *et al.* 2017, p. 3; Pembroke 2018, p. 4). Breshears (2019, p. 31) identifies “low wages, a high reliance on part-time employment, uncertainty about ongoing work, threats of funding cuts, lack of adequate benefits, lack of administrative support, and excessive unpaid work” as converging factors in Canadian ELT teachers’ daily lives, creating “more or less bearable working situations”.

An example of such Irish-based, on-record, ELT precarity was the overnight liquidation of International House Galway on 26 January 2023 (Granirer 2023). One of one hundred and fifty schools in a global network, IH Galway continued to advertise on its social media two weeks prior to its closure (Packer 2023), while an inspection of the same school’s website on 01 February, 2023 (International House Galway 2023) found it “still up and running, and apparently touting for business” (Granirer 2023). Up to two hundred students were impacted, requiring relocation to new schools (Donnelly and Hyland 2023). In response, the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) urged the government to expedite implementation of the International Education Mark (IEM), a quality assurance scheme under which Irish-based, ELT schools would be obliged to pay into a bond “to safeguard international students’ investment in their education” (ICOS in Packer 2023). This bond protects students, yet uncertainty remains over whether the protection will be extended to teachers (Packer 2023). While it is imperative that student welfare is prioritised in such events, it must be stated that of seven, online media reports of this very specific closure (ICOS 2023; Knott 2023; Malone 2023; Granirer 2023; Sport GBFM

2023; Donnelly and Hyland 2023; Packer 2023), only one mentioned the welfare of the International House teachers (Packer 2003), underscoring need for the present study.

Whilst Pennycook casts a more critical eye over ELT sector discourses (1994, p. 69) highlighting ELT-addressed, global power imbalances (e.g., in roles of women, for ethnic-minority students, and in social-class structure), its teachers are not listed among those afflicted. Historically, teachers have not been perceived as disadvantaged, or at risk of precarity, in ELT narratives. Absence of direct teacher voice on the issue of precarity is an irony given, as Harmer highlights, “one of a teacher’s chief physical attributes is the voice” (2007, p. 425), extended by Shrier’s belief that “the voice that teaches world languages should be the voice that is most listened to and esteemed” (1993, p. 120). Voice, in the Canadian context, gave unionized ELT teachers increased earning power over non-unionized counterparts (Breshears 2019, p. 33), challenging and diminishing precarity. Criticism has been levelled against professional associations such as IATEFL and TESOL, potential teacher voices which retreat from discussions surrounding pay, lack of benefits and precarity-related, job insecurity, despite member calls for prioritisation of such debate (Sun 2010; Jordan and Long 2022, p. 248). Breshears insists dialogue is needed within these organisations “regarding their advocacy responsibilities” concerning teacher work conditions (2019, p. 33), while Sun (2010, p. 152) equally highlights advocacy “a paramount issue” in addressing precarity-related issues.

Perceptions of ELT teachers are not limited to those within the sector. Wider societal influences, such as those included in Figure 1.1 (Section 1.2) must also be considered.

### 2.3.3 Societal perceptions of ELT teachers

Historic and contemporary factors have shaped how ELT practitioners are perceived, which in turn impact how teachers perceive themselves. Pennycook (1994), for instance, links overt, colonial exploitation practices to more subtle, covert forms in which English has played a significant role. By extension, he postulates whether the positioning of teachers within (or exclusion from) certain discourses on wider ELT teaching practices is entirely coincidental (*ibid*, pp. 131-140). Indicating positivist and structuralist paradigms historically presenting ELT as a solely benign, abstract, metaphorical entity which is ‘natural, neutral and beneficial’, Pennycook believes it a discipline to have existed in something of a vacuum, concerned only with questions of linguistic description, at the

expense not only of social, cultural or political understandings of language (1994, p. 141; Sections 1.1-1.2), but such issues in general.

This vacuum, so to speak, within which ELT has traditionally resided has led to contemporary calls for more critical examination of the sector and its discourses. Application of ‘political economy’ (Block, Gray and Holborrow 2012; Block and Gray 2016), an inter-disciplinary, social-scientific field of inquiry focusing on relationships between the individual and society, the market, and the state, seeks to comprehend the interrelation of social institutions, their activities and capitalism (Block 2017, p. 35). Particular attention is focussed on who precisely wields power in the production, allocation and consumption of resources (Mosco 2009; Ravenhill 2014). Political economy constitutes what Block identifies as a necessary “new turn” in research, encouraging greater engagement with, and investigation of, broader political and economic issues, through an applied linguistics lens (2017, p. 35). This emphasises greater need for a Critical Discourse Analysis dimension. The action research for this study strives to achieve same, borne from “the collective realisation that we are living in times...in which societies are becoming more socioeconomically stratified and unequal instead of less so” (Block 2017, p. 36). This has implications for teachers that have not always been advantageous. Given dearth to the point of virtual absence of research linking issues around ELT to political economy (Block 2017, p. 51), there is “much fertile ground for such intersectional work”, considering the global value that English competence has attained as a marketable skill (*ibid*, p. 43). The theme of political economy is revisited in analysis Chapters 6 and 7.

For instance, an area requiring a more critical gaze is one which has subtly, but invariably influenced ELT operators’ and students’ preferred teacher-type: historical, yet commonly-held ELT tenets that the ‘ideal’ teacher is native-speaking (Phillipson 1992, p. 185; Medgyes 1994; Canagarajah 2016, p. 9; Copland, Garton and Mann 2016; Copland, Mann and Garton 2020), and preferably, white (Butler and Ragsdale 2020). Canagarajah observes this as linked to a post-colonial vestige based on “purportedly altruistic motivation that these [native-speaker English] varieties will empower developing communities” (2016, p. 18; see also Allen 1967). This has created a kind of apartheid in the privately-run, ELT sector for many appropriately qualified, non-native-speaker teachers (Phillipson 1992, p. 185; Maley 1992, pp. 97-98, Pennycook 1994, p. 137; Varghese *et al.* 2005, pp. 25-28; Harmer 2007, pp. 118-20; Hernandez 2018, Combe

2020; Nolan 2022). It is particularly acute for brown, or black-skinned teachers, prompting Butler and Ragsdale's (2020, p. 5) emphatic statement: "The market is racist and UK schools condone it". Accusations of ELT school complicity in such long-held practices constitute what Dabiri (2020, p. 3) identifies as "structural ways racism impacts upon black life". That these practices have gone unchecked for so long exemplifies what Gray cites as blatant examples of sweeping instances of racism "under the carpet of 'cultural differences'" (2020, p. 31). The emergence of English as an International Language (EIL) means there is no longer one, single, 'correct' form transmitted, local distinctions and variations bringing richness to the classroom experience, validating contributions of native and non-native-speaking ELT teachers alike (Young and Walsh 2010; Copland, Mann and Garton 2020). While Harmer (2007, p. 119) and Medgyes (1992) identify a confidence and idiomatic competence among native-speaking teachers, a non-native teacher's familiarity with local customs and learning preferences, combined with proven ability in foreign language mastery, lead Harmer (2007, pp. 119-120) and Carless (2006) to suggest a Native English Teacher (NET)/Local English Teacher (LET) collaboration, particularly in non-native-speaking school contexts.

Farrell outlines a "well-established tradition" of private and public-sector EFL teaching in Ireland (2017, p. 62). Despite nearly 80% of the world's teachers being of non-native-English-speaking origin (Canangarajah 1999), this statistic does not appear to have diminished prejudice in Irish ELT. An investigation of hiring practices in forty-six privately-run, Dublin-based ELT schools chronicled nearly 22% to have openly promoted 'nativeness' on their websites or in promotional brochures, as "major characteristics of teachers in their staff" (Hernandes 2018, pp. 31-32). Nolan (2020, pp. 42-53) found evidence of native-speaker status "an overwhelmingly advantageous position" at the teacher-training phase of Irish-based, ELT professional development, despite native-speaker, student-teacher participants on the same course demonstrating not a hint of "an attitude of superiority in relation to their non-native speaker counterparts". Phillipson debunks such 'native-speaker fallacy' as an anachronistic, "white man's burden [...] metamorphosed into the British native-speaking teacher's burden" (1992, p. 179). His embodiment of the ideal, foreign-language teacher in a European context mirrors Britten's: someone with near-native proficiency, from a similar cultural and linguistic background as their learners, who, having mastered a second language, may be better-qualified than native speakers (1985, p. 116; Phillipson 1992, p. 195; Harmer 2007, p. 119; Copland, Mann and Garton 2020). Nonetheless, it appears perceptions of inferiority

are not confined to non-native speaking teachers. Farrell's corpus investigation of Irish-based teachers observes: "the viewpoints and practices of EFL teachers from Ireland have been overlooked in the suitable target Englishes debate" (2017, p. 22), where Irish English, "the robust national variety spoken by the Irish people" (O'Keeffe 2011, p. 57) has often been side-lined for Standard British English, target varieties in Irish ELT programmes (Farrell 2017, p. 60). By extension is the theme of teacher inferiority complex, examined in Chapter 8.

Crookes and Arakakai (1999) and Copland and Donahue (2019) acknowledge the difficult demands of the daily, ELT teacher workload. There can, however, be much subjectivity to the term 'difficult': circumstances favoured by one teacher might be hardship for another (Pennington 1990, p. 65). To illustrate, Kuchah (2016, pp. 150-151) questions first-world interpretations of 'difficult' in contemporary ELT in Cameroon. His depictions contrast with earlier references (e.g. West 1960) of teachers coping with searing temperatures, huge class sizes and minimal resources, with perhaps sub-standard English of their own, hence he suggests Maley's (2001) description of "a poorly-paid teacher" more applicable to modern settings. Regardless, Johnston's empirical findings affirm ELT as "an unstable, marginalized, impermanent occupation" in which teachers lack status and power, trying to do "a highly creditable job in very tough circumstances" (1997, pp. 703-707), Johnston further concluding that in Poland, both students and teachers were "most disempowered" (ibid). For many Polish-based ELT teachers, it was simply not in their interests to remain in the profession. Improvements in British-based ELT have brought greater prospects and security to state-sector employment; teachers no longer need to "feel tied to the [ELT] profession" (Kennedy and Phillips 1989, p. 24). Nevertheless, in private-sector ELT, high qualifications have continued to be required for, generally, low-paid teaching positions, with "lack of any machinery" for teacher-employer dialogue (ibid), a contemporary reality explored in Chapter 6. This raises questions of how ELT is positioned in a professional context, what a profession is and what it means to be a professional from a societal perspective.

Maley indicates "anarchic diversity" (1992, p. 98) to be a problematic, ELT feature which "characterizes (or bedevils) it", and offers generic truths distinguishing state-sector teaching from private. The former is rooted in a textbook-and-syllabus-based, classical-humanist tradition, with teachers who conform; the latter tends towards flexible innovation, concerned with the wants and needs of paying clients, yet liable to sacrifice

quality and professional standards for profit (ibid, p. 97). Such a dichotomy leads to Maley's assertion that "clearly, the professional interests of teachers and their employers only partially coincide" (ibid), supporting O'Keeffe's (2001, p. 15) statement that if Irish ELT truly wants professional enhancement, "greater commitment, not from teachers, but from language school owners, universities or whoever that employer may be" is crucial, together with "development of stronger teacher networks [...] so that teachers bring *themselves* together in pursuit of professionalism" (ibid, p. 17; italics O'Keeffe's). This dichotomising of ELT as a profession and business is given thorough examination in analysis Chapters 6 and 7, with the issue of professionalism next discussed.

## **2.4 How interpretations of professionalism in ELT impact teacher prospects**

Increased focus on distinctions between professionalism and professionalisation within teaching in general (Herbst 1989), and ELT over more than three decades (O'Keeffe 2001; Sun 2010; Breshears 2019) should have made positive contributions to its teachers' workplace standing. This, however, does not appear the case (Apple and Jungck 1992; Nunan 2001b; Johnston *et al.* 2005; Breshears 2019, p. 28). Over thirty years ago in a US context, Wright ascribed this to metaphorical "growing pains of an evolving profession", observing a then "double-edged sword" to ELT's youthful status, its teaching cohort "a fledgling group" (1988, p. 23). During a similar timeframe, McKnight pinpointed a certain immaturity of the Australian profession (1992, p. 30). However, Canagarajah (2016, p. 7) has also acknowledged more recent need for TESOL "as a recently formed professional community [...] to establish its autonomy", suggesting a continued dilemma with regard to the professional standing of ELT and, by extension its teachers in a more contemporary context.

Doble (1997) suggests four criteria in determining teaching professionalism: "commitment, an adequate body of knowledge, autonomy" and, most significantly for this study focus, "status and prestige". Strong evidence supporting the existence of the first two leads to O'Keeffe's affirmation of a past, healthy, Irish-based, ELT status (2001, p. 16) which she believes will extend into a post-Brexit future (in Ragsdale 2020, p. 33). Nevertheless, weak presence to total absence of the latter two criteria has been problematic for teachers, impacting social status, prestige and workplace conditions in the Irish Republic (Section 2.3.2), with teacher autonomy observed as restricted to how their actions influence profit for their school (Doble 1997, p. 63; O'Keeffe 2001, p. 16).

This prompts debate as to whether Irish ELT can entice graduates to remain within, “and so become part of a ‘profession’” (O’Keeffe 2001, p.15) given lack of full-time, permanent, pensionable, contracted opportunities, or a dedicated ELT union in both private and public sectors (O’Keeffe 2001, p. 15; in Ragsdale, 2020, p. 33).

Descriptions by one Australian Director of Studies of the ideal teacher detail the “volunteer-like” nature of the sector, profiling a candidate aged 50-60, of “flexible economic means” as “the right kind of person...like gold” (Stanley 2016, p. 6). This is consistent with findings of work satisfaction increasing with age (Pennington 1990, p. 70). Such model ELT teachers are not motivated by money or on any career path, love interacting with young people, are content with constantly shifting timetables, and are “moveable little parts that enable the machine to keep going” (Stanley 2016, p. 6). However, Johnson (1986, pp. 59-60) and Pennington (1990, p.76) challenge the belief that teachers are solely motivated by intrinsic rewards:

Fair pay and benefits, job security, reasonable workload, recognition of professional qualifications of self and others, participation in decision-making, good physical working conditions, quality materials, and quality systems for structuring and coordinating the work and the people of the organisation.

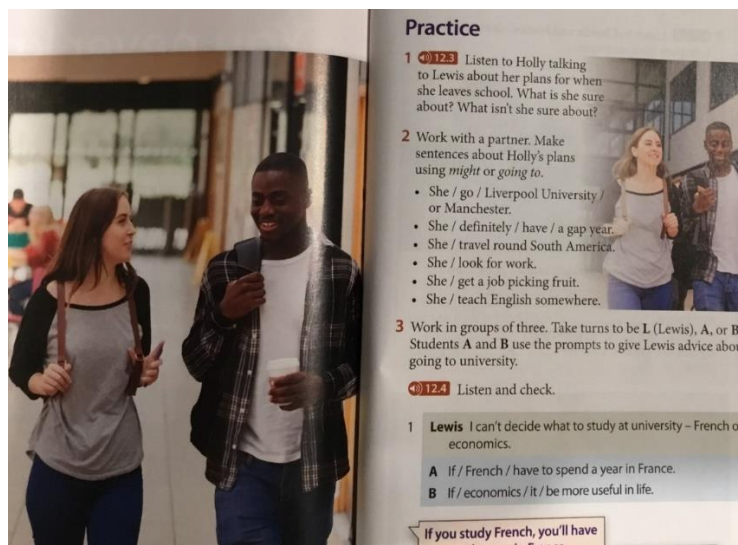
(Pennington 1990, p. 76)

While Johnson (1986, pp. 73-74) advises “efforts to retain outstanding teachers should probably focus on ensuring that they can do their best work without disruption or financial hardship”, Johnston observes ELT as particularly suiting married women with high-earning partners, who accept flexibility in a ‘charity’-like, teaching job (1997, pp. 699-704). In Ireland, O’Keeffe suggests ‘vocation’-like, traditional views of teaching foisted upon ELT, coupled with a “universality to the notion of TEFL as a holiday from real life and real work”, hence outlines distinction between “doing something in a *professional* way, and being a socially-defined *professional*” (2001, p. 14, italics O’Keeffe’s). Edstam (2004, p. 4) is sceptical of both the ELT professionalization model and that of general teaching, noting it a weapon of ideology overvaluing patriarchal traits of competition, hierarchy, reward and elaborate credential systems, and devaluing female motivations of personal achievement, job satisfaction and nurturing (ibid; Biklen 1987, p. 18). Pennington (1990, p. 81) finds “considerable room for improvement” in ELT regarding status and concrete rewards for teachers. This is owing to a tendency towards pricing teacher worth on day-to-day, school overheads, and ancillary-staff salaries (e.g.,

administrators, receptionists, cleaners) in what is, first-and-foremost, a for-profit business, and underlines the dilemma of certain, outside stakeholders (e.g., agents) accounting for disproportionate amounts of school outgoings (Stanley 2016, p. 8). This to some degree explains observations of ELT as “different” (Maley 1992, p. 99). Whilst expecting all its stakeholders to have identical needs and aspirations is unrealistic, he acknowledges this does not need to be “an impediment to ‘professional’ solidarity” (ibid). How teacher worth, and solidarity among teachers, emerged linguistically in the present study is explored in Chapters 6-8.

Hipsher (2010) does not regard lack of qualifications as a hindrance to native, English-speaking teachers, while a similar view presents in a popular A2-level, ELT coursebook series. In a listening practice exercise, two final-year secondary-school students, Holly and Lewis, are discussing plans for when they finish second-level schooling. Holly’s listed choices include: go to university, have a gap year, travel around South America, look for work, get a job picking fruit, teach English somewhere. At no point in either the lead-in or main activity is mention made of, or alluded to, Holly’s credentials as a teacher, other than an accompanying photo which presents Holly as a white female, and the listening activity itself, which ascertains that she is a British-accented, native-speaker (Soars *et al.* 2019, pp. 120-121, see Figure 2.1). Lack of professional qualifications notwithstanding, this coursebook extract exemplifies what, from a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, Jordan and Long (2022, p. 264) regard as a stereotypical, “glossy celebration of consumerism” portrayed in such textbooks “which appeal to middle-class,

aspirational, internationally-mobile individuals, to the exclusion of the poor, the unemployed and the marginalized everywhere.”



**Figure 2.1: Textbook exercise depicting Holly describing ELT as an option for funding travel (Soars, Soars and Hancock 2019, pp. 120-121).**

Hipsher's opinion, however, is one many regard as undermining ELT as both a skill and discipline (Freeman 1992; Thornbury 2001; Breshears 2004; VNExpress International 2022). Pennington (1989) concurs with Blaber and Tobash (1989, p. 4) in the firm belief that until the field's "unique" characteristics are acknowledged, and ELT professionals given comparable worth to their non-ELT peers, "it will be difficult to resolve or even address many salary, security and benefit issues". Nevertheless, on teacher attitudes to their own aspirations, Kennedy and Phillips (1989, p. 25) reported a "vagueness...even fecklessness" displayed by many in response to the question *What are your longer-term career plans?* This is at odds with what Johnston (1997, p. 703) would identify as being 'professional': displaying long-term dedication to one job only, done to the best of one's ability, and earning a "respectable" salary. Very few British respondents in Kennedy and Phillips' 1989 study seemed motivated by either a desire to teach, or to discover more about ELT, consistent with Johnston's observation of "lack of agency", or stated career path progression among his Polish cohort (1997, pp. 691- 698). The desire to teach is investigated thematically in Chapter 5, whilst longer-term career plans of participants in this Irish-based, study context will be explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

Many of the British study participants stated "going overseas" as primary motivation for entering ELT (Kennedy and Phillips 1989). This remains consistent in a more contemporary context (Davies 2020, pp. 28-29), reflecting Doble (1997) and O'Keeffe's

(2001, p. 15) observations of Irish ELT teacher, professional attitudes, and is given thematic investigation in Chapter 5. It has prompted views of ELT as the “stop-gap form of employment” (Pennington 1990, p. 82) exemplified in Figure 2.1. Doble (1997) suggested a tendency for past candidates to “wander” into the field, a metaphor also explored in Chapter 5. Whilst the British study accepts ELT may provide a passport to travel pretty much anywhere, Stanley (2016) outlines problematic, “social imaginaries” confining the sector to a ‘teach-and-travel’ discourse, as presented in Figure 2.2, where *EL Gazette* features “a teaching holiday in Ireland” that will provide an “invaluable opportunity for international teachers seeking a sense of adventure, culture and heritage” (Kenny 2023, p. 30).

## FEATURE



With beautiful scenery, a rich history and a welcoming population, you could well be tempted to head to the Emerald Isle, says Alannah Kenny, of English in Ireland

Ireland is a dynamic, lively, modern country with a young population and a successful, tech-oriented economy, but also remains a country steeped in culture and tradition, where music, conversation and making friends matters. It is small island nation, but also a dynamic and open society.

language teaching career in 2014 in Costa Rica, but is now settled in Ireland. “I have been an English teacher since 2014,” he says. “I started my journey in Costa Rica and have lived in South Korea, Czech Republic, Spain and Italy before I arrived in sunny Ireland in 2021. These teaching thrasral verbs in class and

Ireland is renowned for its beautiful, unspoiled countryside and scenery. The rugged landscapes and outdoor tourist attractions of the Wild Atlantic Way are perfect for scenic excursions. Some of the most popular sites include the Cliffs of Moher in the mid-west, the Connemara National Park and the Binn

**Figure 2.2:** *EL Gazette* article example of the ‘teach-and-travel’ practice.

While this accentuates a positive experience, the ‘teach-and-travel’ narrative has, undeniably, contributed to a “soft-underbelly” of practice that has brought international ELT into disrepute (Stanley 2016; Thornbury 2001, p. 391; VNExpress International 2022). Despite Copland, Mann and Garton's findings (2020, p. 352) of professional commitment among their native-English-speaking teacher cohort abroad, other ELT employment scenarios report “commercial operators [who] see a fast buck in hiring native-speaker transients” (Maley 1992, p. 98). In such a landscape, Maley doubts ELT can ever achieve full, professional status, acknowledging teacher career prospects would

be “immeasurably enhanced by the closer regulation and consequent recognition” of what it is they do (1992, p. 99).

The *Centre for British Teachers* report observes sectoral shortcomings for those with only a basic ELT certificate, or no qualification at all, limiting them to poorly-paid jobs. Jordan and Long (2022, p. 195) observe, for instance, how the CELTA qualification curriculum “reflects the interests of corporate ELT, i.e., the commercial publishers, examination boards, teacher education bodies and course providers” rather than teachers themselves. It questions what remains for practitioners after the initial, globetrotting novelty has worn off (Kennedy and Phillips 1989, pp. 25-26). All *Centre for British Teachers* report respondents had good primary degrees, consistent with the survey responses of participants in this study outlined in Chapter 5, and Johnston’s Polish-based participants, nearly all of whom had language-teaching training and CELTA combined (Johnston 1997, p. 691). Yet “strikingly few” unqualified or certificate-only British teachers chose to gain an ELT diploma (e.g., DELTA), citing cost and availability as factors, as many as half preferring to enrol on masters’ courses. This is mirrored among the Irish-based teacher participants in the present study survey responses in Chapter 5.

Maley (1992) raises scepticism about the necessary connections between normative teacher training, and performative teaching competence, believing ELT teachers are not professionals in the same way lawyers or medics are. He regards this a strength, yet concedes need for ELT to “continue to move towards professional excellence” (ibid, p. 99). In the United Kingdom, a typical teacher was likely to look into further qualifications after three to four years’ teaching, or for personal reasons such as marriage, children or returning to the UK, the adult ELT market preferred (Kennedy and Phillips 1989). The same report noted a “hard-headed practicality” that set in when issues like money and conditions of service began to “bite” (ibid, p .28), particularly for those choosing to undertake a diploma such as the DELTA. It reflected a time of life when teachers become more security conscious and less mobile, aiming to secure permanent contracts in state-sector ELT (teacher-training and university especially preferred among senior teachers), or in a British ELT school (ibid, pp. 26-28).

Compared with numbers entering, attrition numbers were found extremely high, “poor career prospects both in terms of money and promotion” cited as primary reasons, with lack of security, low profession status, lack of challenge, a desire to settle in Britain, and

inability to find an appealing job additional realities (Kennedy and Phillips 1989, p. 29). This concurs with findings of Pennington (1990, p. 60) and McKnight (1992). Negative attitudes held by staff members outside the ELT faculty were significant in decisions taken to leave ELT (McKnight 1992, pp. 26-30), as teachers felt rendered an “underclass” (Nicholls 1991, p. 4). Pennington (1990) warns prolonged dissatisfaction will inevitably lead to loss of qualified people from ELT, threatening any emerging professionalism. As discontent becomes more public, it is likely to create a knock-on, negative impact, resulting in fewer people with long-term, ELT career aspirations, and loss of students (ibid, p.60). The pandemic exacerbated discord within ELT teacher ranks in the Irish context; in response to: *What’s your view of the current/future situation with your English Language Teaching school and job?* 88% responded with comments “that were coded as negative or pessimistic” (UNITE ELT Branch 2020a, p. 27).

The analysis chapters of this study examine themes in responses of its Irish-based survey and focus group participants to ascertain whether their lived experiences represent those in the literature explored in this chapter. It could not be determined if the *Centre for British Teachers* study findings represented continuous patterns in British ELT, or ones limited to its unique, study cohort (Kennedy and Phillips 1989, p. 29). Its observations, nonetheless, paralleled statements made of Irish TEFL/ELT by De Verdon Cooney (2000, p.8), who viewed it “a long-term holiday”. The question *Do you regard ELT as a profession?* aimed to explore themes surrounding these issues with the focus group participants in this study, detailed analysis of which will be outlined in Chapters 6 and 7.

## **2.5 Chapter overview**

This chapter began by referencing prior research conducted on areas such as teacher identity, motivation and development, narrowing its focus to the primary focal concern for this study: teacher perceptions of ELT, and how work conditions influence these perceptions. It has sought to examine literature pertaining to these conditions, teacher perceptions of same, their status and prospects in both an international and Irish context. It has also explored existing societal perceptions of ELT teachers. Studies by O’Keeffe *et al.* (2007), Vaughan (2009; 2022), Farrell (2017), Farr, Farrell and Riordan (2019), and Farr (2022) emphasise the importance of corpus linguistics investigation in ELT teacher-related research. In addition, Block, Gray and Holborrow (2012), Block and Gray (2016), Block (2017), Walsh (2019) and Jordan and Long (2022) offer insight into the need for a

Critical Discourse Analysis slant on examination of the ELT sector, acknowledging wider societal influences that can impact teachers within its ranks.

At this juncture, it is thus appropriate to explore the specific, theoretical frameworks and related methodologies employed for this study: Critical Thematic Analysis, Corpus Linguistics and Metaphor Analysis. Research and literature pertaining to each will be outlined in the next chapter, beginning with how discourse is critiqued, in Critical Discourse Analysis.

## **Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework**

### **3.0 Introduction**

In Chapter Two, emphasis was given to the importance of a more critical analysis of ELT-related discourses in examined literature, particularly where these discourses pertain to workplace issues, and what has been accepted, ‘common sense’ (van Dijk 2006, p. 116 and detailed in Section 3.8.2), ELT workplace practice up until now. Critiquing such discourses responds to Mann and Walsh’s recommendations for “a more critical approach” to reflective practice, to ensure it goes “beyond rosy summaries of the outcomes...towards accounts of how [action research] gets done” (2013, p. 291). This entails objectivity, which corpus-assisted research enables, exemplified in previous studies of ELT teacher workplace discourse (e.g., Vaughan 2009; 2022). Corpus-assisted, Critical Discourse Analysis (CACDA), including investigation of metaphor, will provide the principal frameworks for this study. This chapter outlines how a corpus linguistic analysis will provide an objective entry point for critical analysis of the data collected for this study, in turn allowing identification of metaphor used by participants. Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA) is primarily undertaken for the qualitative analysis of data, which will assist in bringing together corpus linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and metaphor framework strands this study employs. A comprehensive outline of what a critical approach to analysing language entails now follows, beginning with a timeline tracing of CDA.

### **3.1 Origins of Critical Discourse Analysis**

Modern linguistics emerged from the comparative philological study of Germanic and Romance languages. The Swiss scholar Ferdinand de Saussure set up a unified discipline in the late nineteenth century based on one, clearly-defined concept of the linguistic sign, identified by contrast with coexisting signs of the same nature, constituting a total, linguistic structure that cannot exist independently. This developed the concept of structuralism: the linguistic strand of a broader, twentieth-century movement (de Saussure 1972, pp. 4-6). It encouraged moving from a diachronic study of language to its more static, synchronic examination as a set of resources: ‘parole’, or language use, and ‘langue’, the underlying system communicators use, a dichotomy Fairclough distinguishes as ‘language’ and ‘discourse’ (2003, pp. 3-4). As a sound-pattern repository

manifested in writing, de Saussure regarded language as a social institution. A new science, ‘semiology’ (from the Greek ‘semeion’ or ‘sign’), combined the simple, vocal apparatus of language with social aspects, such as rites, customs, or signs; a language system could then be considered semiotic, or multimodal, as well as linguistic (de Saussure 1972, p. 15; Machin and Mayr 2010, p. 17). These factors were later acknowledged in Critical Linguistics, which encompassed a broader base of discourse and resource types, explored in Section 3.2.

De Saussure distinguished linguistics from other sciences. His specific aims included recording the history of languages to “delimit and define” linguistics as a study, believing language to belong both to individuals and society. This forged a crucial link in a democratizing, “social bond” formed by members of society through their speech practices; a language could thus never be complete “in any single individual...only in the collectivity” (de Saussure 1972, pp. 6-13). One of his aims espoused more critique to discourse analysis: “To determine the **forces** operating permanently and universally in all languages, and to formulate general laws which account for all linguistic phenomena historically attested” (ibid, p. 6, bold emphasis added). While de Saussure was most likely referencing language systems (i.e., grammar, lexis and phonology), ‘forces’ has nuances of strength, power, coercion or domination. That work is done when a force moves an object through a distance is a basic principle of physics; force provides momentum, or can blockade something in its path (Dundon *et al.* 2016, pp. 290-302). Metaphorically, force is associated with physical power, as in the phrase ‘brute force’ (Deignan 1995, p. 38). Forces at play besides prescriptive rules, the traditional binds for attested languages of antiquity such as Latin (de Saussure 1972), are integral to a critical analysis of language, and, in the context of this study, any examination of the ELT sector, historically unrivalled in global dominance in language promotion terms (Copland, Garton and Mann 2016; see Section 1.2).

From such realities, linguistics evolved into something which did not simply regard language as a positive medium, but recognised and critiqued its capacity to be divisive, transpiring in Critical Linguistics.

### **3.2 Critical Linguistics**

Coined by scholars at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s (Kress 1990, pp. 84-97), the term 'Critical Linguistics' views language and context through a pragmatic, sociolinguistic prism (Levinson 1983). Language had formerly been largely accepted as a speaker resource, not a potential problem (Kramarae *et al.* 1984). The precursor to Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Linguistics believed grammar could be an instrument of ideology (Fowler *et al.* 1979). Thornborrow (2002, pp. 14-15) equates Critical Linguistics to a "weak version of the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis" of linguistic determinism (Sapir 1929/1958), an idea that language influences thought processes through its systems of classification and representation, influencing what we understand as our 'real world' (Machin and Mayr 2012, pp. 16-17). No two language systems classify the world identically, implying perceptions of events are coloured by our community's language habits, predisposing us towards certain interpretations (Thornborrow 2002). This extreme view of linguistic determinism is countered by the belief that our thinking is less determined, more influenced, in a two-way, interpretive process (Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 16), rejecting Leach's assertions that "this world is a representation of our language categories, not vice versa" (1964, p. 34).

The medium through which Critical Linguistics analysed language, or discourse, was the text, through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). This examined texts in a systemic manner for grammatical, lexical and phonological text features, and functionally by exploring what social purpose and meaning-making lay within (Halliday 1985; McCarthy and Clancy 2019, pp. 201-203). SFL considered language a social-semiotic system, where meaning and form are driven by both context, and speakers' communicative goals (Halliday 1985). Its focus was on complete texts, allowing comparisons of two or more accounts of events rather than isolated, decontextualized sentence analysis more in line with Chomskyan tradition. This fundamental feature linked it to its successor, CDA, enabling a theory that took "the social functions of language seriously" (Breeze 2011, p. 496), yet limited Critical Linguistics to 'planned', rather than 'spontaneous' interaction (Thornborrow 2002, pp. 14-15).

Critical Linguistics showed how language and grammar could act as instruments of ideology to categorise people, places, events, and actions, how certain people are foregrounded, backgrounded or excluded, how things are communicated indirectly, and through total absence (Fowler *et al.* 1979). It was, nonetheless, disinclined to make direct links between language, ideology and power. Core focus on power lies at the heart of

CDA (Machin and Mayr 2010) and, by extension, the Critical Thematic Analysis applied to this study, with indisputably strong links between the global promotion of the English language, ideology and power (Copland, Garton and Mann 2016; see Sections 1.1 -1.2).

### 3.3 Defining power

Kress (1990, p. 94) outlines “a radically different kind of linguistics”, with greater connections between discourse, social hierarchy and power (Labov 1972; Hymes 1972). This opened Critical Linguistics to political intervention and social change, encouraged by scholars such as Foucault, whose focus on relationships in institutions, their overall structure, and discourses within, emphasised power as something coming from below and above, a shifting relationship of force and resistance in how people interact in such environments (Foucault 1980). The Critical Thematic Analysis this study takes aims to investigate how empowered or disempowered ELT teachers feel within their institutional (i.e., school workplace) settings, of significance. Power has a capacity to produce “intended and foreseen effects on others” (Wrong 1979), with Machin and Mayr offering a more definitive interpretation:

[Power] comes from privileged access to social resources such as education, knowledge and wealth, which provides authority, status and influence to those who gain this access and enables them to dominate, coerce and control subordinate groups.

(Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 24)

People employ language to communicate human concerns; one of the most basic is power (Kramarae *et al.* 1984). In exploring features like dialect or standard language, power is not something ELT teachers typically give attention to, despite observations that, in lesson transmission, they accept language is “intricately tied to how power is actually manifest” (*ibid.*, p. 13). While not all human interaction is discourse-related (Fairclough 2003, p. 2), power manifests chiefly through speech: “How we talk about the world influences the society we create, the knowledge we celebrate and despise, and the institutions we build” (Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 21). Such definitions are applicable to ELT given the dominance of English, marketed as a coveted resource (see 1.1 -1.2, to be examined in Chapter 7). Increased understanding of power relations, and subsequent

influences on discourse, directed Critical Linguistics toward a newer, Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1985).

### **3.4 What is Critical Discourse Analysis and what does it entail**

A shared perspective accepts that both Critical Linguistics and CDA engage in “linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis” (Van Dijk 1993, p. 131), but the primary concern of CDA lies in uncovering “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak 2001, p. 2). CDA scholars play advocatory roles for groups suffering social discrimination; they “make explicit” frequently hidden power relations (Meyer 2001, p. 15). Mediating between language and society is how CDA differs from other sociolinguistic processes. Critique and analysis of the focus group interview and open-ended survey question discourses in this study, for example, provided a timely opportunity to examine whether Irish-based, teacher-workplace experiences paralleled media reportage (Section 1.2).

Inevitably, dominance structures in discourse are situated in both time and space, legitimised through ideologies of powerful groups whose discourses potentially stabilise and naturalise conventions (Wodak 2001, p. 3). Koester (2006, p. 20) notes how CDA can address workplace-discourse power dimensions, and asymmetries. Such asymmetry can be observed in Marketing English in Ireland (MEI) representing private-language-school owners. When appointed to investigate sector employment conditions, mediator Patrick King concluded that not one, single employer body existed that represents all Irish-based ELT schools in matters of employee industrial relations (2019, p. 7). Furthermore, “little evidence of a desire for statutorily-based minimum working conditions” was found among 92 ELT-school providers, 66 of whom included MEI members (2019, p. 2). The same providers nonetheless expressed “a strong desire...for a strict accreditation regime”, with a “common standard being applied to all schools” in matters of curriculum design and delivery (*ibid*). This exemplifies the kind of power differential that maintains a status quo which has suited disparate stakeholder groups within Irish ELT (Section 1.2), but has left sector teachers consistently vulnerable, necessitating CDA theoretical examination.

The common thread through Critical Linguistics and CDA presents in the word ‘critical’. The importance of critique in literature is traceable to the mid-eighteenth-century science

of philology, with interpretation and comment on texts about literary history, customs and institutions (de Saussure 1972). Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 5) highlight the term ‘critical’ in its forensic, “denaturalising” of language. Often in minutiae is where relations of power and political ideology are found. For instance, nominalisation in political speeches is a deliberate, distancing act politicians take to avoid using a definite, subject pronoun such as ‘I’ or ‘we’, which is more committal (Fairclough 2003, pp. 12-13; Filardo-Llamas and Boyd 2018). However, CDA is less about simple, linguistic feature descriptions, more about how and why features are produced, and ideological goals they serve (Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 5). It exposes language strategies that ostensibly appear normal or neutral, but more often contain hidden ideologies. Thus CDA aims “to reveal buried ideology” (Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 1).

Exploration of themes that emerged from the teacher focus group interviews examines what potential ideology operating within and without Irish ELT discourses could ultimately be influencing its work practice. With this in mind, it is first essential to outline what exactly constitutes ideology.

### **3.5 Definitions of ideology**

CDA has evolved into a version of critical analysis that is more concerned with working across disciplines, such as the media, politics, economics, education and health. The trans-disciplinary nature of this newer CDA incarnation was earlier identified as a “realist” approach of a real world (Fairclough 2003, p. 6). Fairclough endowed Critical Discourse Analysis with three basic properties: being trans- (or inter-) disciplinary, as explained above, but also relational, and dialectical. As humans, social relations we engage in are largely expressed linguistically, through a range of media. Therefore, CDA is relational (Fairclough 2010, pp. 4-5). As a form of social practice, language focus lies in how it is used in a particular context (Fairclough 1989; Wodak 2001). Our social relations are layered “relations between relations,” communicated through one another, and through power relations within more complex objects like institutions and hierarchies (Fairclough 2010, p. 4). As social relations are principally conducted through discourse, Fairclough hence views CDA as dialectical, exploring relations between objects that are different, but not ‘discrete’, or mutually exclusive: “power is partly discourse and discourse is partly power” (Fairclough 2010, pp. 3-4). Ultimately, power is about

relations of difference (Wodak 2001, p. 11), hence the mutual relation language and power have within societies.

Ideologies act as sets of beliefs and values belonging to particular groups underpinning their discourses, which may contribute to unwanted identity projection onto others through such discourses tainted by an ideology (Flowerdew and Richardson 2018, pp. 3-4). Through repeated social interaction and mores of a given period, ideology develops to promote specific interests (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994), creating “ways of thinking in which historically transient, exploitative forms of social organisation are represented as eternal, natural, inevitable or ‘rational’” (Jones 2001, p. 227). This characterises CDA as problem-driven, rather than theory driven (Flowerdew and Richardson 2018, p. 1). It is, as Fairclough reminds, *critical* social analysis (2018, p. 13; italics Fairclough’s), the objective not simply to critique discourse, but through interdisciplinary, theoretical collaboration, to provide explanations, thus actively contribute to the betterment of society, and “contribute to political action for change” (ibid). It is hoped that findings from this study will assist groups like ELT Advocacy and UNITE ELT Branch in providing direct representation for ELT teachers, make recommendations, and assist policymaking on how the sector can best go forward on work practice issues, thus having real social impact (Copland and Creese 2015, pp. 187-188).

### **3.6 CDA features and characteristics**

CDA entails application of “a critical attitude” in analysing discourse, as opposed to a direct method (Van Dijk 2018, p. 28), a belief shared among its many scholars. It presents as a varied combination of approaches, whose linguistics foundations draw heavily on social theories, overlapping and interweaving toward a common end (Wodak 2001; Meyer 2001; Breeze 2011; Machin and Mayr 2012; Fairclough 2003, 2018; Flowerdew and Richardson 2018). This reveals how writers and speakers use grammatical features, and language in general, “to persuade people to think about events in a particular way, sometimes even to manipulate them while at the same time concealing their communicative intentions” (Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 1). It focuses on written or transcribed texts, but is open to multimedia analysis (ibid). It is not politics, but supports this discipline (Fairclough 2018, p. 18), with Aristotelian roots regarding politics as action in pursuit of the highest good, based upon decisions from deliberation (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012).

CDA “chooses the perspective of those who suffer” (Wodak 2001, p. 10). As language can be used in challenging, subverting and changing power distributions (ibid, p. 11), it is the discourse analysis approach deemed most relevant for this thematic study of ELT teacher professional lives. Despite observations of elevated earning potential and status among native-speaker teachers (e.g. Kirkpatrick in Copland, Garton and Mann 2015, p. 241), Irish-based ELT teachers have been historically voiceless at a national, policy-making level, which may have contributed to disempowering work practices experienced by many, especially during the pandemic crisis (ELT Advocacy 2020). This study will be examining teacher voices within a critical thematic perspective, pre- and mid-pandemic.

### **3.7 Limitations of CDA as an approach**

Despite perceived strengths, CDA is not without its detractors. Koester cautions how an “explicit socio-political stance” taken by its analysts may lead to assumptions that workplace power issues “are always relevant to a particular institution” (2006, p. 20). From the present study perspective, it is imperative to stress that not all language-school owners exploit their teaching staff, and not all teachers behave in an impeccably professional manner, themes explored in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. CDA tools can only demonstrate how texts use semiotic resources, and what potential meanings are; it cannot make predictions as to how viewers actually interpret texts or images (Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 10). Having “naïve linguistic determinism” (Breeze 2011, p. 508) has been cited as one of CDA’s greatest weaknesses, early researchers accused of paying “scant regard to issues of methodological consistency” (ibid, pp. 503-504; Stubbs 1997). Widdowson (1998) has been a most outspoken critic of CDA owing to its lack of systematicity. Billig (2002) condemns the acronym ‘CDA’ as akin to an “academic brand”, which Breeze observes evolved into “a critical orthodoxy” (2011, p. 518), in danger of becoming “inflexible, dogmatic and exclusive”.

Strong potential for analytical bias has been pinpointed in CDA through both researcher subjectivity, “the product of conviction” (Verschueren 2001, p. 65), and unrepresentatively small text samples (Stubbs 1997). As the purpose of analysis is to provide sound application of theoretically-grounded, rigorous methods (Breeze 2011, p. 507), the use of corpora, later outlined in Section 3.9, can assist and inform CDA text analysis, providing objectivity in quantitative analysis, thus mitigating against such

claims (Stubbs 1997, p. 10; Subtirelu and Baker 2018). From a qualitative perspective, corpus-assisted ‘horizontal and vertical’ text exploration (Verschueren 2011), coupled with pragmatic investigation of language form and function, prevents imposition of intuitive interpretation. CDA researcher guidelines include bearing fundamental, political persuasions in mind when interpreting data, clearly stating the theoretical background to their work to prevent eclectic, vague approaches, and applying corpus and pragmatic data analysis to avoid being ‘impressionistic’ (Breeze 2011, pp. 520-521). This is the intent of this study, through application of clearly-defined, corpus-assisted, Critical Thematic Analysis and metaphor frameworks. Breeze (2011) cautions against moving too hastily from language data to interpretation, urging realism in analyst response to texts. The use of Corpus Analysis, presented in Section 3.9 as a framework, aims to provide an objective medium for this study, and is thoroughly detailed in Chapter 4.

With the above caveats in mind, the next section examines CDA approaches, presenting those chosen as best suited for a framework for this study’s purposes.

### **3.8 CDA approaches guiding this study**

De Saussure observed that “no other subject has fostered more absurd notions, more prejudices, more illusions or more fantasies” than linguistics, and saw the primary task of the linguist “to denounce them, and to eradicate them as completely as possible” (1972, p.7). This perhaps explains the varied range of approaches CDA scholars have at their disposal (Breeze 2011; Flowerdew and Richardson 2018).

In making discursive aspects of social inequities more transparent, CDA comprises of clusters of approaches with similar, theoretical bases and research questions. There is “no typical” CDA approach (Meyer 2001, p.23). That chosen depends on the angle the individual researcher is coming from, and focus they wish to take, in analyses as diverse as the Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak and Meyer 2001), Ethnography and Critical Discourse Studies (Krzyżanowski 2018), or the Corpus Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (Conrad 2022, p. 231) adopted for this study. Three, specific CDA approaches selected as having particular study relevance include Dialectical Reasoning, the Socio-Cognitive Approach and Critical Thematic Analysis. Frameworks for each are provided as follows.

### 3.8.1 Dialectical Reasoning

For Fairclough, (2018, p. 13) CDA involves ‘dialectical reasoning’, critique that acknowledges what needs to be done to change existing realities, through recognition and explanation of associations between discourse and other components of that reality. He espouses dialectical deliberation, a process relating discourse to decisions, political action and, ultimately, change of existing states of affairs “for the better” (ibid, p. 18). For instance, his five-step CDA framework, outlined as follows, is readily applicable to this study, step one of which has been addressed in Chapters 1 and 2, steps two and three providing guidance and relevant application to the analysis Chapters 5-8, while steps four and five can serve to assist reflection in concluding Chapter 9:

- 1) Identify a social problem with a semiotic aspect, to “produce knowledge which can lead to emancipatory change” ;
- 2) Identify obstacles to the problem being “tackled” through:
  - a) analysis of the location of the problem in its network of practices;
  - b) analysis of the semiotic relationships within the practices;
  - c) analysis of the discourse itself, to understand what makes the problem “intractable” ;
- 3) Identify whether the network of practices “needs” the problem to see if the status quo benefits a particular interest group in a social order;
- 4) Identify “hitherto unrealized possibilities for change” to act as alternatives to the obstacles;
- 5) Identify one’s social position as a researcher, to critically reflect on the analysis.

(Fairclough 2003, pp. 209-210)

To this end, it is vital for CDA to collaborate with other disciplines such as political economy, explored in Chapter 7, and theories (ibid, p.14), which this study adheres to through Critical Thematic Analysis, outlined in Section 3.8.3. Most recently, focus has spotlighted the post-2007 global recession, and strategies to discursively overcome this:

As the huge gap between rich and poor has continued to increase even during the crisis, it would seem that only a struggle for fundamental social and political changes can reverse this and other damaging tendencies. If CDA wants to contribute, it needs to be radical.

Such call for ‘radical’ CDA, highlighting its potential for instigating social change, has strong roots in the aforementioned discipline of political economy (Block and Cameron 2002; Block 2017). It is of direct relevance to the present study in its examination of an Irish ELT teaching cohort historically unheard, yet impacted by precarious work conditions (see Section 2.3.2).

### 3.8.2 Socio-Cognitive Approach

Socio-Cognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) is where CDA relates discourse structures to social ones (van Dijk 2018, p. 27). The socio-political context needs considering when examining text, questioning what vantage point it is coming from, to explain why the text has the appraisal structures it displays. SCDS provides a *cognitive interface* between discourse and society, recognising that social or political structures can only affect text and talk through the *minds* of language users<sup>3</sup> (ibid; italics Van Dijk’s). Many discourse features (e.g., phonological stress, pronouns and co-reference, syntax, topic, focus, and propositions), can only be described in terms of cognitive notions. How they are constructed, the coherence relations and global meanings found in topics, and what indexical expressions, metaphors, frames, implications, presuppositions, argumentations, beliefs and knowledge discourse participants use, all feed into ideologies (van Dijk 2018, p. 28). SCDS investigates mediation between such ideologies, societal structures, text, and talk.

Van Dijk highlights polarisation between *Us (ingroup)* and *Them (outgroup)* (italics Van Dijk’s), in specific, social attitudes formed by everyday experiences, stored as subjective, mental models based on socio-culturally shared, generic or historical knowledge he calls ‘Common Ground’ (2018, pp. 32-34). This acts as a received “knowledge device” within communities based on previous social encounters, and information gained from prior discourses in the same context (ibid, p. 36). This is problematic, as old, mental models and references may be reactivated, reminding readers or hearers of past events or policies, sowing public division. Presupposition that there actually **is** a problem is commonplace

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<sup>3</sup> for a more detailed synopsis, see van Dijk 2018, pp 28-33.

in media articles intent on ideologically polarising (van Dijk 2008; 2018, pp. 37-39; Fairclough 2003, pp. 2-3; Breeze 2011).

Sometimes ideologies become shared so widely they become “part of the generally accepted attitudes of an entire community, as obvious beliefs or opinion, or common sense” (van Dijk 2006, p. 116). The online survey and focus group data collected for this study revealed whether Irish-based teachers self-identified with these realities through their own lived workplace experiences, and how they evaluated them. These factors make an SCDA lens important, investigating how existing attitudes held by wider bodies wielding influence over the sector, as well as those of the general public, impact teachers (see Figure 1.1). This is to be contrasted with how ELT teachers perceive themselves thematically.

To address concerns about CDA lacking rigour in Section 3.7, a range of corpus-assisted frameworks were adopted to assist analysis of discourses of the teacher participants, from a thematic perspective. Acknowledging wider societal influences that impact teachers within ELT ranks stresses need for a Critical Discourse Analysis lens through which to examine the sector, as examined in Section 2.3 (e.g., Block, Gray and Holborrow 2012; Block and Gray 2016; Block 2017; Walsh 2019; Jordan and Long 2022). These frameworks are detailed as follows.

### 3.8.3 Critical Thematic Analysis

This study adopts, firstly, a qualitative research framework offered by Braun and Clarke, justified as “a method in its own right” (2006, pp. 77-78). They outline theory, application, and evaluation of a type of Thematic Analysis popular in psychology and across a range of epistemological approaches, from realist/experiential methods to essentialist or constructionist paradigms, yet not “wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework” (Braun and Clarke 2006, pp. 78-81). Thematic Analysis shares features with Critical Discourse Analysis in its insistence on engagement with relevant literature for application of an informed, theoretical, deductive, and analytical approach (ibid, p. 86; Lawless and Chen 2019). For this reason, it is considered a reliable tool across different methods (Boyatzis 1998), hence its suitability for this study.

One benefit Thematic Analysis application brings is its theoretical freedom, providing “a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 78). It allows identification, analysis and reporting of patterns or themes across entire data sets which can be minimally organized, yet deeply described. The framework offered by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 78) enables clarity about not only what, and why a researcher is doing something, but most importantly, how. The precise Critical Thematic Analysis framework adopted for this study is given thorough explanation and outline in Chapter 4 (Section 4.4.1).

Next examined is Corpus Linguistics, how it complements CDA, and how it contributes to the selected theoretical framework for this study.

### **3.9 CDA and Corpus Linguistics**

Computer-assisted, corpus analysis of large bodies of text is currently the most efficient means of exploring collocational patterns (Stubbs 1994; Fairclough 2003, p. 131; O’Keeffe and Walsh 2012; Jones 2022, p. 132; Oakey 2022, pp. 194-199; Greaves and Warren 2022, p. 209; Mautner 2022, pp. 256-257; Jones and Durrant 2022, p. 343). This is particularly useful in exploration of metaphor (Brookes *et al.* 2022, pp. 621-626; Alejo-González 2024), pertinent to this study and detailed in Section 3.10. The term ‘collocation’ describes co-occurrence of lexical words in restricted, set phrases or chunks of language, “the mere word accompaniment...in which [words] are most commonly or most characteristically embedded” (Firth 1957, p. 11). It demonstrates how certain words tend to be primed with others through repeated encounters, revealing predictable associations (Thornbury 2006, p. 180), for example ‘blonde hair’ as opposed to a ‘blonde car’, ‘lean’ rather than ‘slim meat’ (Carter and McCarthy 2006, p. 895). Such priming can be extended to a process called colligation, where fixed, grammatical patterns emerge, e.g., verb patterns such as ‘would like [to + infinitive]’/ like [verb + ing] (Sinclair 1991; Thornbury 2006, p. 180; Conrad 2022; Hunston 2022, pp. 148-149). Corpus analysis can play a dual role in unearthing such colligative and collocative associations, which assist in metaphor identification (Deignan 2005; 2008, pp. 282-284; Berber-Sardinha 2012; Oakey 2022, pp. 199-201; Alejo-González 2024). Corpus investigation also lends impartiality to a critical analytical process, crucially important for the credibility of this study (see 1.4-1.5).

Keyness, frequency, and contextual diversity are important measures to consider in selecting words and phrases for CDA focus (Subtirelu and Baker 2018, p. 113). While Subtirelu and Baker cite earlier references (e.g., Williams 1976; Stubbs 1996) in defining a keyword as one which “has significance in a particular discourse and tells us about the values of a society” (2018, p. 108), redefinition has been made possible by corpus software: “words that occur statistically saliently”, or from a CDA context, “aboutness”, via log likelihood/chi square tests in one corpus, measured against a comparative reference corpus or text (Subtirelu and Baker 2018; Gries 2022; McIntyre and Walker 2022). Hardt-Mautner (1995, p. 3) is acknowledged as making the link between Critical Discourse Studies and corpus approaches, while Partington, Duguid and Taylor (2013, pp. 1-24) are credited with devising Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), aiming “to discover non-obvious meaning” in texts, and “identify questions and puzzles that would otherwise not have been considered” (Subtirelu and Baker 2018, pp. 107-108). Since then, corpus-assisted approaches have critiqued discourse and ideology (Weisser 2022, p. 100; Conrad 2022, p. 231; O’Halloran 2022, p. 689), proving that “corpora may be utilised in the service of a more critical linguistic perspective on texts” (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 119). Examples include incidents of use of the passive voice, frequently employed by public figures to distance themselves from acts (O’Halloran and Coffin 2004), or in Louw’s (1993) identification of semantic prosody, “a consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates”, both positive and negative. The specific, corpus-assisted methodology this study employed is detailed in Chapter 4 (Sections 4.4 -4.5).

Having considered a range of “intellectual antecedents” of CDA (Breeze 2011, p. 495), including above recommendations for use of corpus linguistic application, the final complement for this study is a cognitive, linguistic approach (Hart 2018, p. 80) described as Metaphor Analysis.

### **3.10 CDA and Metaphor**

Cognitive in nature, Metaphor Analysis allows for creativity and strategy in language study, observing how metaphor shapes our thought processes and actions (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Ng 2018). From a CDA perspective, metaphors are significant in the study of ideology (Koller 2014; Hart 2018, p. 80; Section 3.5). Much ELT classroom language

focuses on idiom and metaphor (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, pp. 29-30; McCarthy and O’Dell 2002, p. 4; McNamara 2019). Metaphor Analysis assisted in examination of specific, figurative language teachers employed in descriptive evaluations of their lived ELT experience, and how their workplace conditions influenced this.

The concept of metaphor is fundamental to human cognitive processes (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Machin and Mayr 2012, pp. 163-185; Ng 2018, pp. 251-256; van Dijk 2018, pp. 27-28). Dating back to Aristotle, metaphor “underlies all of our statements about the world” (Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 163). Lakoff and Johnson’s seminal *Metaphors We Live By* elaborates: “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another” (1980, p. 5). Historically, it was employed in rhetoric to create vivid impact and persuade (Ng 2018, pp. 215-216). From CDA and CTA perspectives, metaphor is “one resource available for producing distinct representations of the world”, deeply and culturally embedded (Fairclough 2003, pp. 131-132).

Halliday (1994) extended the concept of ‘metaphor’ from conventional, prosaic application to word meaning and grammar (Fairclough 2003, p.143), freeing it from the realm of literature, poetry and prose. In Cognitive Theory, metaphor has more than a mere “ornamental role” (Musolff 2004, pp. 171-172; Hart 2018). Metaphor Analysis has gained credence as “a profitable tool” (Ng 2018, p. 215), cognitive approaches the current, dominant paradigm (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Musolff postulates use of metaphor in certain political discourse may be “inescapable” (2004, pp. 171-172), while metaphors serve pragmatic functions for Low (1988, p. 128), compelling attention through positive or negative event dramatization, or as distancing devices, enabling participants to discuss emotionally-charged topics without commitment or losing face. This was of significance when teachers gave certain evaluations of their ELT sector lived experience (see Section 1.5). The pragmatic nature of idiom and metaphor usage is reinforced by McCarthy and Handford (2004), observing metaphor saliency in workplace discourse in discussing problems (e.g., ‘a can of worms’; ‘a nightmare’) and response/solution signalling (e.g., ‘sit down together and talk/think about something’; ‘figure it out’). The repeated nature of metaphors suggests “they have become pragmatically specialized as signalling devices” foregrounding key discourse stages, yet “they can also exist independently” (Koester 2006, pp. 101-102).

Despite its pervasiveness, dictionary entries do not generally define words in terms of metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 115). Regardless, metaphor is not confined to verbal expressions: it enshrines how we think about particular subjects in systematic ways (ibid; Ng 2018). For example, love is not dictionary-defined as ‘a journey’, conceptually realised by Lakoff and Johnson in the statement LOVE IS JOURNEY (1980). Hart (2018, p. 80) outlines how Critical Metaphor Analysis has identified “a relatively finite number of familiar knowledge frames”: e.g., JOURNEY, BUILDING, WAR, ILLNESS, GAMES, and topological/ orientational schema, such as UP-DOWN, NEAR-FAR, CONTAINER when trying to grasp many political or social phenomena (Charteris-Black 2004, 2006; Koller 2004; Musolff 2004). Thus, “the most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 57). Every experience occurs within a vast background of cultural presuppositions. Metaphor associations with wider, societal and cultural references, coupled with the fact that ELT teachers make such extensive use of it in their classroom delivery, make it of relevance in exploring how teachers perceived workplace culture within the ELT industry, and expressed potentially emotive issues in idiomatic ways (see 1.5).

Cognitive Metaphor Theory (CMT) applies unidirectional mapping across two ‘domains’, whereby a ‘target’ domain, abstract, complex and subjective, gets conceptualised in terms of a concrete, physical, more familiar ‘source’ domain (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). An example is ‘education is a journey’, ‘education’ being the target domain, mapped onto ‘journey’ as the source (ibid). This is represented typographically in upper-case letters of smaller font than the preceding and following text (e.g., EDUCATION IS JOURNEY), marking metaphorical mapping references throughout this study henceforth. Linguistically, metaphors relating to education can also be realised with collocative language associations with journeys, which corpus analysis can help to identify: ‘embark’, ‘a head-start’, ‘left behind’, ‘new frontiers’ (Drew and Holt 1988; Cameron 2003). Mapping across domain elements, typically linked using words ‘IS’ or ‘AS’, is “not random”, involving “systematic and structured correspondences” (Ng 2018, pp. 216- 217). The same target domain is capable of being framed by different source domains, for example EDUCATION IS COMMODITY. This has relevance for this study in recognising themes such as LANGUAGE AS COMMODITY (Simpson and O’Regan 2018), ELT AS BUSINESS and ELT TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR, dealt with in Chapter 7. Such framing defines the relationship between educational institutions, their teachers, and

students as one that is primarily transactional, serving a range of industry stakeholders (Ng 2018, pp. 216-217). Stakeholdership in Irish ELT will be addressed as a key Chapter 8 theme. These insights provide indication of how particular topics are metaphorically conceptualised, and how thinking may condition participants to act in particular ways (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 156), pertinent to why and how teachers perceive the sector the way they do, in both global and local contexts.

Certain dominant metaphors in the lexicon of Western societies have been appropriated to serve ideologies of a social and economic nature, prioritising competition, industry and efficiency (Fairclough 2003, pp. 4-5; Goatly 2007, pp. 335-402). Examples including COMPETITION IS A RACE, TIME IS MONEY and TIME IS A COMMODITY are ideals of capitalism propounded by economics philosophers such as David Hume, Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus (Fairclough 2003), and imply that metaphors can be used strategically in the construction and perpetuation of particular worldviews, or versions of different realities (Filardo-Llamas and Boyd 2018, p. 316). This proves problematic when they “take on an especially pernicious quality” (Ng 2018, pp. 219-220), like right-wing discourse depictions of immigrants in which natural disaster images proliferate (El Refaie 2001; Flowerdew *et al.* 2002; Charteris-Black 2006; Hart 2010, pp. 144-157). Socio-Cognitive Discourse Studies (Section 3.8.2) critically examines metaphorical concept application where global and local semantic coherence is controlled (i.e., domestic politics against international issues), for instance ECONOMY AS BUILDING, capable of infrastructural collapse (Musolff 2004). Van Dijk (2008) observes how context-specific use of metaphors can be entrenched and conventionalized over time, becoming part of the socio-cognitive models of discourse community members. In the context of the present study, such models are encapsulated in thematic perceptions held of ELT in examples like ELT AS PATH, examined in Chapter 5, and perceived attitudes of ELT stakeholders and members of the public towards ELT teachers (e.g., TEACHER AS BACKPACKER), explored in Chapter 8.

‘Generic’, primary metaphors rooted in early childhood physiological and psychophysical memories link them to bodily, as well as cognitive experiences (Musolff 2004, pp. 116-117). This lends credence to metaphors having a quasi-universality, displaying “different degrees of prominence in different societies and contexts” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 14). A classic example is in Kövecses’s identification of a BUILDING source domain (2002, pp. 127-131), in which Musolff observes interpretive ambiguity; some

cultures perceive a building as a shared, collective entity, others a private, individual space (2004, pp. 122-128). Therein lies the value of corpus-assisted data analysis, in examining diachronic patterns and historical changes in metaphor distribution (ibid, p. 140).

Steen (2008, 2011) views metaphor identification as three-dimensional: linguistic, conceptual, and communicative. A linguistic model sees it recognisable in an analogy or simile, or indirectly, where in-text, target domains may not be overtly realised. A conceptual model sees the metaphor used in either novel or conventional ways, whereby a communicative model categorises metaphors as deliberate (i.e., instantly recognised), or non-deliberate. When used in highly conventional ways, metaphors reinforce existing conceptualizations (Ng and Koller 2013), complementing Thematic Analysis criteria offered in Section 3.8.3 above.

Co-occurrence of ‘metaphor clusters’ is not random or coincidental, especially in marketing and branding, such as BUSINESS IS WAR, BUSINESS IS COMPETITION (Wright 1999; Koller 2005). Education is a sector where “branding and promotion are deemed to be important activities” (Ng 2018, p. 221), applicable to the context of privately-owned, ELT schools which, to some degree, fit Ng’s contemporary description of universities (2018, p. 221): they adopt practices which aim to boost efficiency and competitiveness, are driven by deregulated, neoliberal, government policies, and are characterised by the liberalisation, privatisation and marketization evident in the higher-education sector (Fairclough 2003, pp. 4-5; Steger 2005, p. ix; Birch and Mykhnenko 2010). ELT AS BUSINESS, thematically identified through the corpus analysis revelation of ‘business’ as a keyword, juxtaposes a thematic ELT AS PROFESSION, both given detailed, critical examination in Chapters 6 and 7.

What now follows is a chapter summary.

### **3.11 Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has presented theories adopted as complementary methodologies for this study, synergised into a single, identifiable framework. Application of this aims to determine whether sentiments expressed within the ELT literature reviewed in Chapter 2, particularly on workplace issues, were reflected within the interview repertoires and survey responses of the teacher participants of this study, outlined in Chapters 5-8.

The chapter first focused on the evolution of critical language analysis. Beginning with the nineteenth-century semiology of Saussure (1972) through to the Systemic Functional Linguistics of Halliday, it traced Critical Linguistics, espoused by scholars such as Kress *et al.*, to the more contemporary, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) expounded by linguists like Fairclough in *Dialectical Reasoning*, and Van Dijk in *Socio-Cognitive Discourse Studies*, focusing on power reflected in discourse. It then examined Critical Thematic Analysis, one clearly-structured, CDA-influenced theoretical framework deemed the single, most appropriate application for this study purpose, detailed as methodology in Chapter 4. Corpus Linguistics and relevant literature was then explored; how the corpus investigation assisted in identifying key language, how this methodology emerged thematically in the focus groups and open-ended, survey questions, but, most crucially, how it brought impartiality to data analysis is laid out in Chapter 4. Finally, studies on metaphor and its association with CDA were explored. The methodology used to examine how metaphors presented, were linguistically realised and identified thematically was by means of Corpus-Assisted, Critical Thematic Analysis, and an additional, procedural Metaphor Identification framework, now detailed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4 Data and Methodology

### 4.0 Introduction

To reiterate, this study aims to investigate how teachers with experience of working in privately-run, Irish-based ELT schools perceive the sector, and how shared discourses and narratives of its participants reflect where they position themselves in relation to it. It examines their direct experiences of work conditions in Irish-based ELT schools, first through an online survey. It then explores emerging themes from a corpus of focus group interview discourses and four open-ended, survey-question responses combined, to ascertain how participants perceive their place within these schools, sector bodies which represent Irish ELT, and wider Irish society. It thus aims to hear active, ELT teacher voice through linguistic patterns they chose, particularly of a metaphorical nature, to express their evaluations of Irish ELT, and determine the extent to which their workplace environment and conditions influenced and impacted these lexical choices.

A mixed-methods approach is often taken in analysing institution-related discourse (Cicourel 1987). For this study, survey data collection combines documented evidence of Irish-based, ELT teacher workplace conditions of those with direct experience of working in the private sector. This was to determine what, and if, through their interactions, “institutional imperatives originating from outside the interaction are evidenced and made real and enforceable” (Heritage 1997, p. 163). The study contributes to theoretical debate by critically investigating these interviews through corpus-assisted, Critical Thematic Analysis of language teachers employ, metaphor in particular. Triangulating different data sets, it responds to a call for increased focus on under-researched ‘backstage’ ELT teacher interaction, as opposed to the ‘frontstage’ discourse often restricted to what happens “in the natural domain of the professional”: i.e., classroom, hence institutional, parameters (Vaughan 2007, p. 175; Sarangi 2002, p. 106). Interviews were deliberately conducted outside school walls, as it was felt participants could voice perceptions and honest evaluations of lived experiences more freely.

As Chapter 3 (Section 3.8) indicated, the study’s use of critical analysis takes the widest view of context. There is consequently a need to look beyond individual, institutional environments for interpretation. Increased ‘hybridity’ (Cameron 2000, pp. 21-23) of talk

across social domains, and ‘conversationalization’ (Fairclough 1992, pp. 204-205) of once-formal institutional discourse, now act as phenomena which obscure power structures within. Additionally, Koester (2006, p. 98) outlines lack of research on metaphor use in workplace discourse, influencing both the study’s intent to explore how participants used idiomatic language to express evaluative stance, and address the study research questions:

**RQ1:** What are primary themes arising from perceptions and concerns that English language teachers have of their workplace conditions within the private ELT school sector in Ireland?

**RQ2:** What language do these teachers use to describe their professional status within Irish ELT and the wider Irish teaching profession?

**RQ3:** How do variables of age, gender, or years of teaching experience influence how these teachers use language to express their ELT workplace status?

This chapter details the teacher participants, the instruments through which data were collected, and the methods used to find answers to these three RQs through analysis of data sets. The mixed-methods approach sourced quantitative and qualitative data through the survey, focus group interviews and corpus analysis application to build a profile of the teacher participants, presented as follows.

#### **4.1 The study participants**

Quantitative data sourced via an online survey presented a respondent demographic representing a teacher cross-section from eight different Republic of Ireland counties, with initial response numbers of 122 reduced to 81 valid responses after filtering included only fully-completed submissions. In identifying where their school was situated, these 81 teachers represented counties Cork (2), Donegal (1), Dublin (53), Galway (9), Kerry (5), Limerick (9), Mayo (1) and Wicklow (1) (see Figure 4.1). Dublin schools had the largest representation at 66%, unsurprising as 45 of the 85 schools listed on the ACELS/QQI/QQA website were Dublin-based.

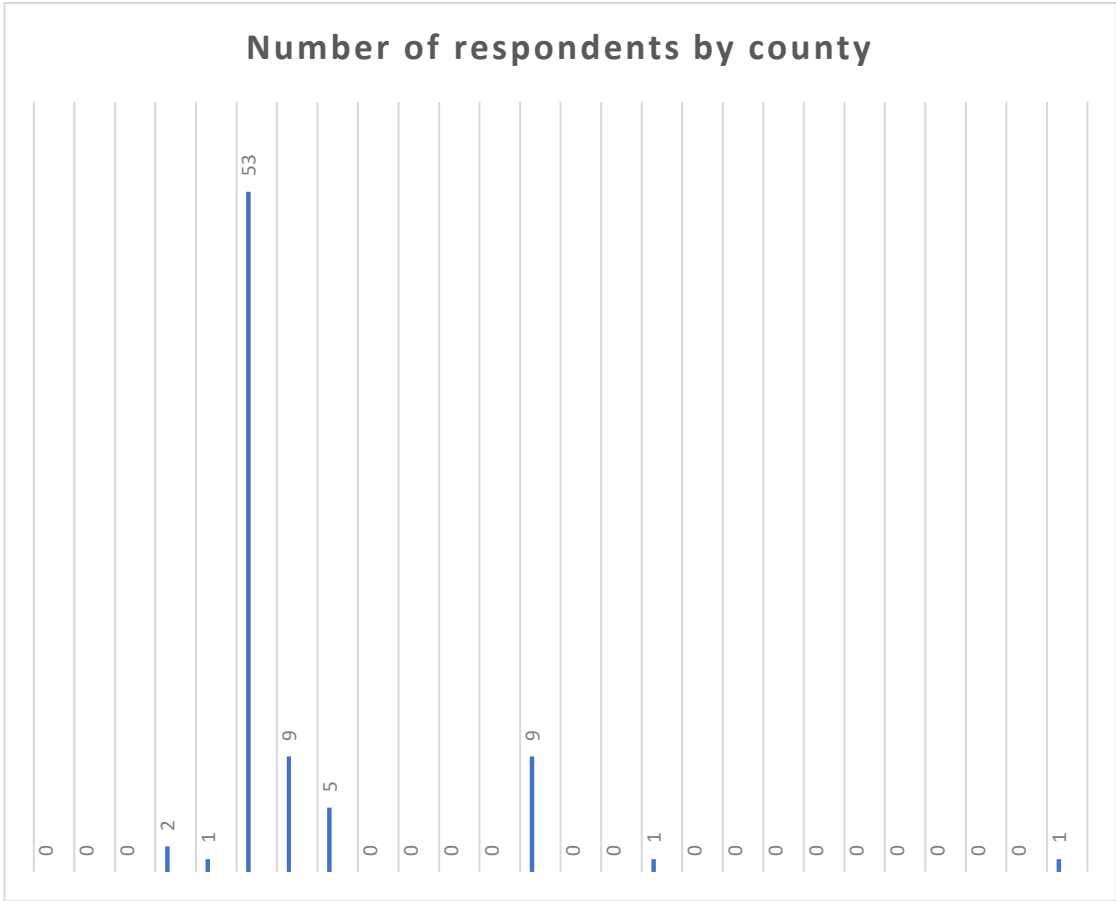


Figure 4.1: Q1 Please choose the county in Ireland your school is situated in (n=81).

Responses built the following teacher profile by gender, nationality, age, and experience level: Figure 4.2 indicates twice as many females (51) than males (25) replied.

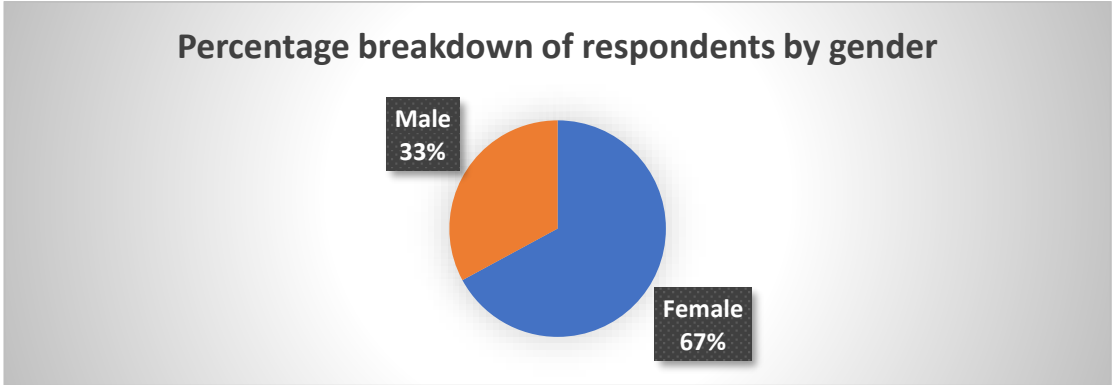
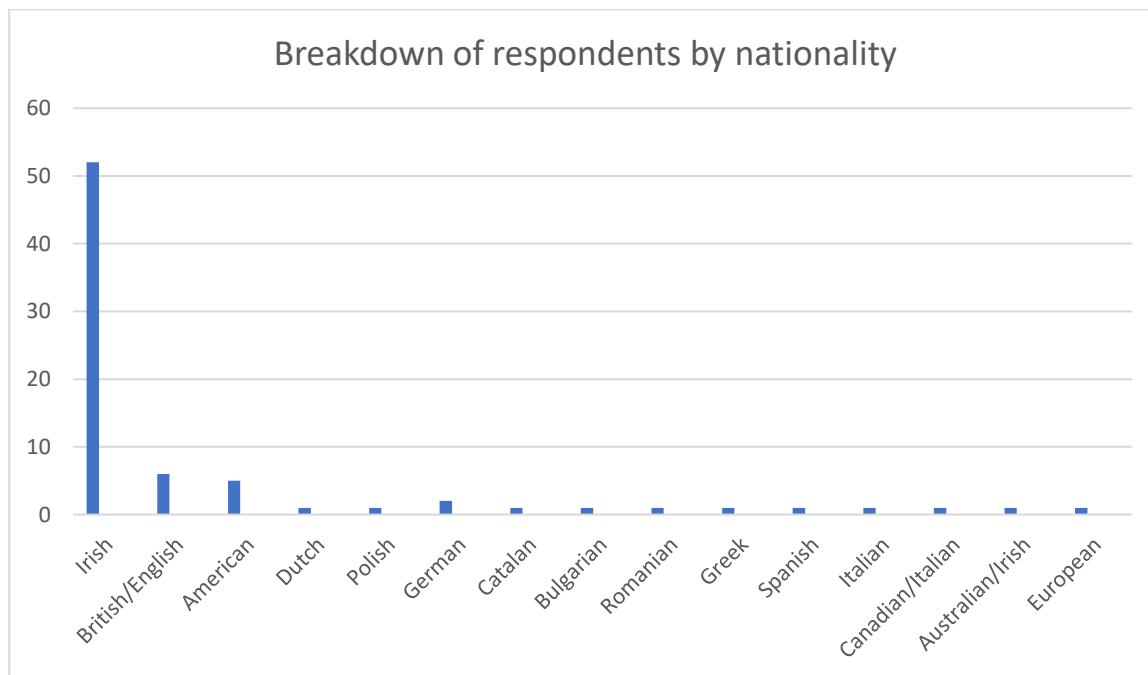


Figure 4.2: Gender breakdown of teacher respondents (n=76).

Of 76 who identified their nationality, 52 teachers (68%) stated that they were Irish, with 24 or 32% identifying as 'Other', giving single nationalities ranging from British or English (6), American (5), Dutch (1), Polish (1), German (2), Catalan (1), Bulgarian (1), Romanian (1), Greek (1), Spanish (1) and Italian (1), or a nationality combination,

including Canadian/ Italian (1) and Australian/Irish (1), one respondent stating ‘European’ (Figure 4.3). While 68% of these teacher respondents identified as Irish nationals, the 17% who did not reflected a broader, nationality-profile range in present-day, privately-run Irish ELT, showing need for increased recognition of a non-native, English-speaking teacher demographic (see Chapter 2, 2.3.3).



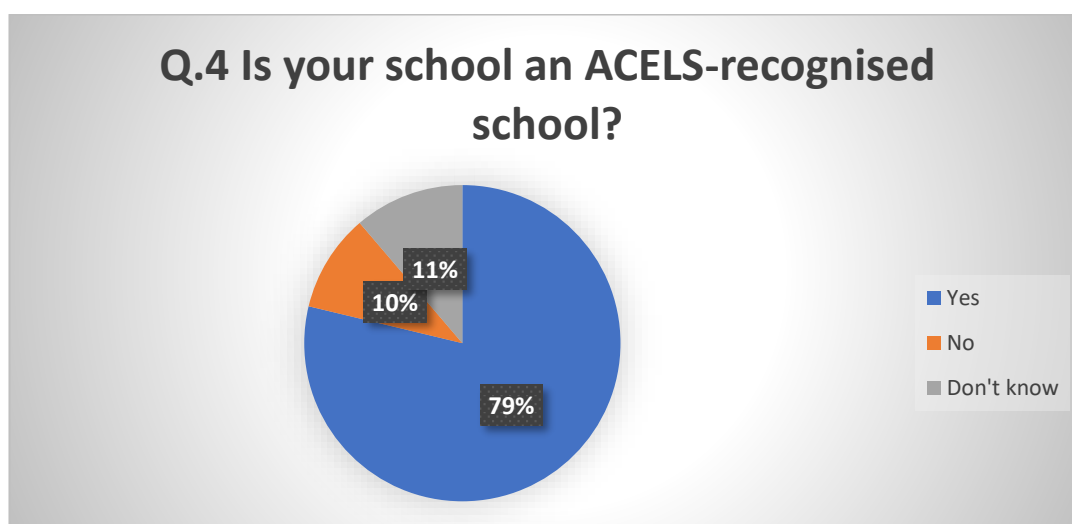
**Figure 4.3: Nationality range of teacher respondents (n=76).**

The majority were in the 31-40 age bracket; the total response breakdown in Table 4.1 shows the 21-30 and 41-50 categories with roughly equal numbers. Representation of teachers in the 51-60 and 61-70 age groups contradicts stereotypical perceptions of the transient, backpacker ELT teacher in their twenties (Doble 1997; O’Keeffe 2001; De Verdon Cooney 2000, p. 8; Thornbury 2001; Stainton 2018; Codó 2018), profiling a more mature, career-type teacher.

Age Category	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
<b>Under 20</b>	0	0
<b>21-30</b>	15	19.74%
<b>31-40</b>	32	42.11%
<b>41-50</b>	16	21.05%
<b>51-60</b>	8	10.53%
<b>61-70</b>	5	6.58%
<b>Over 71</b>	0	0
<b>Total response number:</b>	76	

**Table 4.1: Q7 – Which age category do you fall into? (n=76).**

Only ACELS-recognized schools had been contacted for survey distribution; Section 4.2 provides detailed explanation of its three-phased dissemination. Of 80 respondents to the question of whether their school was ACELS-recognized, 63 (78.75%) replied yes, eight (10%) no, yet Figure 4.4 shows how nine (11.25%) did not know, significant in terms of teacher empowerment and awareness of what regulatory body, if any, oversees their place of employment.



**Figure 4.4: Teacher response breakdown by percentage to Q4 – Is your school an ACELS-recognised school? (n=80).**

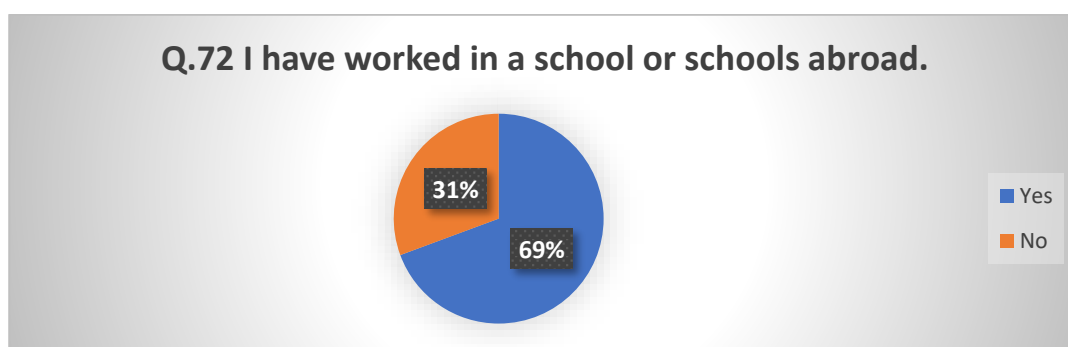
Of 75 who offered details on their number of years’ teaching experience, fewer than 10% recorded having under two, 8% had more than 25 years’ experience, with a majority at 19% demonstrating upwards of 15, mirroring UNITE ELT Branch findings that employment in ELT is “not as short-lived an experience as portrayed” (2020a, p. 5; see Table 4.2).

<i>Q.9 If you have experience teaching in paid employment in a school/schools, are you:</i>	<b>Number of teachers</b>	<b>Percentage of teachers</b>
<b>Newly qualified (under 1 year)</b>	2	2.67%
<b>1-2 years</b>	5	6.67%
<b>3-4 years</b>	11	14.67%
<b>5-6 years</b>	10	13.33%
<b>7-10 years</b>	10	13.33%
<b>11-15 years</b>	14	18.67%
<b>16-20 years</b>	9	12%
<b>21-25 years</b>	8	10.67%

<b>25+ years</b>	6	8%
<b>Total respondents</b>	75	100%

**Table 4.2: Breakdown of teacher respondents by years of ELT teaching experience (n=75).**

Finally, 62 recorded responses to the statement *I have worked in a school or schools abroad* indicates 43 (nearly 70%) replied ‘yes’ (Figure 4.5), in countries ranging from the UAE, Australia, the UK, Italy, Japan and Saudi Arabia. This demonstrates a highly-experienced cohort, with considerable levels of teaching both in Ireland and internationally.



**Figure 4.5: Percentage of teacher respondents who had or had not taught outside of Ireland (n=62).**

This initial portrayal of the survey respondents in terms of school location, gender, nationality, age, and experience level is expanded upon in Sections 4.2 and 4.3, while further survey responses are detailed in Analysis of Data Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. The study instruments, namely the survey and the focus group interviews, are now presented and described in detail, starting with the survey itself.

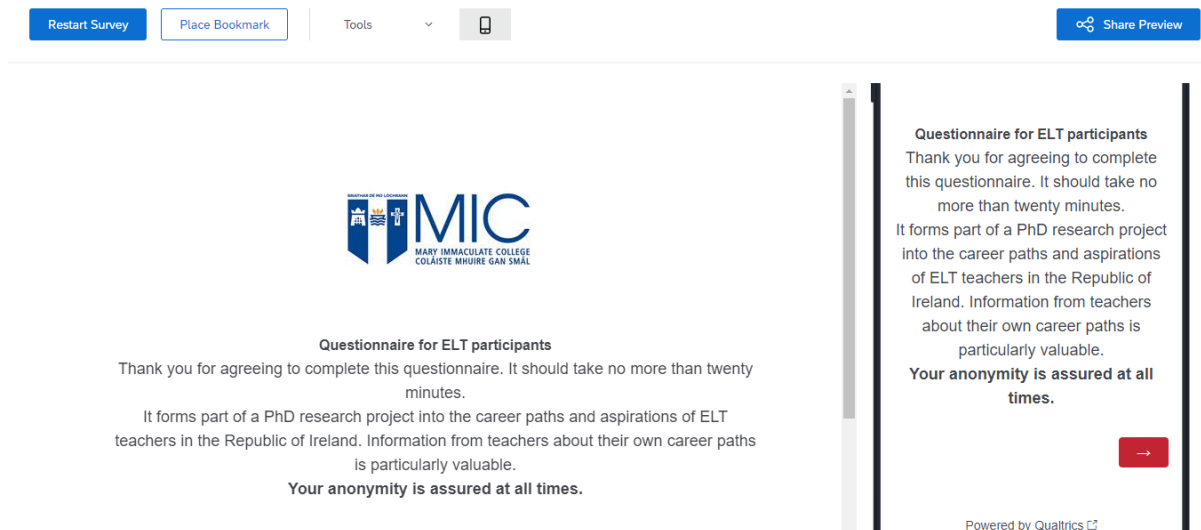
## 4.2 The instruments

The account of how data were sourced and collected begins with how the survey was conducted.

### 4.2.1 The online survey

The first step in the data-collection process involved compilation and distribution of the online survey, generated using QUALTRICS XM software (<https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/>) and totalling seventy-nine questions (see Appendix A). To maintain investigative rigour, respondents were not made aware of the intended study

metrics (i.e., perceptions and evaluations of teacher work conditions); offered instead was ‘career paths and aspirations of ELT teachers’ (Figure 4.6).



**Figure 4.6: The online survey, with metric ‘career paths and aspirations of ELT teachers’ given as focus. (<https://micquality.eu.qualtrics.com>).**

The survey was piloted with two teachers, whose feedback was refined, finalised and distributed online over a five-month, three-phased approach. This aimed to reach the maximum possible number of practitioners either currently employed in, or with employment experience in privately-run, Irish-based, ACELS-affiliated ELT schools. The survey contained seventy-five closed questions for quantitative data collection, specifically addressing RQs 1 and 3, while four open-ended questions permitted qualitative participant response, aiming to investigate RQ 1 more fully, and RQ 2.

The closed questions consisted of blocks examining teachers’ school location and ACELS/QQA status, nationality, gender, age profile and teaching experience, as reported in Section 4.1. In addition, qualifications, motivation behind qualifications and Continuous Professional Development undertaken and how each was funded, teachers’ roles and duties, and teacher experiences regarding work environment and pay conditions were also explored. The four concluding, open-ended questions investigated reasons for entering and remaining in ELT, and wider, teacher attitudes:

1. *Why did you decide to work in ELT?*

2. *What are your longer-term career plans? Do you see yourself continuing in ELT?*
3. *What in your opinion are the typical attributes of a professional ELT teacher?*
4. *Do you regard yourself as a professional? Is there anything else you would like to add that hasn't been covered in this questionnaire?*

These questions also acted as the essential bedrock for the focus group interviews, outlined in Section 4.2.2. The researcher's contact details at the survey end invited teachers to be interviewed, proving a valuable means of recruiting focus group participants. The survey was distributed in three phases:

### **Phase 1 (November 2019):**

Emails were sent to Directors of Studies (DoS) of eighty-five, privately-run ELT schools in the Republic of Ireland on the same weekend, 17-18 November 2019 (see Appendix F), sourced from the ACELS/QQI-recognised list of schools' website ([www.acels.ie](http://www.acels.ie)). University-based ELT schools (University College Cork, University College Dublin, Dublin City University and University of Limerick) were outside study confines, hence excluded. ACELS/QQI-recognised, affiliated and regulated schools were deemed the more relevant study focus; future research is recommended on work conditions in schools outside their remit (see 1.2). Emails were addressed to the named DoS of each school on the website, or 'Dear Director of Studies' if unavailable. A brief outline of the study and link to the online survey was provided, requesting it be made available to teachers at their school. Of the eighty-five emails sent, five were no longer active, with no contact for that school. Among the remaining eighty, nine email replies were received in total, three of which ran as summer schools only, hence had no teachers in November. The plan to contact these schools later in the summer of 2020 was rendered impossible due to pandemic restrictions (see Section 4.2.3). **Phase 1** generated forty-five survey responses, results among which are detailed in Chapters 5-8.

**Phase 2 (December 2019):** A three-pronged approach combined actions culminating in three additional focus-group participants, and further survey responses:

1. An 'ELT-ed' mini-conference organised by ELT Ireland at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick (09 March, 2019) resulted in teachers voluntarily approaching the researcher post-presentation, indicating

- willingness to be interviewed. Recruits were also sent the survey link in December 2019, and asked to share it among teacher colleagues;
2. A representative from UNITE ELT Branch was emailed and asked to circulate the survey link to teachers to whom they had access;
  3. An email was sent to ELT Advocacy and ELT Ireland, who put the survey link on their social media sites (the pre-‘X’ Twitter, and Facebook).

**Phase 3 (Jan-Feb 2020):** The final phase involved two approaches:

1. A call-out for participants at the end of an interview with Prof. Anne O’Keeffe in a January edition of the *EL Gazette* magazine (Ragsdale 2020), with the survey link and researcher’s contact details provided.
2. A call-out for participants at the 2020 ELT Ireland annual conference (22-23 February) where, post-presentation, ELT teachers indicated willingness to either be interviewed, complete the survey, or both.

The five-month timespan during which the survey remained live is acknowledged as unorthodox (QUALTRICSXM 2023a), but felt necessary given historical difficulty in accessing teachers (Section 1.2). 122 replies received, before being closed in late May 2020, were filtered using QUALTRICS to allow analysis of only fully-completed surveys, providing 81 total, valid responses, demographic details of participants outlined in Section 4.1. Explanation of how the focus groups were organised and conducted now follows.

#### 4.2.2 The data and study participants: the focus group interviews

For qualitative data collection, fifteen interviews were conducted and recorded with ELT teachers between 11 July, 2019 and 03 November, 2020, totalling twenty-four participants. The anonymity the survey had provided, and the fact that focus group recruitment took place from a range of sources over three time phases (Section 4.2.1) meant it could not be ascertained if focus group participants had also completed the survey; they were hence treated as a separate cohort. All twenty-four had worked as ELT teachers in Irish, privately-run schools, for varying lengths. How focus-group teacher participants were recruited is detailed in Section 4.2.3, with comprehensive analysis of interviews presented in Chapters 5-8. Consistent with survey data, the majority were Irish nationals, with two British, one American, and one Canadian composing the remaining

native-speaker cohort; there was only one, non-native-speaker participant, who was Romanian. The average age was 41, with twelve years' mean teaching experience again consistent with survey responses. Two were no longer teaching, four had worked as Directors of Studies, two as teacher-trainers, and four had held administrative positions in schools, mainly in sales and marketing, or student services. A detailed outline of how focus group data were gathered is now given.

#### 4.2.3 Data collection for the focus group interviews

The second dataset involved thirteen hours of recorded focus group interviews with twenty-four ELT teachers employed in a privately-run school in the Irish Republic at time of interview, or having had direct experience of such work. Teachers were sourced through word of mouth. A snowball sampling effect (Dörnyei 2003, p. 72) resulted in sixteen initial participants, the remaining eight recruited as outlined in Section 4.2.1, **Phases 1-3**. Questions adapted from studies by Johnston (1997) and Kennedy and Phillips (1989) were piloted with four participants; modifications based on their feedback resulted in four, open-ended questions posed to each interviewee:

**Question 1:** *Why did you decide to work in ELT?*

**Question 2:** *What are your longer-term career plans? At what point in time as a teacher did you make that decision? Do you see yourself continuing in ELT? Are there opportunities to grow in ELT?*

**Question 3:** *Do you view ELT as a profession?*

**Question 4:** *What, in your opinion, are the typical attributes of a professional ELT teacher? Do you regard yourself as a professional? Is there anything else you would like to add?*

Interviews took place in varying locations beyond school workplaces, “outside the four walls or ‘traditional’ classrooms” (Walsh and Morton 2017, p. 1), with signed consent sought (see Appendices D and E). Where possible, teachers were interviewed in pairs. The rationale behind this was that pair-work as a collaborative medium is often encouraged in ELT classrooms to promote cooperation, and make the classroom a more friendly place, embracing the “two heads are better than one” maxim (Harmer 2007, p. 165). For many of these participants, this was their first-ever opportunity to have their on-record voice heard about matters beyond pedagogical performance. It was therefore

felt that a partner, particularly if sensitive issues arose, may provide a supportive environment, following Mayr's (2008, p. 171) recommendations that interviewees "feel comfortable" during the interview process. Nine interviews were thus conducted in pairs.

The original study aim had been to conduct all interviews in a face-to-face, paired manner, but pandemic restrictions necessitated the kind of adaptations many researchers had to make for continued progress under what has been identified as "difficult circumstances" (Smith 2021). Unforeseen, practical limitations impacted this study through pandemic-imposed, social restrictions: lockdown delayed data collection by four months. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face in July 2020, following safe, social-distancing measures, after the first lockdown had lifted. Nevertheless, technical issues (diminished sound quality recording outdoors), coupled with physical location restrictions imposed on participants around Ireland, meant online would be the only viable option for successful recording of the remaining interviews, via Zoom. Interviews ranged from 21 minutes to 1 hour and 44 minutes, the average length 1 hour and 10 minutes. Pre-lockdown interviews were twice as long as those conducted during restrictions, either face-to-face or online; the mean, pre-lockdown length was 80 minutes, the post-lockdown average was 43 minutes. Whilst unavoidable, this is an acknowledged study limitation, as potentially rich data may have been sacrificed through circumstance. Further study limitations are detailed in Section 4.10. Recording quality was so adversely affected in one dyadic interview that it was rendered unusable, through outdoor noise interference. Therefore, the remaining eight interviews, conducted online and video recorded on Zoom, were shorter on average.

Four of the post-lockdown interviews consisted of dyads (including the one eliminated), the remaining six had single teacher participants. Sound quality remained a challenge when transcribing Zoom interviews, particularly when overlapping occurred, or long pauses of up to three seconds whilst awaiting responses. Such hesitation often indicates that an informant regards a question as problematic, and this is how it has been received (Cameron 2001, p. 149), significant for this study. It served to remind that while social media platforms have had massive impact on data creation and processing; as corpus linguists we are "still working with a text-based paradigm for their investigation" (O'Keeffe and McCarthy 2022, p. 4). Despite challenges caused by poor connectivity, Zoom video contact provided what McCarthy and O'Keeffe (2010, p. 6) define as "invaluable contextual and para-linguistic and extra-linguistic" features, such as raised,

emotive intonation for emphasis, assisting the forcefulness CTA criterion to be outlined in Section 4.4.1, exhalation and inhalation before offering measured evaluations, and ironic, incredulous laughter. Although delayed, focus group data collection was finally completed by late November 2020.

### **4.3 The need for multiple datasets**

This mixed-method study comprises of two datasets: data from the survey closed questions, some of which were presented in Section 4.1, and data from four, open-ended survey question responses added to the transcribed, focus group interviews. Conducting focus groups is a standard research method resulting in certain types of discourse (Cameron 2001, p. 19). For this study, it is a corpus of ELT-teacher, focus group interviews combined with open-ended, survey question responses to build a mono-modal, text-based corpus, providing qualitative and quantitative data for investigation.

Focus group research subjects have certain preconceptions of what an interview entails; discourse data must thus be treated as distinct ‘discourse’ and ‘data’ (ibid, p. 66). The need for multiple research sets is paramount for gaining objectivity in investigation of data, with corpus analysis recommended as an additional, impartial safeguard (Partington *et al.* 2013, p. 206). A corpus-informed approach was hence essential to complement the Critical Thematic Analysis of data collected. A corpus can uncover patterns of language usage (Hunston 2022). The corpus for this study was built to test researcher intuition on how the focus group and survey participants expressed perceptions of Irish ELT linguistically, aiming to bring impartiality to the analysis of its multiple datasets, a potential issue addressed in Section 4.10. Key was how teachers used metaphor and modality-based devices to evaluate experiences, explored in greater detail in Section 4.4.2.

In addition to being an Applied Linguistics researcher, I was employed in privately-run, Irish-based ELT schools over a thirty-year period. Corpus investigation of the multiple data sets of this study hence satisfied O’Keeffe *et al.* ’s recommendation for ELT teacher-led inquiry, highlighting that what corpus linguists often find insightful is “not always relevant or exciting for language teachers” (2007, p. 246). That corpus linguists located in the academic world and ELT teachers in the privately-run sector may not share similar research interests furthers need for teacher-driven research questions, and for corpus

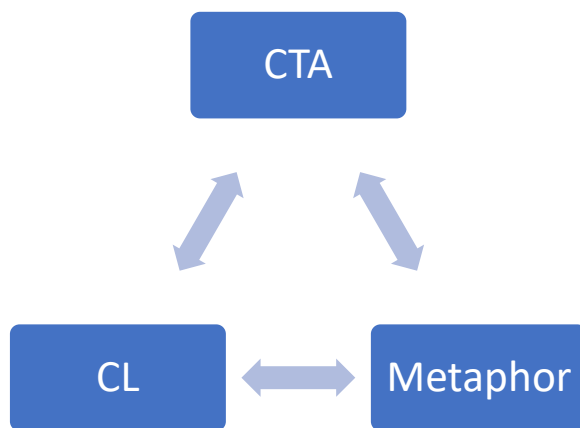
findings that receive greater, critical response from teachers themselves. In my dual researcher/ELT teacher role, theory and practice could thus converge, informing this PhD study. Through analysis of its multiple datasets, and focus on direct evaluations teachers themselves have voiced through modal and metaphorical expressions, this study attempts to bridge the research gap between investigation of teacher work conditions in the privately-run ELT school context, Irish-based ELT teacher perceptions and evaluations of same, and academia, as discussed in Chapter 2. Empirical exploration of communicative events within professions is advised to better understand interactions within, and lead to better practice (Adolphs *et al.* 2004; Koester 2006). O’Keeffe *et al.* (2007, p. 241) highlight how ELT teachers “are more linguistically equipped” for self-reflection beyond classroom confines, extending to external loci such as meetings and staffrooms, “part of the wider situational matrix of teaching” (*ibid.*). The focus group interviews were conducted in such external loci, beyond school walls, imperative to understanding real concerns of ELT teachers, which may not always be restricted to their pedagogy.

For Cameron, each time we speak, we tell listeners “something about ourselves” (2001, p. 170). Language reflects intertextual networks of diverse external, social, economic, political and cultural practices. Where language and power intersect is often where social asymmetries and discriminatory practices can be identified in emergent discourse themes, which can then be examined and challenged (Blackledge 2012, p. 617; Chapter 3, 3.3-3.6). Critical theory application, and the role Critical Thematic Analysis can play in linking educational research with politics and policy-making, means such research is “concerned not only with understanding a situation or phenomenon but with *changing* it” (Cohen *et al.* 2018, p. 1, italics theirs). As outlined in Chapter 3, within a Critical Discourse Analysis paradigm (which Critical Thematic Analysis resides within), reality is understood as *constructed* by societal forces that become ‘naturalized’: it is ‘the way things are’ (Cameron 2001, pp.121-126; italics Cameron’s). This manifests linguistically as common-sense beliefs, inevitable and unchallenged, serving specific, vested interests and dominant groups (see Section 3.8.2). For instance, the term ‘globalisation’ is an abstraction that becomes an accepted reality, and typifies a linguistic choice speakers make that is “not just random but ideologically patterned” (Cameron 2001, pp. 121-126; Section 1.2).

Having presented demographic details on the study participants, demonstrated the data instruments and collection procedures, and outlined the necessity for multiple data-set collection, Section 4.4 now details the study’s extensive, methodological synergy. It will first explore how Critical Thematic Analysis is applied as a CDA framework. It will then examine the use of the Metaphor Identification Procedure as an analysis framework, after which is given a detailed insight into how corpus investigation of the data for this study assisted its Critical Thematic and Metaphor analysis. It will also explain how these three methodologies were woven together, complementing one another for these study purposes.

#### 4.4 Methodology

Explanation of this study methodology begins by detailing what the Critical Thematic Analysis entailed, and how this synergises with Corpus Linguistics and Metaphor Analysis (Figure 4.7).



**Figure 4.7: The three selected methodologies of this study.**

##### 4.4.1 The use of Critical Thematic Analysis

Critical Thematic Analysis enabled critique of the focus group interview and open-ended survey question corpus from a CDA standpoint. A framework offered by Lawless and Chen (2019), adapted from an earlier model of Braun and Clarke (2006), outlines a systematic method to examine interrelationships between interview discourses, social practices and power relations, detailing themes and patterns arising from “local action and interaction embedded in a wider social world” (Blackledge 2012, p. 618). This acknowledges wider bodies within and outside ELT, directly influencing teachers’

perceptions and evaluations of their work lives (see Section 1.2), and members of the general public, who may or may not be familiar with what ELT entails, yet hold “‘monochromatic’ and stereotypical” evaluations of what ELT teachers are, and what it is that they do (Codó 2018, p. 442). It furthermore assists in this study exploration of how teacher perceptions and evaluations are influenced by work conditions.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79; bold print added) distinguish between the terms **data corpus**, (the entire quantity of study data collected), **data set** (focus on one facet of this collection), **data item**, and **data extract**, each with a narrower focus respectively on very specific data aspects. Table 4.3 illustrates how this correlates to the present study.

<b>Descriptor</b>	<b>Description of data type for qualitative analysis</b>
<b>Data corpus</b>	All 24 teacher focus group interviews + four, open-ended survey question responses
<b>Data set</b>	Set 1 = all 24 teacher focus group interviews Set 2 = four, open-ended survey question responses
<b>Data item</b>	One full focus group interview, either between two teachers and the interviewer/researcher, or with just a single teacher and the interviewer/researcher; All responses to one full survey question
<b>Data extract</b>	One chunk of text extracted from one interview, or from one survey question response

**Table 4.3: Descriptive breakdown of data offered by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) and its application for the data of this study.**

When a topic arises in one particular data set, all instances of this topic in the entire data corpus become a data set, to identify recurring topics as themes. The advantage of collecting and transcribing one’s own data lies in increased familiarity with its content, in inductive, bottom-up coding, and deductive, top-down analysis during the process, resulting in RQs being more efficiently coded for.

Further analysis scrutinizing semantic and latent themes is where corpus assistance unveils frequent single and multi-word keyword items, expressing underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations and potential ideologies shaping and informing more surface, semantic data content (Braun and Clarke 2006, pp. 83-84; Lawless and Chen 2019). This demonstrates how Corpus Linguistics complements this study. Use of corpus

software to isolate and highlight repeated instances of single words and word clusters can offer impartial assistance in pinpointing emerging themes and, for this study, metaphors. Taking each Table 4.3 descriptor into account, how CTA, CL and Metaphor Analysis synergise in this study can be outlined in the following table. Table 4.4 illustrates a selection of nominal frequency words, from the data corpus of combined focus group transcripts and open-ended question responses built for this study. Displayed and highlighted in red are references to ‘money’ (28), ‘business’ (29) and ‘industry’ (31), meriting investigation from a thematic perspective, criteria for which, offered by Owens (1984), will be later detailed. The nouns ‘hour’, ‘day’, ‘year’ and the word ‘time’ suggest potential temporal, metaphorical links to ‘business’, ‘money’ and ‘industry’ in Table 4.4 (highlighted red). This is analysed in Chapters 6 and 7, assisted by a Metaphor Identification Procedure, outlined in Section 4.4.2 and Appendix G. In addition, presence of the word ‘profession’ (33) suggested a dichotomy between the ELT sector as a business, and as a profession, each explored as distinct themes in Chapters 6 and 7.

Raw noun frequency of Focus Group Interviews and Survey Questions Data Corpus		
1. teacher	2. school	3. people
4. thing	5. student	6. time
7. kind	8. laugh	9. year
10. language	11. lot	12. job
13. teaching	14. something	15. name
16. hour	17. class	18. week
19. way	20. bit	21. course
22. day	23. work	24. ELT
25. I	26. question	27. participant
28. money	29. business	30. director
31. industry	32. Ireland	33. profession

**Table 4.4: Nominal frequency word forms identified in the data corpus through corpus investigation which can be further investigated, through Critical Thematic and Metaphor, theoretical exploration.**

Data set analysis in the second descriptor in Table 4.3 would call for separating the transcribed focus group interviews from the open-ended survey question responses, to explore whether similar words and themes surfaced in each separate, discrete data set. For instance, Table 4.5 demonstrates the nominal frequency list that the open-ended survey questions as a distinct data set in their own right generated. Once again, ‘time’ and related references ‘hour’, ‘year’ and ‘week’ are visible, as are ‘industry’, ‘business’ and ‘profession’, consistent with the entire data corpus.

Raw noun frequency of Open-Ended Survey Questions Data Set		
1. teacher	2. ELT	3. student

4. school	5. teaching	6. language
7. job	8. people	9. year
10. experience	11. work	12. career
13. education	14. opportunity	15. time
16. industry	17. profession	18. level
19. way	20. hour	21. sector
22. professional	23. training	24. management
25. condition	26. Ireland	27. lack
28. area	29. owner	30. patience
31. week	32. business	33. pay

**Table 4.5: Nominal frequency word forms identified in the data set which comprised of the open-ended survey questions only. Overlap with the data corpus is visible in time references, business and profession.**

One focus group interview, or all responses to one survey question, each constitute what descriptor three indicates as a data item. Corpus investigation of concordance lines can lend greater in-depth analysis to such items, locating where, specifically, particular keyword references were, as Figure 4.8 indicates. A corpus requires “manual sifting” of word or concordance lists to decide which items actually constitute idioms (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 82), facilitated in this study with the MIP checklist (Appendix G). Examining lexical patterns, or ‘chunks’ (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 13) reveals more about metaphor: linguistic metaphors are evidence of conceptual metaphors, or the way people think (Section 3.10). As an example, ‘lot’ appears in data corpus position 11 in Table 4.4, which often features in the chunk ‘a lot of’. Concordance lines displayed in Figure 4.8 demonstrate the three-word cluster ‘a lot of’ for this study corpus.

44	doc#0	) you know?</s><s>(6. but t- to be honest, I'm there as well, like I said a lot of good things about the school and that, but THE SCHOOL IS NOT THE
45	doc#0	:e some money well it seems to be open up a school, but even at that, a lot of the schools are struggling (5: yeah) 1:39:00.15 5: but if like if you DO t
46	doc#0	eah) but you make good money in a place like Sydney, you will spend a lot of money as well 10.07.73 8: it's like Dublin, you make €25 an hour...but
47	doc#0	s tests, and get into the courses they want, it's very rewarding, there's a lot of ...and I think there are very few jobs that you can really see THAT YOU
48	doc#0	can say that...it's not stressful...yeah, it's stressful that we don't have a lot of money, it's stressful that it's maybe not as secure as we would like, bu
49	doc#0	of parents and intrinsic motivation of adulthood so don't care, but have a lot of energy and are a lot of fun, a mixed-nationality group of smart teens ci
50	doc#0	motivation of adulthood so don't care, but have a lot of energy and are a lot of fun, a mixed-nationality group of smart teens can be a joy, there's a ter
51	doc#0	at was fun</s><s>[laughs]) that was fun but I (Int: right!) to be honest a lot of them were just there, put there after they'd gone through C1 and that v
52	doc#0	a professional, I'm not sure that (8: the world sees you as such) I think a lot of people still see...there are people see the job as something that. peopl
53	doc#0	ah, they're like 'Oh yeah; Int: in your experience, yeah?) 1:01:25.51 7: a lot of people, I think their exper- their exposure to...ehm...</s><s>TEFL teac
54	doc#0	>><s>[laughs] and a drinking problem</s><s>Here I am!) so yes, so a lot of people ehm not that they haven't heard of it but like when you mention
55	doc#0	>>never met anyone who [unclear] but ahm I think yeah maybe people a lot of people in the...the industry itself...probably feel that way...think we're ε
56	doc#0	I</s><s>It's their PROFESSIONI) well most schools you go to you get a lot of people who have NO INTENTION of their being there (8: in six months
57	doc#0	think then you know...if you're any bit of a daycent teacher you've put a lot of ...time and energy in, you try to stay up-to-date on what you're doing y
58	doc#0	nd then they know it...they've learned something whereas I would say a lot of teaching is just telling people to memorise that...which is (8: NOT what
59	doc#0	lways been interested in it, you know...and I say that when we were, at a lot of the schools in London , we had a lot of children there from who didn't t
60	doc#0	nd I say that when we were, at a lot of the schools in London , we had a lot of children there from who didn't have English coming in to us, they migh
61	doc#0	mm) you know, background, so they didn't have English, so we spent a lot of time not, hadn't really any training that, you know, putting words up an

**Figure 4.8: Concordance lines for the phrase a lot of demonstrates multiple combinations with ‘people’, and time and money references.**

‘A lot of’ is a vague approximator used when speakers do not have precise numbers to hand (Koester 2006, p. 92). This includes vague nouns (e.g., ‘stuff’) and vague categories (e.g., ‘people’), or ‘exemplars’ which place an onus on the listener to identify references (Channell 1994). Despite imprecision, vague language carries ideational meaning, mirrors the informality of certain work environments, and projects ‘very high degree of shared knowledge’ (Koester 2006, p. 92), relevant in terms of what these teachers shared in their perceptions of ELT. The concordance line examination in Figure 4.8 displays ‘a lot of’ combinations in multi-word clusters referencing ‘people’, ‘money’, and ‘energy’. The multi-word combinations with ‘a lot of people’ (circled in blue) indicated not only how others from outside the sector perceive ELT and its teachers, but also how ELT teachers perceived their peers, thematically investigated in Chapter 8.

Taking one concordance line example from Figure 4.8 (circled in red), the final Table 4.3 descriptor, focusing on data extract, can be seen in the following chunk of text extracted from **Focus Group 4, Participant 8**, referencing ‘a lot of time’:

**FG4-8:** you’re OBLIGED to, you have, we have to have a degree AND a teaching qualification, it’s not like you can walk off, in off the street, and I also think then you know...if you’re any bit of a daycent [exaggerates and laughs] teacher you’ve put **a lot of...time** and energy in, you try to stay up-to-date on what you’re doing you.....you know you work hard at it and.....and I think I’m GOOD AT IT....I don’t think that somebody you pull in off the street can do...what I do

Strong intonation on words is one of Owen’s (1984) criteria of forcefulness, explained later in this section. The intonated words OBLIGED and AND, indicated by capital letters, accentuate the modality of ‘have to’, and sector insistence of standards. Sector obligations of teachers are explored in Chapter 6, while the capital letters, CTA transcription feature is in evidence throughout all four, analysis chapters. Also visible in this extract are phrasal verb chunks referencing ‘in’, identified by the corpus investigation as a highly-frequent preposition (Section 4.5.2.2): ‘put in (time and energy)’ and ‘walk in/ pull in off the street’, offering metaphorical self-evaluation and insight into this teacher’s sense of their own, professional worth and status. Use of ‘daycent’ (i.e., ‘decent’), intonation on ‘I think I’m GOOD AT IT’, and the teacher’s need to emphasise this, suggests how that status may be perceived otherwise in a wider, ELT context. These

examples thus demonstrate how the Corpus Linguistic, CDA and Metaphor methodologies may be linked to the four, discrete descriptors offered in Table 4.3, and synergised for the purposes of this study.

Braun and Clarke’s model (2006, p. 87) presents a recursive, six-phase data analysis, calling for multiple readings of the focus group interview data, and aiming for rigour in response to the RQs of this study. Table 4.6 illustrates an inductive, bottom-up first reading and coding of the focus group interview data during the initial transcription process, followed by a more theoretical, deductive, top-down analysis on second reading of these transcripts, when corpus-assisted CTA and Metaphor analysis addressed the specific RQs this study poses.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Process description</b>
<b>1. Familiarise yourself with your data</b>	Transcribe, read and re-read data, noting down initial ideas
<b>2. Generate initial codes</b>	Code interesting data features systematically across the entire data set, and collate data relevant to each code
<b>3. Search for themes</b>	Collate codes into potential themes by gathering relevant data to each theme
<b>4. Review themes</b>	Check if themes relate to the coded extracts and entire data set to generate a thematic analysis map
<b>5. Define and name themes</b>	Refine the specifics of each theme by generating clear names and definitions to get a clearer view of the overall story they are telling
<b>6. Produce the report</b>	Select vivid, compelling extract examples that relate specifically to the research questions

**Table 4.6: Braun and Clarke’s (2006, p. 87) six-phase, step-by-step thematic analysis guide.**

Multiple readings of study data complement both the interpretive work a corpus analysis of data requires, and identification of metaphor, provided in the Metaphor Identification Procedure framework (Appendix G). A basic corpus search, using corpus software, is “a useful starting point” (Jones 2022, p. 127), but a corpus in isolation cannot reveal much about language. Real insights come from manual analysis of its data (Evison 2010; Jones

2022, p. 126). Close investigation of single words, their collocates and phrases can be complemented through identifying latent themes in the text context and co-text, which shape and inform more surface, semantic content (Deignan 2008, pp. 282-284; Oakey 2022, pp. 199-201). This is what Critical Thematic Analysis can then unearth (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 82; Lawless and Chen 2019).

There are a number of considerations in applying thematic analysis. The first is what, precisely, constitutes a theme, primarily a question of prevalence (Braun and Clarke 2006, pp. 82-84). In this respect, by objectively ascertaining single-word frequency, cluster frequency and keyness, corpus analysis assists in narrowing down what is prevalent and salient in a data set, as Table 4.4 and Figure 4.8 illustrate. Rich description of an entire data set is useful in the investigation of under-researched areas, as has been the issue of work conditions from the perspective of ELT teachers themselves (Codó 2018, p. 438), or in interviews with participants whose viewpoints on a topic are unknown to the researcher (Braun and Clarke 2006, pp. 82-83), factors relevant to this study. In interview contexts, informants often present themselves as certain kinds of people, and are given opportunity to do so by providing an account of themselves. The invitation to reveal unknown evaluations is potentially face-threatening, as either an imposition (threat to negative face) or exposure to negative judgement from the researcher or fellow participants, i.e., a threat to positive face (Cameron 2001, p. 147; Copland and Donahue 2021).

A second consideration is whether the researcher wishes to give a rich description of the entire collection of data, or a more detailed, nuanced account of only a few themes. For this study, given historical lack of research into ELT teacher work conditions in an Irish context, the former was preferred, but for logistical reasons the latter was applied, resulting in four analysis chapters, each examining one overarching theme, and selected, related subthemes, synergising all three methodologies in Figure 4.7.

A third factor is whether analysis should be inductive, with coding applied during the first reading during active transcribing (advantageous when, as in this study, data has been researcher-collected), or more theoretical and top-down, with specific RQs guiding coding after transcription. In this study, the former took place during the initial transcribing process, following the six-phase criteria offered in Table 4.6 to identify metaphor. A second reading of the transcripts entailed close adherence to and application

of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (Appendix G), as well as critiquing identified themes from a CDA perspective (see Section 3.8) in a top-down analysis, to further address the RQs.

A fourth point is whether one is to search for semantic, or latent themes: the corpus analysis enabled semantic theme identification through frequency and keyword list creation. How these items then reflected underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, ideologies and, in particular, metaphors of ELT as a sector, and how they shaped and informed more surface, semantic content in the teachers' discourses, was deemed crucially important. The framework in Table 4.6 enabled a constructionist, critical thematic analysis, permitting exploration of the sociological constructs, contexts and conditions influencing individual accounts and experiences, which CDA theory informed, and the RQs sought answers to. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 85) stress the importance of overall RQs driving a project, and clarity of questions put to participants during interviews, which piloting assisted with in this study (Section 4.2.1). Additional guiding questions include (Braun and Clark 2006, p. 94):

- i. What does this theme mean?
- ii. What are the assumptions underpinning it?
- iii. What are the implications of this theme?
- iv. What conditions are likely to have given rise to it?
- v. Why do participants talk about this topic/thing/issue in this particular way?
- vi. What is the overall story the different themes reveal about the topic?

These questions ensure all thematic aspects cohere around central concepts, with adequate, multiple examples. The interpretative act of transcription is emphasised, requiring "rigorous and thorough" (ibid) verbatim, orthographic recording of utterances, verbal and non-verbal, in the recursive, six-phase analysis in Table 4.6. Critical reading of the themes must then occur, to ensure analytic narrative extends "*beyond* description of the data", to make "*an argument*" in relation to RQs (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 93, their italics). Multiple examples to support observation prevent "anecdotalism" (Bryman 1988), responding to concerns about potential lack of methodological rigour (see 3.7). This transfers CDA methods used to explore media texts (e.g., Fairclough 2003; Phillips

and Jørgensen 2002; Machin and Mayr 2012) to transcribed, focus group interview data through application of a more robust, CTA framework.

Lawless and Chen (2019) extended Braun and Clarke’s six-phase model through application of three criteria offered by Owen, to assist in theme interpretation in relational communication: **recurrence**, **repetition**, and **forcefulness** (1984, pp. 275-276; see Table 4.7). In relational communication, a focus group discussion is a recognised speech event, where participants speak with purpose and play particular roles, conducted along “more or less well-defined conventions” (Cameron 2001, p. 146). Characteristics of this event will emerge from what participants understand its purpose as being, how roles are interpreted, and “how they understand the norms for producing and interpreting talk” (ibid). Owen’s criteria offer a framework for critical reading of interview data, allowing an analyst to see how patterns are linked to wider ideologies (Lawless and Chen 2019, pp. 95-96).

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>recurrence</b>	Repetition of meaning using synonyms and threads through discourse
<b>repetition</b>	Use of exactly the same words
<b>forcefulness</b>	Importance assigned to language choice through tone, volume, inflection, stressing a point, exclamation

**Table 4.7: Owen’s three criteria (1984), adapted by Lawless and Chen (2019).**

These criteria assist an analyst in clearly seeing discourse patterns, and enable methodology synergy in this study. Through recurrence of synonymous words conveying similar ideas, a thread of meaning can be detected through a discourse as it develops, consistent with CDA text analysis. Repetition, or “explicit repeated use of the same wording” (Owen 1984, pp. 274-275) complements corpus analysis in identification of key words, phrases and sentences. Finally, forcefulness, demonstrated in capital letters to represent vocal inflection, volume, dramatic pauses, or use of subordinate utterances in extracts, ensures how this triumvirate identifies the kind of themes, metaphors and stances which “allow sense making at different rates and in various forms fitting the specific current concerns of the participants” (Owen 1984, p. 276).

Such critique is particularly suited to analytical work with social justice goals grounded in critical epistemology, remaining “acutely aware of...social and hegemonic structures, institutional power, and ideological impact” (Lawless and Chen 2019, p. 96; Section 2.3). This relates to how speakers position themselves in terms of their cultural identity, investigating who speakers are (in this study, Irish-based, ELT teachers), and why what they say matters (because historically, on-record views of ELT industry work conditions have been scarcely voiced by Irish-based, ELT teachers themselves in an academic context). CDA limits focus to linguistic form, production and distribution of texts; CTA offers greater flexibility for this study in understanding relational communication in interview data, and how such comprehension can contribute to social change (Owen 1984; Lawless and Chen 2019, p. 96). This would align closely with Foucault (1972) in identifying intertextual chains, and discursive formations linked to wider social ideologies, or more recent critical perspectives offered by Canella and Lincoln (2015, p. 244), who encourage “any research that recognises power...to plumb the archaeology of taken-for-granted perspectives to understand how unjust and oppressive social conditions come to be reified as historical ‘givens’”.

Table 4.8 synthesises the CTA process adapted by Lawless and Chen (2019, pp. 98-100) applied to each analysis chapter of this study.

<b>Coding phase</b>	<b>Open-coding</b>	<b>Closed-coding</b>
<b>Findings/interpretations</b>	What was repeated, recurrent and forceful in these interview transcriptions?	What ideologies, positions of power or status hierarchies are recurring, repeated and forceful?

**Table 4.8: Lawless and Chen’s (2019, p. 100) adaptation of Owen’s (1984) criteria.**

It outlines an initial, open-coding reading of what participants actually say, the framework exploring which participant words or phrases are repeated, recurrent, and forceful during the first transcription process. Thereafter, a second reading of the full, completed transcription applies closed-coding to see how this repetition, recurrence and forcefulness reveals inter-relationships between the discourses, particular to this study in how metaphor was used in expressing wider ideologies. The same framework is adopted in analysis of this study’s purpose-built corpus, combining the focus group interviews and open-ended survey questions.

Application of Critical Thematic Analysis, therefore, complements the corpus analysis of this study. Pattern-forming uses of phrases and clauses, repeated or echoed verbatim or with variation, and pattern-reforming or reshaping of sequences are indicative of the kind of creativity in spoken language contributing to stance, and evaluative points of view “of a more radical position” (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, pp. 184-187; Tannen 1989). This is central to this study with regard to evaluative stance expressed through modality (Koester 2006) and metaphor (Moon 1997), investigated in Chapters 5-8. Lawless and Chen (2019, pp. 100-103) remind us that “evaluations are never value-free or value-neutral”. As metaphor plays a critical role in expression of workplace evaluation (Moon 1997), the methodology for how metaphor was pinpointed in study data is now described.

#### 4.4.2 The use of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP)

Metaphors, particularly idioms, were found to occur an average of seven times per 1000 words in the Corpus of American and British Office Talk (ABOT), a higher density than normally found in non-workplace, conversational discourse (Strässler 1982). This was one research finding, among the studies linking CDA and metaphor in Section 3.10, that made it a feature of interest in exploring the discourse of the participants in this study, especially given the tendency of metaphors to present in repeated patterns (Dorst 2017), complementing this study’s CTA methodology. Idioms were found to cluster when summarising previous discourse, to close a topic and in moving onto another, proving their importance in workplace-based, topic transition (Drew and Holt 1998). They serve additional, relational functions in expression of evaluation, both negative and positive. Moon (1997) found idioms twice as frequent when expressing negative evaluations over positive ones, allowing speakers to be indirect in their interpretation of events.

In expressing positive evaluations, idiom use was found to reinforce solidarity and common ground (Koester 2006, pp. 101-102), and occurred with above-average frequency in the ABOT corpus in appraising situations of a problematic nature, where a solution was required (*ibid.*). McCarthy and Handford (2004) give the hyperbolic example of something being a ‘nightmare’, evidenced in one focus group in Chapter 5. As signalling devices, idioms thus prominently serve to foreground key discourse stages, and interpersonal functions in problem-solution discourse patterns, where they perform evaluative functions (Koester 2006, p. 102). A focus group setting, unlike an institutional meeting, permits neither researcher nor interviewees to immediately address or solve

problems; it is merely a forum for voicing perceptions and concerns. The Irish ELT sector has been identified as having workplace practice issues (Sections 1.2 and 2.2). In a focus group discourse genre, idioms act as subjective stance markers (Moon 1997; Strässler 1982; Powell 1992; McNamara 2019), devices at participants' disposal to merely express judgements and opinions, not necessarily find solutions, evidenced in Data and Analysis Chapters 5-8.

In compiling a specialised corpus of ELT teacher interviews, this study constitutes an examination of metaphor from a discourse data perspective (Deignan 2017; Alejo-González 2024, p. 13). Owing to time and space restrictions, Berber-Sardinha's recommendation (2012) of using corpus-identified keywords to investigate a restricted portion of metaphors in a sample-based method, rather than aiming for coverage of all metaphors in the entire corpus, was the more practical option. This is, however, an acknowledged study limitation, as Berber-Sardinha notes the "low efficacy" of this procedure, given less than half of corpus-identified keywords are actually found to comprise of "metaphorically used words" (2012, p. 38). To assist in identification of metaphor in frequency and keywords that the corpus analysis revealed, a checklist recommended by the Pragglejaz Group (2007, p. 14) ensures researchers report results "as fully as possible" on transcribed texts. Appendix G presents the comprehensive checklist compiled to outline decisions taken by this study's researcher in the metaphor data analysis, giving a detailed explanation of how metaphors were identified on the first and second readings of the participant discourses, the coding system and key applied, and related CTA-identified themes. What remains to be given thorough attention is how corpus analysis proved so pertinent to this study, and how it was adopted.

#### 4.4.3 The use and application of corpus analysis in this study

Corpus Linguistics is essentially where applied linguistics and technology intersect, and has grown exponentially since the late 1950s (O'Keeffe and McCarthy 2022, pp. 1-6). By assisting researchers in discourse analysis and exploration of contemporary, societal themes, it permits deeper, objective understanding of language production through use of computer software (ibid, p. 2). Examples of such freely available, user-friendly technology include *WordSmith Tools* (Scott 1996), *AntConc* (Anthony 2022) and *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014). Data consists of bodies of texts, otherwise referred to as 'corpora', which are traditionally published or transcribed from speech and converted to

electronic form, or online material which may need to be ‘cleaned’ e.g., menus removed, or ‘boilerplate’ text accounted for (McEnery and Brookes 2022, p. 43). Selected corpora are then scanned by a software programme, from which single-word frequency lists, keyword lists, multi-word lists and collocate lists are visually compiled (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007; Subtirelu and Baker 2018, p.106; Oakey 2022, pp. 186-194; Rees 2022, pp. 398-399; Greaves and Warren 2022). These identify linguistic patterns of a particular language variety (Clancy 2022). A corpus is thus “a principled collection” of spoken and/or written texts, which undergoes qualitative and quantitative analysis using computer software (Biber *et al.* 1998; O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007).

A corpus of naturally-occurring discourse permits close examination of the kinds of creative language choices speakers make, in pattern formation and reformation over stretches of talk, compelling “recognition of the social contexts of their production: principally the construction of social identity and the maintenance of interpersonal relations” (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 188). The importance of such relational discourse is multiplied in workplace and institutional contexts, where interactions may often be asymmetrical (Koester 2006, pp. 5-8). Focus group interviews, conducted by a researcher possessing expert knowledge, with interviewees often unaware of the interviewer’s true objectives, display such asymmetry. Power differential lies where interviewees may demonstrate reluctance to commit themselves, or the institutions they represent, to definite stances, despite seeking clearly-stated, evaluative appraisals from participants (Heritage 1997, p. 177). A focus group interview constitutes a formal, structured genre with a clear start, finish, and “internal structures in the form of separate phases” (Koester 2006, p. 8). Goal-oriented from the perspective of the interviewer, an interview can also become informal, outlining how “the boundaries between casual conversation and institutional talk become blurred” (*ibid.*, p. 9).

Lexical items are ‘primed’ to co-occur with other words and phrases (Firth 1957; Hoey 2005; Oakey 2022, p. 192). While a corpus can reveal how words co-occur most frequently, for instance assisting metaphor identification through collocation and colligation, (Section 3.9), investigative analysis is required to explain why speakers make certain linguistic choices, and use language patterns (Jones 2022, p. 126). The added value of Critical Thematic Analysis for this study lies in acknowledging that “interpretation is a human activity” (Hunston 2022, p. 143). It necessitates close observation and grouping of patterns, as concordance lines in a corpus which identify

node words, or keywords in context (KWIC), revealing patterns of language use to their left and right (Hunston 2022; Oakey 2022; Figure 4.7). Figure 4.9 illustrates examples of the KWIC ‘teacher’, where article + adjective + noun collocations demonstrate not only factual descriptions such as ‘the IELTS teacher’, ‘a TEFL/ an ELT/ an English teacher’, but also stance in ‘a good/horrible teacher’, ‘a daycent teacher’ mentioned in Section 4.4.1, and ‘a professional teacher’, significant for this study in its examination of themes of teacher identity in Chapter 8. Critical Thematic Analysis assists this process by identifying recurrence of synonymous words, repetition of identical words, and their intensified delivery, to pinpoint emerging themes, metaphors, perceptions, stance and evaluations.

128	doc#0 s (Int: yeah) uhh, and (Int: yeah) it's nice for them if they feel like their	teacher	is, you know, neutral in the whole thing and is not gonna just, y'know I
129	doc#0 :rea...</s><s>l dunno like in Australia I was specifically just the IELTS	teacher	so that was just teaching four hours of IELTS every day , so that was
130	doc#0 ally had to put in the effort into really. learning how to become a good	teacher	(Int: ok.</s><s>And did you teach English in Colombia, as well?</s><
131	doc#0 which, ehm, didn't have their own premises, they would, you'd be the	teacher	and you'd go out ...to ah a big fac like a big company (Int: gotcha, yea
132	doc#0 t What in your opinion are the typical attributes of a professional ELT	teacher	? 44:25.04 8: this is first and foremost I think you have to have an inte
133	doc#0 one because you can know the grammar inside out and be a horrible	teacher	(Int: ok) I think you have to be socially intelligent because that's how y
134	doc#0 ou know...it's a nice, it's a comfortable environment, they feel like the	teacher	is gonna help them, they're...ok to ask questions, they're not gonna...
135	doc#0 hey're not gonna...ehm, get in trouble or they're not gonna annoy the	teacher	(Int: uh-huh)...ehm, so yeah, that idea, you do need to know your stuf
136	doc#0 IARM and who CARES ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE I can make them a	teacher	easier than somebody who knows all the grammar (Int: that's right, 7:
137	doc#0 : asking me, you know if somebody was thinking of becoming a TEFL	teacher	you know that's what I'd be looking at straight away is 'do you care ab
138	doc#0 r (Int: yeah, yeah) very small... they're they're small costs to you as a	teacher	(Int: exactly) they reap massive benefits (Int: yeah)...</s><s>MASSIV
139	doc#0 hink sort of as well when you were asking about being a professional	teacher	, the difference between somebody I suppose who is COASTING and
140	doc#0 l they're teaching something, they ARE. but that's NOT a professional	teacher	, ANY MONKEY COULD DO THAT ...ahm...</s><s>l think as well the
141	doc#0 h you (Int: yeah)...give 'em a day and they could tell you what kind of	teacher	you are (Int: and it's very, very true!) ...never underestimate [laughs] h
142	doc#0 : you read within ten minutes of you coming in (Int: yeah) what kind of	teacher	you're gonna be, how well you know your stuff (Int: they're SMART pe
143	doc#0 ur students...they know, like they know, they they think you're a good	teacher	(Int: yeah) and ahm, and... 57:06.39 – 59:47.61 (Discussion about Ss
144	doc#0 t I mean I I feel like there have been times when I've been an English	teacher	and not really a professional (Int: yeah, you did allude to that all right)
145	doc#0 e street, and I also think then you know...if you're any bit of a daycent	teacher	you've put a lot of...time and energy in, you try to stay up-to-date on w

**Figure 4.9: Concordance lines for SaFGELT corpus KWIC teacher.**

The importance of representativeness in corpus design cannot be stressed highly enough (Biber 1993; Subtirelu and Baker 2018, pp. 109-111; Reppen 2022, pp. 13-14; McEnery and Brookes 2022, pp. 37-38; Koester 2022, pp. 52-53; Clancy 2022, pp. 67-69). In addition is adherence to a “principled incorporation” (Subtirelu and Baker, *ibid*) of two approaches: a corpus-based one (i.e., where a corpus is a testing-ground for claims or theories about language derived through other means, e.g., current philosophies and practices in ELTE4 - Vaughan 2022, p. 459) and a corpus-driven one, which minimises assumptions about texts, and gives comprehensive descriptions without preconceptions

4 English Language Teacher Education, which trains new ELT teachers, typically on M.A. programmes in ELT/ESOL or TEFL.

(e.g., Tognini-Bonelli 2001; O’Halloran 2022, p. 680). Establishing corpus-driven objectivity in language data analysis was integral to this study, and attempted to mitigate against claims of CDA subjectivity given my previous status as an ELT teacher (see Sections 1.4-1.5), aiming for informed, yet objective decisions on how best to analyse its corpus data.

As discussed in Section 4.4.1, the true manner in which corpus analysis complements Critical Thematic Analysis lies in overlap in their concepts of ‘keyness’. Researcher judgement is required in considering what constitutes a theme, through close reading of transcribed data to search for patterned, prevalent responses (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 82). The difficulty, however, in sole reliance on researcher interpretation is potential for ‘naïve’ realist views of analysis, where themes passively emerge from data and are given subjective voice (Fine 2002, p. 218; Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 80). Thus quantitative, technologically-assisted, corpus analysis complements qualitative, manual, human application and approach, reminding us that, as researchers, “persuasiveness of our arguments...depends on the plausible and robust interpretation of the principled empirical evidence which the data throw up” (O’Keeffe and McCarthy 2022, p. 6). This concurs with Halliday’s reminder that corpus-assisted investigation “does not write the grammar for us”, and data description is “a theoretical activity”. (1996, p. 24). Presentation and description of the specific corpus built for this study is now given, starting with its name.

#### **4.5 The Survey and Focus Group English Language Teacher Corpus (SaFGELT)**

The anonymous responses offered in the four, open-ended survey questions, added to the focus group interview data, gave a broader representation of Irish-based, teacher voices in The Survey and Focus Group English Language Teacher Corpus (SaFGELT). This empirical approach permitted a computer-based analysis of naturally-occurring patterns displaying in SaFGELT, as a purpose-built corpus of ELT teacher discourse outside institution confines, applying qualitative and quantitative techniques (Biber *et al.* 1998, p. 4; Tognini-Bonelli 2001, p. 85). The corpus features of SaFGELT can be broken down, starting with size.

##### **4.5.1 The size of the SaFGELT corpus**

Spoken corpora vary in size and purpose, many holding more than one million words. In 2009, the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE) was considered one of the larger spoken corpora at five million words (Vaughan 2009, p. 72). More recent compilations, such as the spoken British National Corpus (BNC) hold over ten million words. In contrast, examples of naturally-occurring, casual IrEng conversation provided by the Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE) contains just one million words (Farr *et al.* 2002); even smaller is Vaughan’s (2009) C-MELT corpus of ELT teacher meetings, at just over 42,000. This raises questions of spoken corpus size, purpose and representativeness, as corpora can be compiled to explore specific disciplines or settings e.g., academic English, such as the British Academic Spoken English corpus (BASE) at 1.6 million words, or aforementioned Corpus of American and British Office Talk (ABOT) examining workplace interactions (Koester 2006). SaFGELT was created in 2023, using the online software tool *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014). The transcribed focus group interviews were combined with the survey open-ended questions in one document, saved as a plain text file, and loaded to *Sketch Engine*. The generated SaFGELT corpus, smaller than many above-listed corpora, contained 177,439 tokens in total, 127,081 words; Table 4.9 illustrates the numerical breakdown of its content.

<b>SaFGELT Corpus</b>	<b>127,081 words in total</b>
<b>Focus Group Interviews</b>	120,295 words
<b>Open-Ended Survey Qs</b>	6786 words

**Table 4.9: The breakdown of words for each of the data sets of this study, giving a combined total of 127,081 words in the data corpus for examination.**

Flowerdew (2004) notes “no ideal” corpus size. Koester observes the ability of “relatively modest” corpora to yield “robust and powerful findings” (2022, p. 50), with 20,000 to 200,000 words deemed sufficient for examining high-frequency, spoken pragmatic variation (Vaughan and Clancy 2013; Clancy 2022). An advantage of a smaller corpus lies in its freedom to permit closer links between itself and the context in which its texts were produced, such as setting, participants and communicative purpose (Clancy 2016). When the corpus compiler and analyst are one and the same, familiarity with the context permits rich, manual, qualitative and quantitative analysis (Flowerdew 2004). This was the case in this study, assisted by CTA and Metaphor Analysis. Regardless, practical

limitations of small corpus design mean samples will only ever reflect certain degrees of language style (Koester 2022; Reppen 2022).

#### 4.5.2 The SaFGELT corpus frequency wordlists

One of the simplest means of analysing a corpus is looking at the frequency of single words, or longer word sequences (Jones 2022, p. 127), by producing a numerically-listed table of same, in order of occurrence. Such ‘frequency lists’ give helpful indications about corpus data, and act as a starting point for researcher analysis of typical features of spoken, interactive discourse, including viewpoints and evaluations (e.g., ‘great’), speakers addressing hearers (‘I’, ‘you’) responding (‘yeah’) and linking ideas (‘it’, ‘that’) (ibid, pp. 128-129). A single-word frequency list was generated for SaFGELT, providing an objective entry point to inform prior, potentially subjective, multiple CTA data readings. Punctuation marks which presented as initial transcription features (e.g., commas, semi-colons, parentheses, ellipses, exclamation and question marks) were eliminated to facilitate examination of more fruitful word-forms, presented in Table 4.10.

N	Word	Frequency
1.	I	5241
2.	and	3965
3.	you	3780
4.	the	3721
5.	yeah	3400
6.	it	3248
7.	that	3082
8.	deb	2949
9.	a	2925
10.	to	2847
11.	's	2346
12.	of	2209
13.	in	2167
14.	know	1681
15.	like	1622
16.	was	1535
17.	they	1453
18.	so	1313
19.	do	1246
20.	but	1173
21.	is	1132
22.	n't	1092

23. for	995
24. we	954
25. have	909

**Table 4.10: Raw single-word frequency list for SaFGELT corpus: First 25 items.**

Structural discourse choices are “strategic acts with important interpersonal consequences”. However, linguistic choices that present in spoken corpora often appear “messy”, in violation of conventional grammar rules (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, pp. 136-138). Word frequency lists can reveal discrete grammatical items, giving quantitative substance to a more theoretical, Critical Thematic Analysis framework; this assists in taking a corpus-based approach into a more corpus-driven one, as linguistic features, such as idiomatic language collocations, can unexpectedly emerge from data wordlists (Vaughan 2009, p. 85). Application of the MIP (Appendix G) could then enable metaphor identification. Frequency lists are “heavily influenced by the type of data in any corpus” (Jones 2022, p. 129). For example, the spoken BNC2014 features native-speaker conversations on self-chosen topics, while SaFGELT is of interview data, guided by researcher-posed questions on specific, ELT workplace-related experiences (see 4.2). Among items which present in the SaFGELT single-word frequency list are markers of typical, spoken English interactivity, including pronouns ‘I’ (position 1) and ‘you’ (3), ‘yeah’ as a response token (5) and ‘like’ (15) as a multifunctional discourse marker (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 12).

Frequency lists become truly meaningful when compared against those of other corpora (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 3; Clancy 2022). For instance, high occurrences of ‘yeah’ are noted across a range of spoken corpora (Tottie 1991, p. 255; O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, pp. 145-147). Table 4.11 displays the position of ‘yeah’ (highlighted in red) in the top 25 words across four, spoken corpora frequency lists; its high SaFGELT ranking is consistent across all four.

N	SaFGELT	SpokenBNC2014	LCIE	C-MELT
1.	I	I	the	the
2.	and	it	I	I
3.	the	you	you	to
4.	you	the	it	and
5.	yeah	and	and	that
6.	it	‘s	to	it
7.	that	yeah	that	you
8.	to	that	a	yeah

9. a	a	's	they
10. Deb	to	of	's
11. 's	n't	yeah	of
12. of	like	in	a
13. in	do	n't	we
14. know	of	was	do
15. like	was	is	n't
16. was	they	they	in
17. they	in	do	so
18. so	so	he	is
19. do	but	like	have
20. but	is	there	but
21. is	he	know	think
22. n't	oh	we	be
23. for	we	on	know
24. we	no	have	what
25. have	know	what	if

**Table 4.11: Comparative frequencies of the 25 most frequent words in SaFGELT, SpokenBNC2014, LCIE and C-MELT corpora, using Sketch Engine: yeah, and know present as response tokens across all four, while like displays across three.**

Similarly, the discourse marker 'know' presents in all four corpora in Table 4.11, highlighted in yellow. In organising talk and monitoring its progress, particularly in combinations with the pronoun 'you', that 'know' ranks more highly in SaFGELT could well reflect the shared, professional world which the interviewer, as an ELT teacher, and the interviewees inhabited. This is given greater detail in Section 4.7. O'Keeffe *et al.* note an empowering function of 'know' (2007, p. 39); the presence of this feature is encouraging, reflecting high levels of engagement of the teacher interviewees, important in a study seeking direct teacher voice.

To truly gauge comparisons across corpora, frequency must be normalised formulaically; *Sketch Engine* automatically normalises frequency per million words. This feature was operationalised then adjusted, dividing by ten to normalise frequency per 100,000 words, more reflective of the size of SaFGELT, LCIE and C-MELT as smaller, spoken corpora. When frequencies for use of 'know' were normalised across all three, 'know' presented in SaFGELT with more than double the frequency of C-MELT (Table 4.12), a similar, ELT teacher discourse corpus. This required further investigation to see what function it was serving in SaFGELT, outlined in Section 4.7. In addition, 'like' did not appear in the top 25 most frequent C-MELT words, displaying far lower frequency when normalised per 100,000 words. In contrast, SaFGELT recorded three times more frequent use of this

marker. The role of ‘like’ in the act of hedging, a speaker politeness and distancing strategy (Lakoff 1973; Brown and Levinson 1987), will also be explored in Section 4.7, along with other modality devices presenting in SaFGELT

	SaFGELT	C-MELT	LCIE
<i>like</i>	914	291	864
<i>know</i>	947	443	811

**Table 4.12: The frequency of occurrence of like and know across three corpora: SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE (normalised per 100,000 words).**

How *Sketch Engine* enabled comparison of pronoun frequency across the three corpora is now presented.

#### 4.5.2.1 Pronoun frequency in SaFGELT

Pronouns are syntactic phenomena which “cannot actually be satisfactorily explained syntactically” (Wales 1996, xii), positioning speakers in terms of their relationship to others. It was imperative to determine how pronoun presentation could be interpreted when frequencies were normalised against comparative corpora C-MELT and LCIE. Table 4.13 lists pronouns ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘it’, ‘they’ and ‘we’ in descending order of frequency.

	SaFGELT	C-MELT	LCIE
<i>I</i>	2,954	1,828	3,039
<i>you</i>	2,130	1,341	2,651
<i>it</i>	1,830	1,165	2,404
<i>they</i>	819	1,107	968
<i>we</i>	538	1,000	776

**Table 4.13: The frequency of occurrence of personal pronouns I, you, it, they and we across three corpora: SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE (normalised per 100,000 words).**

Word frequency differences between pronouns are “inevitably linked to context” (Clancy 2016, p. 109). ‘We’, for instance, has been shown to index community identity, and is typically twice as frequent in workplace than in intimate, spoken discourse (Vaughan and Clancy 2013). ‘We’ identifies key workplace in- and out- groups (ibid, p. 69), performs politeness functions of inclusivity (Brown and Levinson 1987; Clancy 2016, p. 109) and maintains group identity in pedagogic and professional discourse contexts (Rüehlmann 2007, p. 71). This is crucial given such community members do not share the same closeness as do intimates, such as families or couples (Clancy 2016). Nonetheless, in this respect SaFGELT displayed distinct features from C-MELT. Table 4.13 displays how the

pronoun ‘it’ did not demonstrate significant differences in frequency between the two, with slightly lower use of ‘they’ in SaFGELT. However, ‘I’ and ‘you’ present one and a half times more frequently in SaFGELT than in C-MELT, with ‘we’ half as frequent. These were regarded as salient findings. ‘I’ and ‘you’ n-grams were hence given more thorough investigation in SaFGELT, outlined in Section 4.7, to see in which combinations these two pronouns presented, and what themes extended from them, meriting closer, more critical investigation and analysis in Chapters 5-8.

Also evident in the SaFGELT single-word frequency list were prepositions ‘of’ and ‘in’ (positions 12 and 13 respectively in Table 4.10). As prepositions reflect syntax restrictions in certain expressions of an idiomatic nature (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007), their significance for this study, with its focus on Metaphor Analysis, merited examination.

#### 4.5.2.2 Preposition frequency in SaFGELT

An idiom is a multi-word string of fixed syntactic, lexical and phonological form, with opaque, specialised semantic and pragmatic functions “to a greater or lesser degree” (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 80). Prepositions must be considered when a full text or an extract is being explored for metaphor content (Lindstromberg 1997). Corpora assist this process by revealing the extent to which linguistic output is in repeated units, as fundamental features of language use (Greaves and Warren 2022). This underlines the need to explore not only n-grams, or ‘chunks’, outlined in Section 4.7, but also concordance lines, such as Figure 4.8 in Section 4.4.1, which demonstrated the preposition ‘of’ in the chunk ‘a lot of people’. The extract example in 4.4.1 also identified use of ‘in’ with phrasal verbs ‘pull in/walk in off the street’, used metaphorically in expression of teacher stance.

As so much classroom language focuses on idioms, the “colourful curiosities” of English (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 79), it is relevant this study explores what Sinclair (1991) calls ‘the idiom principle’: ready-made, ‘lexical bundles’ (Biber *et al.* 1999) in the repertoire of its teacher participants. Working within ELT-syllabus parameters, teachers encourage learners to use idioms to relate personal experiences (Bergstrom 1979), making them valid, linguistic objects of interest for this study focus on participants’ personalised, workplace experiences, and evaluations of same. O’Keeffe *et al.* (2007, pp. 82-84) note neither “random [nor] unmotivated” choices in speakers’ idiom selection, serving as

staging-points in discussions (e.g., ‘here’s the thing’), and devices for strong evaluation (ibid; Strässler 1982; Drew and Holt 1988; Koester 2006), whilst encoding important cultural information (McCarthy 1998). Idioms serve important interactive functions in workplace discourse, by strengthening social bonds, reinforcing interpersonal relations and underlining joint creation of discourse themes.

Assisted by corpus investigation, CTA recurrence, repetition and forcefulness criteria (Table 4.7) pinpointed such themes from emerging, identified idioms in the focus group data. Corpus investigation of the prepositions ‘of’ and ‘in’ allowed identification of four idiomatic phrases where they were embedded within the teacher narratives of lived work experience, especially when expressing emotion or moral stance in SaFGELT. These idiomatic chunks selected for investigation are displayed in Table 4.14. The item ‘a lot of people’ was observed in Figure 4.8 (Section 4.4.1), while concordance lines below display ‘at the end of’, ‘end up in’ and ‘fall in(to)’ (Figures 4.10 – 4.12 inclusive).

of	in
a lot of people	end up in
at the end of	fall in(to)

Table 4.14: Idiomatic expressions selected for analysis, as revealed by the corpus investigation.

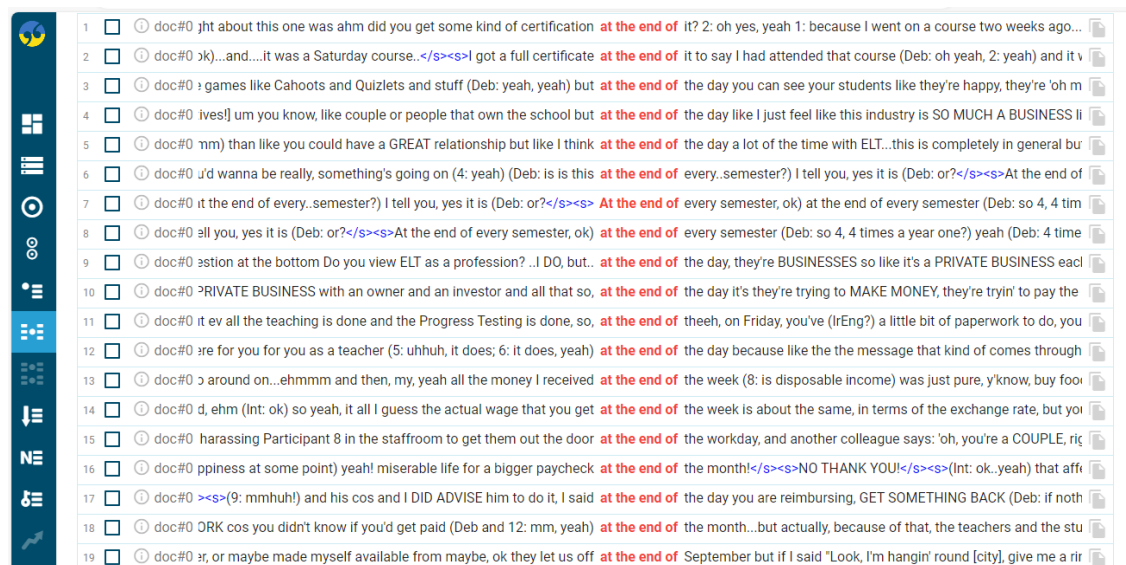


Figure 4.10: Concordance lines displaying the idiom ‘at the end of’.

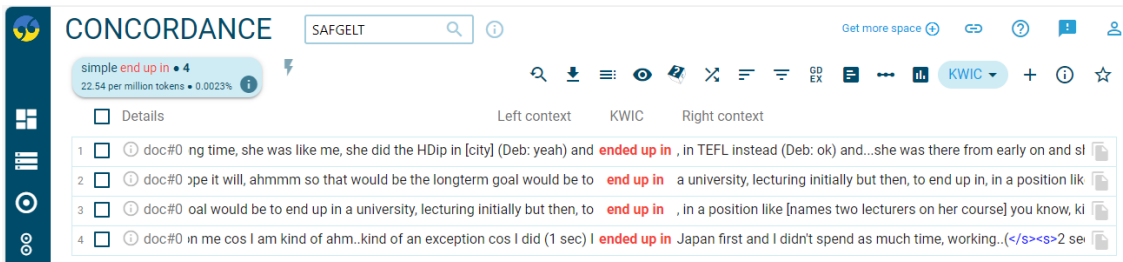


Figure 4.11: Concordance lines displaying the idiom ‘end up in’.

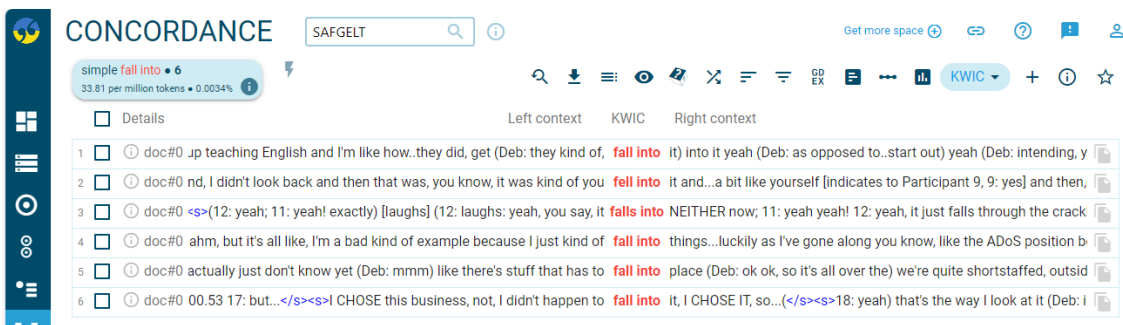


Figure 4.12: Concordance lines displaying the idiom ‘fall int(to)’.

Alejo-Gonzalez (2024, p. 108) notes the metaphoricity of multi-word units such as phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs. How such idiomatic phrases revealed specific, focus group data themes is explored in the analysis chapters. The phrasal verbs ‘end up in’ and ‘fall in(to)’ are significant in the theme of what led teachers to pursue a career in ELT, metaphorically realised in ELT AS PATH, critically investigated in Chapter 5. The idiom ‘at the end of’ is significant in distinguishing between two further themes, ELT AS PROFESSION and ELT AS BUSINESS examined in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively, while ‘a lot of people’ is an idiomatic feature given critical investigation in Chapter 8.

SaFGELT is a small corpus. In small corpora, as Sections 4.5.2.1 and 4.5.2.2 indicate, items of highest frequency tend to be grammatical, such as pronouns and prepositions. Consequently, a closer look at nominal data in isolation provides balanced investigation. *Sketch Engine* enabled generation of a noun frequency list of SaFGELT, the top thirty-three items of which were selected as a logistical cut-off point, outlined in Table 4.15. A similar, comparative list compiled from C-MELT (Table 4.16) was used to facilitate enquiry, ascertaining which nouns might overlap (indicated by purple shading), or differ, hence be of salience in SaFGELT. These are now detailed.

Raw noun frequency of SaFGELT corpus		
1. teacher	2. school	3. people
4. thing	5. student	6. time
7. kind	8. laugh	9. year
10. language	11. lot	12. job
13. teaching	14. something	15. name
16. hour	17. class	18. week
19. way	20. bit	21. course
22. day	23. work	24. ELT
25. I	26. question	27. participant
28. money	29. business	30. director
31. industry	32. Ireland	33. profession

Table 4.15: Top 33 noun forms from SaFGELT corpus, as generated by Sketch Engine.

Raw noun frequency of C-MELT corpus		
1. student	2. class	3. KET
4. thing	5. semester	6. kind
7. exam	8. okay	9. laughter
10. book	11. time	12. people
13. something	14. lot	15. PET
16. laugh	17. week	18. way
19. level	20. English	21. group
22. certificate	23. end	24. course
25. teacher	26. problem	27. name
28. idea	29. list	30. material
31. university	32. stuff	33. one

Table 4.16: Top 30 noun forms from C-MELT (Vaughan 2009), as generated by Sketch Engine.

#### 4.6 Comparisons between SaFGELT and C-MELT nominal frequency lists

While Vaughan's C-MELT (2009) investigated ELT discourse, her Conversation Analysis focus was on teacher meetings within institution walls, specifically the staffroom. Although SaFGELT is of similar, 'backstage' discourse (Goffman 1969), interviews were conducted completely outside schools, in the hope that such physical distance would accommodate frank teacher responses, perceptions, evaluations and stance.

Evident from Tables 4.15 and 4.16 is the overlap of four specific, pedagogical items, albeit in different frequencies: 'teacher', 'student', 'course' and 'class', accessible to non-ELT-expert observers. What also surfaces is evidence of the type of "jargon and professional shorthand" (Vaughan 2009, p. 85) specific to those within ELT: C-MELT terms, for instance, relate to matriculation and qualifications ('KET', 'PET', 'certificate', 'exam', 'university') and the classroom ('book', 'group', 'level', 'material'). Much of

this terminology is absent from SaFGELT, sole exception being the term ‘ELT’, and related words ‘language’, ‘teaching’ and ‘school’. Of note is total absence of ‘TEFL’ from both, “a degraded term” reflecting stereotypical connotations of the sector (Vaughan 2009, p. 12). ‘Teacher’ ranks first in SaFGELT, but is much lower in C-MELT (position 25), while ‘student’ ranks first in C-MELT, but fifth in SaFGELT; nonetheless, high position of ‘student’ is consistent with where and how teacher participants prioritised them, explored in Chapter 8 Data and Analysis on themes of ELT teacher identity.

‘School’ ranks the second most frequent SaFGELT noun, yet does not appear in C-MELT. There are also references to ‘money’ (28), ‘business’ (29) and ‘industry’ (31) in SaFGELT, meriting investigation from a thematic perspective in terms of the first of Owen’s three criteria: recurrence (see 4.4.1). Added were time references ‘hour’, ‘day’, and ‘year’ in SaFGELT against C-MELT’s ‘semester’, and the presence of ‘job’ and ‘work’ in SaFGELT, absent from C-MELT, suggesting a potential, metaphorical time link to ‘business’, ‘money’ and ‘industry’ in Table 4.15, analysed in Chapter 7 with its predominant theme of ELT AS BUSINESS.

Although vague markers overlapped (‘thing’ and ‘something’), ‘kind’ and ‘bit’ presented in SaFGELT, common expressions in approximating or hedging which were completely absent from C-MELT. This is given further consideration in Section 4.7. ‘Profession’ appears in SaFGELT (position 33), absent from C-MELT, yet ‘professional’ does not, meriting examination given one of the questions posed in both the survey and interviews was *Do you regard yourself as a professional?* (see 4.2). Absent from C-MELT are all pronouns, yet the single, visible ‘I’ surfaces in position 25 in SaFGELT, strengthening the justification for close focus on this pronoun and its related n-grams, explored in Section 4.7. The word ‘stakeholder’ was also absent from both. Despite UNITE ELT Branch finding two-thirds of its surveyed teachers to have considered themselves “sectoral stakeholders”, only 50% regarded themselves such in their daily school workplaces (2020b, p. 5). The ELE Ireland Sector Report makes mention of “all stakeholders” and “other stakeholders” (English Language Education Ireland 2021, p. 6), yet does not specify who precisely this includes. Chapters 7 and 8 examine themes of stakeholdership.

These revelations demonstrate how the SaFGELT nominal-frequency word list facilitated enquiry, particularly when compared with C-MELT. The single-word frequency list

(Tables 4.10 and 4.11) and nominal word list revelations justified the study focus on pronoun ‘I’, and investigation of the phrase ‘a lot of people’, given position 3 of the nominal ‘people’ and position 11 of ‘lot’ (see 4.5.2.2). It also lent stronger conviction to the thematic dichotomy *ELT AS PROFESSION* and *ELT AS BUSINESS* for focus in Chapters 7 and 8 respectively, their related subthemes, and metaphors.

Added to single-word and nominal word frequencies to assist thematic and metaphor analysis, *Sketch Engine* generated N-grams, or word clusters, two or three-word chunks or ‘multi-word units’ (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 63). As linguistic features, these are now given focus.

#### 4.7 Multi-word frequency lists for the SaFGELT corpus

Table 4.17 outlines two-word clusters found in SaFGELT. Their examination is recommended as they typically represent the largest group of clusters in any corpus, evidenced by high frequency in this table. Their inclusion guards against assumption of word meaning independent of text context (Sinclair 2001, p. 353; Greaves and Warren 2022, p. 206). The presence of items ‘know’ (14) and ‘think’ (33) in the single-word frequency list pointed to the possibility of their resurface in word clusters (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 13), giving greater insight into SaFGELT.

N	2-word n-grams for SaFGELT corpus	Frequency
1.	you know	1101
2.	and I	496
3.	I think	473
4.	I was	448
5.	in the	404
6.	don't	392
7.	it was	366
8.	kind of	349
9.	to be	318
10.	of the	318
11.	I do	288
12.	if you	233
13.	and then	226
14.	a lot	211
15.	so I	206
16.	but I	201
17.	as a	198

18. and it	197
19. at the	186
20. as well	184
21. have to	183
22. I I	182
23. to do	174
24. I know	174
25. I have	173

**Table 4.17: Two-word n-grams for SaFGELT.**

The two-word cluster ‘you know’, as the most frequent in many spoken corpora, is “ubiquitous” in signalling shared, speaker-listener knowledge, projecting perspectives and launching topics (Erman 1987). That ‘you know’ holds highest position in SaFGELT is consistent, and therefore unsurprising, in Table 4.17. In contrast, two-word clusters like ‘I mean’ or ‘you see’ mark shared knowledge which cannot be assumed, when speakers need to reformulate what they say (*ibid*); both are absent from this list. As a marker, ‘you know’ indicates participants believe their assertions are “uncontroversial” (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, pp. 173-174), significant given interviews were investigating shared perceptions and evaluations of ELT workplace conditions. Table 4.18 displays a comparative, two-word list between SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE, ‘I mean’ (highlighted in red) observed in the latter two only.

N	SaFGELT corpus	C-MELT	LCIE
1.	you know	I think	don’t
2.	and I	don’t	you know
3.	I think	I mean	in the
4.	I was	you know	I do
5.	in the	kind of	of the
6.	don't	of the	I think
7.	it was	going to	I was
8.	kind of	to do	it was
9.	to be	I do	and I
10.	of the	have to	going to
11.	I do	in the	on the
12.	if you	to be	do you
13.	and then	that they	n’t know
14.	a lot	want to	to be
15.	so I	the students	did n’t
16.	but I	did n’t	to the
17.	as a	if you	have to
18.	and it	n’t know	I mean

19. at the	if they	I know
20. as well	at the	kind of
21. have to	and I	if you
22. I I	they have	at the
23. to do	and then	for the
24. I know	would be	would n't
25. I have	think that	he was

**Table 4.18: Comparative twenty-five most frequent, 2-word n-gram clusters for SaFGELT, LCIE and C-MELT.**

Frequency drops off as clusters become longer, hence most corpus analysis focuses on n-grams two-four words in length maximum (Jones 2022, p. 133). Table 4.19 outlines SaFGELT three-word clusters, where appearance of ‘you know what’ (position 25) is significant, in extent to which participants commented on observed, ‘common sense’ ELT workplace states of affairs (Section 3.8.2), and converged on understanding of shared experience. This is explored extensively in Chapter 7 under the thematic ELT AS BUSINESS, and Chapter 8 on identity themes. That neither ‘mean’ nor ‘see’ feature on the single-word, two-word, nor three-word SaFGELT frequency lists reinforces assumptions of the shared, workplace world of the interviewer and the teacher interviewees, as does inclusion of domain-specific terms ‘English language teaching’ and ‘Director of Studies’.

N	3 word n-grams for SaFGELT	Frequency
1.	I don't	193
2.	a lot of	150
3.	don't know	76
4.	and I was	69
5.	I think it	68
6.	I think that	68
7.	do you know	62
8.	you don't	57
9.	at the moment	56
10.	one of the	55
11.	I don't know	53
12.	don't think	53
13.	I don't think	52
14.	it was a	49
15.	and I think	48
16.	I didn't	48
17.	you have to	47
18.	English language teaching	46
19.	I was like	45

20. Director of Studies	45
21. they don't	43
22. laughs out loud	43
23. a little bit	42
24. I can't	41
you know what	40

**Table 4.19: Three-word n-gram clusters in the SaFGELT corpus.**

Table 4.20 displays comparative, three-word cluster lists between SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE.

N	SaFGELT	C-MELT	LCIE
1.	I don't	I don't	I don't
2.	a lot of	don't know	don't know
3.	don't know	I think that	I don't know
4.	and I was	I don't know	I didn't
5.	I think it	a lot of	a lot of
6.	I think that	I think it	isn't it
7.	do you know	a little bit	don't think
8.	you don't	at the end	I don't think
9.	at the moment	I think we	I can't
10.	one of the	I mean I	I wouldn't
11.	I don't know	don't think	you don't
12.	don't think	the end of	you know what
13.	I don't think	they have to	know what I
14.	it was a	don't have	going to be
15.	and I think	they don't	I think it
16.	I didn't	in terms of	you have to
17.	you have to	you have to	do you know
18.	English language teaching	kind of a	what I mean
19.	I was like	we don't	I think that
20.	Director of Studies	and I think	you want to
21.	they don't	have to do	you know the
22.	laughs out loud	going to be	one of the
23.	a little bit	have to pay	know what I
24.	I can't	you want to	and I was
25.	you know what	I didn't	n't know what

**Table 4.20: Comparative 3-word n-gram list for the three corpora SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE.**

Directives (commands, requests, suggestions) are often softened with frames such as ‘do you think’, ‘do you want (me) (to)’, ‘I don't know if’, ‘what do you think’ to save face of

addressees: i.e., avoid demeaning, restricting or coercing them (Brown and Levinson 1987). They also serve politeness in expression of stance, playing crucial roles in “smooth, sensitive and sociable progression” of discourse, and mitigation, or ‘hedging’, modification of directly assertive utterances to make them less open to being challenged or rebutted, through expressions like ‘I think/sort of (Br)’ or ‘kind of (N. Am Eng), ‘a bit of’, ‘I don’t know’, ‘I don’t think’, ‘to be honest’ (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 73). ‘I think it’ and ‘I think that’ featured highly (positions 5 and 6 respectively in Table 4.19) in the three-word SaFGELT n-grams, consistent with O’Keeffe *et al.* ’s findings (2007, p. 175), where ‘I think’ counted for one of the ten most frequent hedging items in LCIE as a strong IrEng feature. That the majority of the participants identified as Irish nationals may have played a part in this.

O’Keeffe *et al.* (2007 pp. 188-189) also note “pervasive” presence of ‘like’ as a hedging marker; its visibility in direct speech, approximating as a vague category marker (VCM) and in posing analogy-seeking questions, make it five times more frequent in spoken than written English. ‘I was like’ features in the top twenty most frequent, three-cluster items in SaFGELT (19) and at number 30 in the cluster ‘like you know’, yet ‘like’ is notably absent from the C-MELT and LCIE lists (Table 4.20). It appears in a higher position in the SaFGELT four-word n-gram frequency list in the cluster ‘and I was like’ (position 7, Table 4.21 below), making ‘like’ significant for exploration, among its multiple functions, of when teacher participants applied it in the act of hedging. Investigation of such four-five word, n-gram clusters offers colligative and collocative benefits to exploration of longer patterns: they can be part of more in-depth frames (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, p. 45). Combined with the presence of the two-word clusters ‘I think’ and ‘kind of’, as well as the three-word clusters ‘I think it/that’ and ‘a little bit’, these findings pointed to strong potential for hedging use among participants. Investigation was merited to see which teacher demographic was more inclined towards use of such hedging markers, presented in Chapter 8 which explores identity themes.

N	4-5 word n-gram clusters for SaFGELT	Frequency
1.	I do n't know	53
2.	I do n't think	52
3.	know what I mean	28
4.	at the end of	23
5.	you know what I	22

6. you know what I mean	21
7. and I was like	17
8. an English language teacher	17
9. a lot of the	17
10. the end of the	16
11. in English language teaching	16
12. did you decide to	16
13. decide to work in	15
14. to be able to	15
15. you have to be	14
16. it as a profession	14
17. a lot of people	14
18. at the end of the	14
19. can I ask you	14
20. do n't want to	14
21. for a long time	13
22. yourself as a professional	13
23. your longer-term career plans	13
24. do you know what	13
25. it was it was	13

**Table 4.21: Frequency list of 4-5 word, n-gram clusters for SaFGELT.**

Also noteworthy is the appearance of ‘a lot of people’ in the four-word, n-gram list (position 17, Table 4.21; see also 4.4.1). Jones notes use of the approximator ‘a lot of +[noun phrase]’ in the combination ‘I think there’s a lot of people’ to add authority to an opinion, making it more difficult to challenge (2022, pp. 135-136). This is significant if one feels disempowered. In the case of this study, its use is analysed in Chapter 8 in how teachers evaluated perceptions of sector outsiders towards them and their profession.

Modality is defined as “expression of the speaker’s stance towards the propositional content of an utterance” (Koester 2006, p. 64). It divides into two kinds: epistemic, concerned with degrees of commitment to the truth of propositions, and deontic, describing degrees of obligation or necessity (Lyons 1977). At its centre is an expression of detachment, or commitment, describing how speakers use language to perform a range of functions:

...to express personal beliefs and adopt positions, to express agreement and disagreement with others, to make personal and social allegiances, contracts and commitments, or alternatively to disassociate the speaker from points of view, and to remain vague and uncommitted.

(Stubbs 1986, p. 1)

Modality presents through interpersonal markers, such as modal verbs (can, could, should) and verbs like ‘want’, ‘have to’ and ‘think’, which emerged from the SaFGELT corpus investigation. The appearance of the cluster ‘you have to’ (position 17, Table 4.19), a deontic modal item (Carter and McCarthy 2006, p. 678), merited fuller investigation to see what exactly it was teachers felt was obliged of them within ELT, particularly as ‘you have to be’ reappeared in slightly higher position (15) in the four-word n-gram Table 4.20. This reflects core Chapter 6 themes examining ELT AS PROFESSION.

‘Wh’-cleft sentences serve functions in negotiating “presupposed and new or salient information” (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, pp. 131-132). The first-person pronoun ‘I’ has been found the most frequent word following ‘what’ in speech, particularly in demonstrative cleft constructions with mental process verbs (‘This/That is what I thought/mean/want/was wondering’), in referencing previous information, and pausing to highlight, paraphrase, or expand upon topics (e.g., ‘you know what I mean’) (ibid). The chunk ‘you know what’ in the SaFGELT three-word clusters resurfaced in Table 4.19, as ‘know what I mean’, ‘you know what I’, ‘you know what I mean’, extending the two-word ‘you know’ focus of Chapter 7 in exploration of ELT AS BUSINESS. In addition was three-word cluster ‘I wanted to’, noted in repeated, CTA data reading. It is detailed in Chapter 5 as a key theme of what motivated teachers to follow a metaphorical ELT AS PATH, strongly correlating with four-word clusters ‘decide to work in’, ‘an English language teacher’, and ‘in English language teaching’ (Table 4.21) which reflect the interview question *Why did you decide to work in ELT?*

‘I think’ does not appear in the four-word n-gram list; instead, its negated form ‘I don’t think’ appears in position 2 (Table 4.21). The fact that ‘I don’t’, ‘don’t know’, and ‘I don’t know’ all appeared within the eleven most frequent, three-word clusters, and in top position in the four-word list, is consistent with high frequency of this cluster in most spoken corpora. ‘I think’ was nevertheless justifiable for Chapter 8 investigation, given this was the first opportunity for many to frankly and anonymously discuss perceived societal views of their Irish-based ELT experiences, and given its high two-word and three-word list rankings (Tables 4.17 and 4.19 respectively).

To summarise, items that the frequency lists generated enabled a narrowing of linguistic focus for the analysis chapters of this study. ‘I want’ is examined in Chapter 5 to determine teacher motivation for ELT entry, realised through phrasal verbs ‘fall into’ and ‘end up (in)’, with the metaphor ELT AS PATH examining related, thematic perceptions and evaluations. ‘I’ and ‘you’ combinations with ‘have to’ in Chapter 6 explore both self- and sector-imposed obligations or necessity felt by teachers, and related themes under the overarching theme ELT AS PROFESSION. ‘You know’ in Chapter 7 explores themes of time, money, and ‘common sense’, ELT workplace practices under the theme ELT AS BUSINESS. Finally, ‘I think’ gives evaluations of how outsiders, realised in the cluster ‘a lot of people’, perceive the ELT sector and its teachers, outlined in themes of identity in Chapter 8. To reinforce these frequency list selections, keywords observed in SaFGELT are next presented and outlined.

#### **4.8 Keyword lists for SaFGELT as a sub corpus against reference corpora C-MELT and LCIE**

Observation of keyness allows comparisons of items between similar types of corpora. Typically, the frequency of items in one smaller corpus, or sub-corpus, is compared against a larger, reference corpus to investigate which words occur at statistically-significant, higher (positive keywords) or lower (negative keywords) frequency in the subcorpus (Jones 2022, pp. 130-131). Jones stresses need for such comparability “to make keyness searches worthwhile” (ibid). Lists of keywords can then be generated for display and comparative analysis. Frequency comparisons with a reference corpus tend to be ‘normalised’ (i.e., based on occurrences per million words). The first reference corpus selected, using *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014) to generate SaFGELT keywords, was the one-million-word Limerick Corpus of Irish English (LCIE). Larger than SaFGELT, it was nonetheless representative in its range of contemporary, spoken IrEng (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007), given all participants had been Irish-based at some point. C-MELT was then used as a second reference corpus. Although smaller, as a corpus of ELT teacher discourse it was somewhat more representative than LCIE. Two keyword lists for SaFGELT were thus generated, using LCIE and C-MELT as respective, reference corpora; the top fifty keywords from each are displayed in Table 4.22.

<b>N</b>	<b>Keywords for SaFGELT with LCIE</b>	<b>Keywords for SaFGELT with C-MELT</b>
1.	ELT	ELT
2.	staffroom	professional

3. participant	participant
4. CELTA	director
5. English-language	industry
6. sooo	profession
7. prep	union
8. COVID	online
9. QQI	country
10. ACELS	quietly
11. CPD	city
12. longer-term	world
13. IELTS	staffroom
14. online	sector
15. long-term	support
16. TESOL	friend
17. PD	qualification
18. hourly	live
19. admin	Dublin
20. PhD	social
21. sooo	goin
22. DoS	CELTA
23. entrepreneurial	contract
24. undergrad	studies
25. ESOL	English-language
26. yeaah	fantastic
27. attribute	secondary
28. Sydney	wanna
29. childcare	training
30. lockdown	salary
31. wifi	email
32. DELTA	owner
33. Colombia	during
34. inhouse	contact
35. MEI	member
36. something	attribute
37. salary	regard
38. Brazilian	PhD
39. director	COVID
40. profession	TEFL
41. patience	Australia
42. WhatsApp	indicate
43. ILEP	culture
44. Cambridge	sooo
45. teacher	QQI
46. studies	Korea
47. grammar	primary
48. theeee	wage
49. UAE	ACELS
50. Venezuela	rate

**Table 4.22: Top 50 keywords for the SaFGELT subcorpus, measured against LCIE and C-MELT as reference corpora, respectively.**

Backchannels (Yngve 1970, p. 568), or response tokens (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 142) describe short messages speakers receive when holding the floor, including minimal utterances (‘yeah’), non-word vocalisations (‘mm’, ‘umhum’), non-minimal response tokens pre-modified by intensifying adverbs (‘great’, ‘absolutely’, ‘really good’), and short phrases or clauses (‘that’s true’, ‘not at all’, ‘you’re not serious’, ‘most definitely’) (ibid, pp. 142-144). Non-word vocalisations and minimal utterances were eliminated from the keyword lists, one exception being ‘yaaaah’ (position 23 when SaFGELT was measured against LCIE). Their dominant presence, particularly during the online interviews, was swamping more significant keywords, hence disregarding them allowed greater transparency of potentially richer, salient keywords. With non-word vocalisations removed, the final SaFGELT keyword lists demonstrate multiple, domain-specific, sector acronyms (Vaughan 2009, p. 87). ‘ELT’ occupies first position in both, as teachers’ chosen sectoral term of reference, ‘TESOL/ESOL’ rank middling, while ‘TEFL’ surfaces near the end. The ELT teaching qualifications ‘CELTA’ and ‘DELTA’ appear, as does reference to the examination body ‘Cambridge’. ‘PhD’ is visible, yet ‘MA’ appears on neither list. These qualifications feature in Chapter 5 in relation to ELT AS PATH, and Chapter 6 when the theme of Continuous Professional Development, and how it contributes to ELT AS PROFESSION, are explored.

There are terms a non-expert readership would understand as key to ELT pedagogy, such as ‘staffroom’, ‘English-language’, and ‘prep’ (i.e., preparation of lessons) yet while ‘training’ appears when C-MELT is the reference corpus, ‘teaching’ appears on neither. ‘Teacher’ surfaces as a keyword in position 45 with LCIE as a reference, but ‘student’ features on neither. While ‘profession’ appears on both, the key thematic focus of Chapter 6 in ELT AS PROFESSION, ‘professional’ appears only when C-MELT is a reference, ranked the second-highest keyword, thematically explored in Chapter 8 on themes of teacher identity. The references noted in the nominal-frequency list (Table 4.15) to ‘money’ (28), ‘business’ (29) and ‘industry’ (31) merited further thematic investigation for their relation to SaFGELT keywords ‘union’ (position 7 with C-MELT as reference), ‘hourly’ (position 18 measured against LCIE) and, significantly, ‘entrepreneurial’ in position 23 when LCIE was the reference corpus, entrepreneurship a key theme explored in Chapter 8. ‘Salary’ surfaced on one list, measured against LCIE, in low position (37). Again of salience, as observed in Table 4.15, is complete absence of ‘stakeholder’ from either keyword list, given focus in Chapter 8.

Finally, ‘wanna’ on the SaFGELT/C-MELT list was deemed significant as a key phrase. From a developmental perspective, getting things done derives from what Lyons (1977, p. 826) observes as a ‘desiderative’ function, realised linguistically through the verb ‘want (to)’, expressing inclination and desire (ibid), particularly in first-person pronoun ‘I’ combinations. Koester (2006, p. 85) finds ‘want to’ the sole, deontic modal expressing desire or inclination in the ABOT corpus; he indicates its synonym ‘have (got) to’ as most frequently occurring in expressions of workplace obligation and necessity. Presence of ‘wanna’ in SaFGELT may have been due to transcription distinctions between the SaFGELT corpus and the reference corpora (i.e., ‘wanna’ as opposed to ‘want to’ transcribed verbatim). Its negated form, ‘don’t want to’, presented in position 20 in the four-five n-gram clusters (Table 4.21). However, it was felt that the affirmative ‘want to’ and ‘have got to’ both merited investigation for evidence of positive or negative prosody (Oakey 2022, pp. 194-199). This could compare what it was that the ELT teacher participants wanted to do within their ELT environment, investigated in Chapter 5, as opposed to what limited them through obligation, explored in Chapter 6.

#### **4.9 Ethical Issues**

Ethical clearance was sought and granted by the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC), ensuring informed participant study participation through the following procedures:

- Participants were sent a Focus Group Interview Information Letter (see Appendix B) outlining the research project in which they were invited to partake for face-to-face recorded interviews. This needed slight modification (Appendix C) when the pandemic hit, and all remaining interviews had to be moved online via Zoom;
- Participants willing to be interviewed face-to-face were contacted to arrange suitable dates, times, and venues. An Informed Consent Form (Appendix D) was emailed to interviewees prior to the arranged date, and signed in person before commencing each face-to-face interview. A modified Zoom Informed Consent Form (Appendix E) was emailed to online interviewees, signed, and returned via email prior to each recording. Participants were also asked as recording commenced to clearly state their consent to being interviewed;
- Anonymity was absolutely assured for each and every survey respondent and focus group participant, with right to withdraw at any point without consequence,

in keeping with good research practice working with human subjects whose disclosures may be of a sensitive nature (Copland and Creese 2020, pp. 176-186; Steneck *et al.* 2020). One such experience occurred, a single, face-to-face interviewee becoming anxious and requesting to cease proceedings. The interview was immediately terminated and permanently deleted from the recording devices, with their signed consent form and written observations destroyed and discarded in their presence;

- Face-to-face interviews were recorded on two devices simultaneously, iPad Voice Memo and a backup Dictaphone. Online interviews were recorded on Zoom, with iPad Voice Memo as backup;
- In keeping with MIREC policy, all recorded data collected and transcriptions were kept and stored safely on a password-protected hard drive.

The micro-ethics of conducting ELT research included considering my own position (Vaughan, 2022, p. 473), in light of claims that “there is no such thing as an ‘objective’ analysis of a text” (Fairclough 2003, pp. 14-15). What follows is an honest assessment of the limitations of this study.

#### **4.10 Study Limitations**

Three broad issues were identified as study limitations. Action taken to mitigate against each is outlined as follows.

##### **4.10.1 The position of the researcher in this research**

I am a PhD researcher who has taught ELT in privately-run, Irish-based ELT schools (see Section 1.5). Every care was taken to ensure impartiality in conducting this study research, namely through application of corpus investigation of transcribed data, and use of extensive CTA and metaphor analysis frameworks. Mindful of Koester’s (2006, p. 16) observation of challenges for lay researchers investigating institutional interactions, my knowledge of “the local communicative ecology” (Gumperz 1999, p. 465) could be viewed as a strength in interviewing the cohort. Having access to their knowledge and background assumptions could enhance my understanding of the focus groups, from their perspective (Cicourel 1987). It is nonetheless acknowledged that as an ELT teacher, I

may have brought a subjective slant to the study. Corpus analysis, along with a talk-intrinsic view of context, aimed to mitigate appropriately (Koester 2006, p. 16).

Multiple motivating factors may entice ELT teachers to conduct research out of a sense of “professional curiosity”, yet Vaughan stresses more needs doing; not all study undertaken “finds its way into the public domain” (2022, p. 469). Despite identified need for greater reciprocity between the ELT teacher-researcher relationship (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 246), and research-driven proactivity among teachers themselves (Schön 1983; Harmer 2007, pp. 414-417; Jordan and Long 2022, pp. 187-188), objective surveying is essential (Vaughan 2022, p. 470).

#### 4.10.2 The sample sizes of the online survey and focus groups

Every effort was made to uphold internal validity of the online survey throughout its distribution, collection and analysis. Nonetheless, limitations are fully acknowledged. The survey, an ideal opportunity to reach out to as many teachers as possible whilst affording anonymity, was kept open for five months. The sample-size of eighty-one, valid responses represents a restricted cross-section of teachers, from only eight of twenty-six counties, and cannot be said to be representative of all Irish-based, ELT practitioners. Seasonal fluctuation in teacher numbers has historically created difficulty in gaining access to them (see 1.2). Nonetheless, taking Willoughby’s conservative guesstimate of 1,350 into account (2019, pp. 2-3), the initial survey response of 122 teachers would represent nine per cent of the sector teacher-workforce, with some kind of work experience in a privately-run, Irish school.

The survey was limited to privately-run schools recognised by ACELS/QQI, although some teachers recorded their school as not being ACELS-recognised (see 1.2). It excluded responses from teachers based in university-run, ELT centres (see 4.2.1), who may have had alternative experiences to relate. Many of the recorded survey responses were made before or just at the beginning of the first government-enforced, pandemic school closure, hence relate to this highly unique timeframe. For a detailed study of the impact of the first and subsequent lockdowns on lived, Irish ELT teacher work experiences, UNITE ELT Branch (2020a; 2020b) provides statistical information of key relevance.

While I am most grateful to participants who willingly volunteered their time and voices for the focus groups in pursuit of this study, the small cohort of twenty-four teachers is a nonetheless recognised study limitation. It in turn reflects the difficulty in accessing Irish-based ELT teachers who are willing to speak frankly, on-record, about private-sector ELT school work conditions. Furthermore, that only one interviewee was non-native speaking is fully acknowledged as an imbalance, despite best efforts to recruit more NNS teacher interviewees. Of relevance, the participant who wished to cease participation mid-interview (see Section 4.9) was a non-native speaker, anxious their anonymity may be compromised.

#### 4.10.3 The issue of one analyst and action taken to mitigate

ELT teachers hold a unique position to conduct research into workplace-based, professional language, in both an individual and a team capacity (Vaughan 2022, p. 470). Basic linguistic interactions with our physical world provide rich, metaphorical sources of self-expression for more abstract ideas, attitudes and emotions; metaphor has a capacity to reveal socio-culturally influenced values, making it an interesting research tool (Cameron 2012, pp. 346-347). The initial, manual metaphor analysis conducted during transcription, as outlined in the MIP in Section 4.4.2, complements Critical Thematic Analysis. Whilst the MIP checklist is adaptable to this study circumstance, an analytic team gives greater interrater reliability and objectivity in metaphor interpretation (Pragglejaz 2007, pp. 15-16; Leedy and Ormrod 2015, p. 117; Alejo-González 2024). That my two supervisors acted as additional analysts, kindly assisting me as the principal investigator throughout all aspects of this research journey, enhanced interrater reliability.

Equally challenging is specifying which words and phrases are being used metaphorically; metaphoricity does not always display in straightforward manners (Cameron 2012, p. 346). To mitigate, the MIP closely referenced the frequency and keyword lists generated, in keeping with recommendations of more corpus-based research to explore “the boundaries of what linguistic genres are taken to represent the profession” (Vaughan 2022, p. 478). The extra reading resources listed in the MIP (Section d, Appendix G), coupled with CTA application, aimed to satisfy provision of teacher-led, “critical response” to corpus-linguistic-assisted themes and findings (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 246).

Decisions about what data are “noteworthy”, coding, and judgements taken may be rendered “vulnerable to a researcher’s dispositions, expectations, biases and values”, (Leedy and Ormrod 2015, p. 319). Proliferation of function words in corpora (e.g., articles, prepositions, conjunctions and pronouns) is a case in point; they do not “always reveal much of interest” (Baker 2006, p. 100). Collocate recurrence of content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) is a feature of salience, as patterns can reflect attitudes, values and ideologies within discourse (Vessey 2013, p. 7; Nardone 2018, p. 173), important in examining themes reflecting such attitudes in this study. It is, however, detrimental to dismiss function words, such as pronouns, given their proven significance in reflecting ideology (see 3.8.2). Deignan (2005, pp. 49-50) furthermore reminds us that far from being “semantically ‘empty’”, abstract meanings of grammar words like prepositions “are not arbitrary...but metaphorically motivated”. The pronoun and preposition focus of this study acknowledges these points.

Triangulation of this study’s multiple data sources thus aimed for *rigorous subjectivity* (Wolcott 1994, italics Wolcott’s). Additional procedures recommended include intentional searching for outliers, exceptions and contradictions in samples, being honest about personal biases, careful documentation of procedure analysis, and seeking constructive feedback from participants and professional colleagues (ibid), which my supervisors freely, generously and consistently provided. All of these components were adhered to, in addition to use of corpus investigation. A summary of the methodology outlined in this chapter is now presented, followed by an outline of the analysis chapters.

#### **4.11 Summary**

The theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3 demonstrated how CDA, CTA and Metaphor Analysis could be interwoven, thus synergised as complementary methodologies for this study purposes. This chapter has followed on by presenting how a corpus-assisted, Critical Thematic Analysis and Metaphor Analysis of study data allowed close investigation of its three research questions. The linguistic patterns that participants chose, particularly devices expressing stance on workplace issues (e.g., modality; vague approximators) demonstrated how they positioned themselves within their ELT workplace, and the institution that is the Irish ELT sector. In these evaluations, metaphor played a central role, significant for analysis given its prevalence in everyday, ELT-classroom content (Section 3.10). Of key interest was how participants’ workplace

environments impacted their linguistic choices and perceptions, identified objectively through corpus investigation.

A systematic framework of Critical Thematic Analysis, offered by Lawless and Chen (2019) complemented analytic needs of this study, adapted from Owen (1984) and Braun and Clarke (2006). It offered flexibility for exploration of high-frequency single words, multi-word combinations, and keywords that the corpus analysis identified in the interview and survey data, which could then be analysed from more qualitative, critical standpoints. This comprehensive CTA framework relates to how speakers position themselves in terms of their cultural identity, in this case how teachers' survey responses and discourses reflected evaluations, especially of a metaphorical nature, in comparing ELT in Ireland and abroad. How, specifically, their Irish workplace experiences impacted these perceptions is quantified by survey responses and examination of metaphorical and idiomatic expressions, which are referenced consistently throughout Chapters 5-8, to complement the corpus-assisted frameworks addressing the study RQs.

Owen's (1984) three criteria of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness applied open and closed-coding, in analytical steps, to identify what linguistic patterns and themes the interview data revealed in corpus investigation, particularly metaphor-related. Open-coding paid close attention to salient, discursive patterns meaningful to participants themselves, which could be measured against the corpus investigation to provide objectivity to researcher intuition. Closed coding then interlinked these patterns with emerging themes, as well as wider, overt and covert societal ideologies influencing these, and any evaluations held within (Lawless and Chen 2019, p. 98; Fairclough 2003, Machin and Mayr 2012; Deignan 2005). The checklist of questions Braun and Clarke offer (2006, p. 94; Section 4.4.1) informed the critical thematic inquiry applied.

Four analysis chapters follow, exploring themes and sub-themes arising from responses to four sets of questions posed to participants (see 4.2). Each chapter presents specific, corpus-identified clusters for examination, mapped thematically at the introductory phase, with analysis guided throughout the chapter by Lawless and Chen's (2019, p. 100) questions adapted from Owen's criteria (1984; Table 4.8), reiterated as follows:

- What was repeated, recurrent and forceful in these interview transcriptions?

- What ideologies, positions of power or status hierarchies are recurring, repeated and forceful?

Extra guiding questions (Braun and Clark 2006, p. 94) ensure rigour in CTA, and that analysis consistently addresses the RQs:

- i. What does this theme mean?
- ii. What are the assumptions underpinning it?
- iii. What are the implications of this theme?
- iv. What conditions are likely to have given rise to it?
- v. Why do participants talk about this topic/thing/issue in this particular way?
- vi. What is the overall story the different themes reveal about the topic?

Chapters will first examine how themes are realised through significant pronouns ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘it’, ‘we’, and ‘they’ identified by the corpus analysis (Table 4.10). Primary emphasis will be given to ‘I’ combinations of modality: ‘I want(ed)’, ‘I have to’, and ‘I think’, with subsequent analysis of how remaining pronouns were employed: ‘you’ in ‘you know’, ‘it’ in referencing the ELT sector or an individual school, ‘we’ in examples of solidarity-building, and ‘they’ to reference those in ELT power such as school operators and policy-makers, fellow ELT teachers, or people completely outside the ELT cohort. Each chapter will examine additional linguistic devices of modality (e.g., vague approximators, hyperbole), and metaphor referenced through contributions, particularly in expressions with prepositions ‘in’ and ‘of’. These identified features will receive critical analysis throughout, with keywords referencing business, time, and money examined for metaphoricity.

Chapter 5 will begin by examining the deontic combination ‘I want’. It explores what instigated participants to become ELT teachers, what set them on their metaphorical ELT AS PATH, and whether this was by accident or design, referencing the phrasal verbs ‘fall in(to)’ and ‘end up in’. It weaves quantitative survey data throughout, reinforcing what initially motivated participants to enter ELT, addressing RQs 1-3. This chapter outlines the theme of wanting to teach, and evaluations of same. It then examines the theme of wanting to travel as a thematic, common-denominator lived experience, presenting in descriptions of what these ELT teachers wanted. This is significant given several

placename keywords that surfaced in Table 4.22 (e.g., ‘Australia’, ‘Korea’), and how travel and ELT qualification acquisition intertwined.

Chapters 6 and 7 respectively investigate juxtaposition of ELT as a profession against the sector as a business. Chapter 6 examines deontic ‘I have to’ in its thematic analysis of language used in expressing what it was participants felt obliged to do within their ELT workplace. ‘I had to’ explores past obligations, while ‘you have to’ examines necessity imposed by those in sectoral power. ‘I have to’ also deciphers how participants metaphorically regard ELT AS PROFESSION, what they perceived as contributing to professional ELT status, and whether teachers evaluated it as a profession, addressing all three RQs. Survey findings regarding Continuous Professional Development are interspersed through Chapter 6, to complement thematic analysis.

Chapter 7 then critically examines how participants position themselves when the sector is metaphorically interpreted as ELT AS BUSINESS, factors contributing to this reality, and how school workplace conditions impacted related perceptions. Throughout, use of ‘you know’ investigates and reinforces ‘common-sense’ acceptance of ELT workplace culture and practice, in many instances evaluated as substandard. Chapter 7 also explores themes and metaphors relating to time and money, through exploration of pronoun ‘it’ referencing the sector, and ‘they’ referring to schools and their operators, reinforced with survey data to address the RQs. The preposition ‘of’ is also analysed in the idiomatic cluster ‘at the end of the day’.

Chapter 8 explores the epistemic modal ‘I think’ to determine how wider, societal forces influenced participant attitudes to and evaluations of Irish ELT, and their role as Irish-based, ELT teachers. Instigated by the multi-word phrase ‘a lot of people’, this references, among others, people outside the sector to address all three RQs. Of key interest is analysis of idiomatic and metaphorical language that emerged on unanticipated themes of teacher identity, including entrepreneurship, teacher evaluations of this phenomenon, and critique on how wider societal and global factors have necessitated uptake of this practice, especially among the younger teacher cohort. This instigated an unexpected, metaphorical TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR identity. Among perceptions, novel metaphors also emerged, examined for their relation to power asymmetries in the sector.

Chapter 9 provides reflection and conclusions drawn from analysis of both datasets. Based on observations, it also attempts to offer recommendations for the Irish-based, ELT sector going forward in a post-pandemic scenario. What now follows is the first analysis chapter, Chapter 5, thematically investigating ELT AS PATH.

## Chapter 5 Analysis of Data Theme 1: ELT AS PATH

### 5.0 Introduction

In education, practitioners are “unconsciously guided by images and metaphorical patterns of thought recurring in their field” (Martinez *et al.* 2001, p. 966). Thornbury (1991b, p. 195) urges teachers and trainers to “get in touch” with metaphorical images, as these reflect how they think about teaching, while McGrath (2006, p. 173) similarly holds metaphorical language as “revealing of the subconscious beliefs and attitudes” of more surface, conscious teacher perceptions of what it is that they do. Of note is that different terminology describes the “fundamental feature of language use” reflecting idiomaticity: ‘chunks’ or ‘multi-word units’ (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 63), ‘lexical bundles’ (Biber *et al.* 2004), or ‘n-grams’, grouped according to a number of “fixed, contiguous” word combinations (Greaves and Warren 2022, p. 205). How such combinations, in metaphors and idioms, reflected teacher stance is explored in the following four analysis chapters, beginning with a brief description of this specific one.

### 5.1 Chapter overview

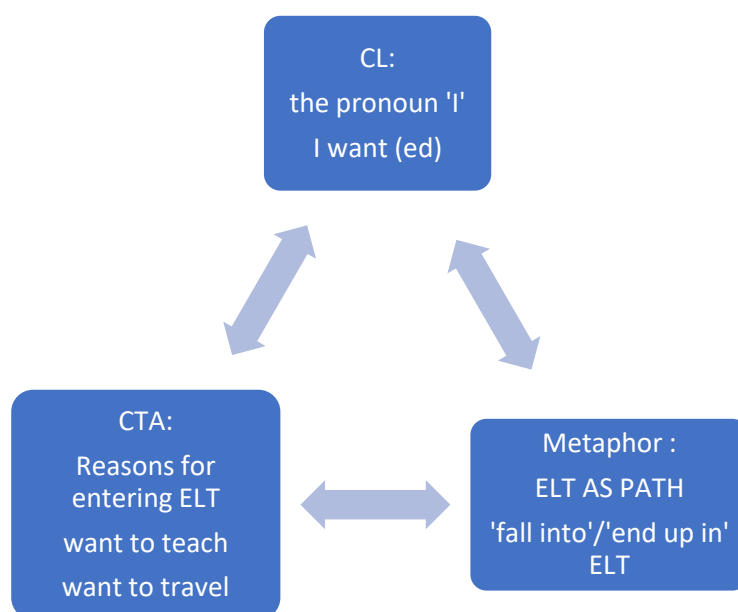
The primary theme of this chapter focusses on reasons for entering ELT, or following ELT AS PATH. The initial, linguistic realisation of this metaphor was through focus on the pronoun ‘I’, revealed as the most frequent SaFGELT word and pronoun. Then, corpus-revealed clusters ‘I want’ and ‘I wanted’ (Section 4.8) saw subthemes spinning off this overarching ELT AS PATH theme, including wanting to teach, and wanting to travel. For many participants, travel was the initial impetus, prompting subsequent, specific, ELT-qualification pursuit. For others, the intervention of fate or chance revealed a ‘falling into’ or ‘ending up in’ ELT (Table 5.1), either whilst abroad, or on return to Ireland.

<b>of</b>	<b>in</b>
a lot of people	end up in
at the end of	fall in(to)

**Table 5.1: Idiomatic expressions containing prepositions ‘of’ and ‘in’, as revealed by the corpus investigation.**

Basic metaphors underlie many idiomatic expressions, especially the conduit metaphor, which sees the human mind as a container from which information is released (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Section 3.10). Metaphors can reference people, animals, things, events, or situations. O’Keeffe *et al.* (2007, pp. 83-84) offer six categories of opaque, idiomatic expression for consideration, including clausal expressions evaluating people’s actions, personal states, things and events, demonstrating wider, idiomatic range than basic clausal ‘verb + complement’ types. Corpus investigation of prepositions ‘of’ and ‘in’ (Section 4.5.2.2) enabled the uncovering of expressions they were embedded within (Table 5.1).

This chapter analysis is divided into three parts. Section 5.2 first investigates how teachers used pronoun ‘I’, exploring the thematic, metaphorical ELT AS PATH more fully in Section 5.3. Section 5.3.1 presents ‘I’ combinations with ‘want’, serving a “desiderative function” (Lyons 1977; Section 4.8), reflecting reasons for entering teaching in the first place, more specifically ELT. The theme of wanting to travel is next examined in Section 5.3.2, then furthered by the link between travel and qualification pursuit in Section 5.3.3. The final chapter Section 5.4 explores the theme of ‘falling into’ or ‘ending up in’ ELT, with luck or chance influencing, in ‘I’ combinations, ELT AS PATH. Critical Thematic Analysis examines these linguistic choices in detail, including metaphors and terms relating to luck or chance leading to ELT AS PATH. This synergy of the chosen CTA, Corpus Linguistic and Metaphor Analysis methodologies is illustrated in Figure 5.1.



**Figure 5.1: How CL, CTA and Metaphor Analysis as three selected methodologies of this study synthesise in this chapter.**

This pronoun and metaphor focus is adopted throughout all four analysis chapters.

The CTA methodology employed adhered to open- and closed-coding in reading of transcripts (Section 4.4.1 and Table 5.2). This accounts for the presence of capitalised words within certain extracts throughout the four analysis chapters of this study. It is a transcription feature indicating raised intonation of voice in delivery of participant experiences, and evaluations that were observed as forceful. Other transcription conventions, such as colour-coding, are omitted from the analysis chapters to enhance readability.

Coding phase	Open-coding	Closed-coding
<b>Findings/interpretations</b>	What was repeated, recurrent and forceful in these interview transcriptions?	What ideologies, positions of power or status hierarchies are recurring, repeated and forceful?

**Table 5.2: Lawless and Chen’s (2019, p. 100) adaptation of Owen’s (1984) criteria for the CTA methodology of this study.**

The specific pronoun clusters that corpus analysis presented for this chapter, followed by critical analysis of use, begins with first-person singular pronoun, ‘I’.

## 5.2 Focus on pronoun ‘I’

...there’s no you and me, there’s just I and I. So you’ve broken down the difference between who you are and who I am. We could never talk, but I and I can talk. We are one. Beautiful.

(Richards 2010, p. 387)

Richards’ Rastafarian tenet outlines the potential of personal pronouns “to personify and depersonify” (Pragglejaz 2007, p. 29; Section 3.8.2), crucial from CTA perspectives. Table 5.3 indicates how the subject pronoun ‘I’ presented as the number one most frequent linguistic item in the SAFGELT single-word frequency list, in only a slightly higher position than in LCIE or C-MELT.

N	SaFGELT	LCIE	C-MELT
1.	I	the	the
2.	and	I	I
3.	the	you	to
4.	you	it	and

5. yeah	and	that
6. it	to	it
7. that	that	you
8. to	a	yeah
9. a	's	they
10. Deb	of	's
11. 's	yeah	of
12. of	in	a
13. in	n't	we
14. know	was	do
15. like	is	n't
16. was	they	in
17. they	do	so
18. so	he	is
19. do	like	have
20. but	there	but
21. is	know	think
22. n't	we	be
23. for	on	know
24. we	have	what
25. have	what	if

**Table 5.3: Comparative frequencies of the 25 most frequent words in SaFGELT, LCIE and C-MELT display 'I' as the most frequent pronoun in SaFGELT.**

However, with frequency normalised against these two corpora, 'I' was one and a half times more frequent in SaFGELT and LCIE than in C-MELT (Table 5.4). Given this is a study investigating individual, ELT teacher voices outside institution walls, the fact that 'I' occurred with higher frequency than it had in a similar, ELT teacher corpus (C-MELT) made it the most salient pronoun for in-depth exploration throughout this study.

	SaFGELT	C-MELT	LCIE
<i>I</i>	2,954	1,828	3,039
<i>you</i>	2,130	1,341	2,651
<i>it</i>	1,830	1,165	2,404
<i>they</i>	819	1,107	968
<i>we</i>	538	1,000	776

**Table 5.4: The frequency of occurrence of personal pronouns I, you, it, they and we across three corpora: SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE (normalised per 100,000 words).**

Linguistic analysis of participant pronoun choices representing experiences of agency demonstrate agency attributed to "self", through use of first-person singular 'I', to "other" in third-person, pronominals 'he', 'she', 'it' or 'they', or through "joint endeavour" in 'we' (Copland and Garton 2011, p. 248). 'I' presented in no fewer than eight, two-word

clusters in the SaFGELT top 25 two-word n-grams (Table 5.5), including ‘I think’ (position 3), ‘I was’ (position 4), ‘I know’ (position 24) and ‘I have’ (position 25).

N	2-word n-grams for SaFGELT corpus	Frequency
1.	you know	1101
2.	and I	496
3.	I think	473
4.	I was	448
5.	in the	404
6.	don't	392
7.	it was	366
8.	kind of	349
9.	to be	318
10.	of the	318
11.	I do	288
12.	if you	233
13.	and then	226
14.	a lot	211
15.	so I	206
16.	but I	201
17.	as a	198
18.	and it	197
19.	at the	186
20.	as well	184
21.	have to	183
22.	I I	182
23.	to do	174
24.	I know	174
25.	I have	173

**Table 5.5: Two-word clusters with ‘I’ revealed by corpus analysis of SaFGELT.**

‘I-I’ presented as a cluster owing to repetition through poor connectivity in online interviews. However, ‘I-I’ also demonstrated hesitated response, particularly when combined with ‘think’ in expressing epistemic modality, and evaluations of perceptions of others within and outside ELT, analysed in Chapter 8. ‘I have’ is examined in the cluster ‘I have to’ for its role in expression of deontic modality in Chapter 6. ‘I want’, despite its negated form ‘don’t want to’ presenting in the four-word frequency cluster list (position 20, Table 5.6), did not appear in the two-word clusters. This was surprising, as it had been noted as highly repetitious in the Critical Thematic Analysis readings and re-readings of the data, particularly tied to above-mentioned themes of teaching and travel, and what ultimately led participants to ELT AS PATH. For this reason, ‘I want(ed)’ was

deemed significant for in-depth analysis in this chapter in Section 5.3, and its related subsections.

N	4-5 word n-gram clusters for SaFGELT	Frequency
1.	I do n't know	53
2.	I do n't think	52
3.	know what I mean	28
4.	at the end of	23
5.	you know what I	22
6.	you know what I mean	21
7.	and I was like	17
8.	an English language teacher	17
9.	a lot of the	17
10.	the end of the	16
11.	in English language teaching	16
12.	did you decide to	16
13.	decide to work in	15
14.	to be able to	15
15.	you have to be	14
16.	it as a profession	14
17.	a lot of people	14
18.	at the end of the	14
19.	can I ask you	14
20.	do n't want to	14
21.	for a long time	13
22.	yourself as a professional	13
23.	your longer-term career plans	13
24.	do you know what	13
25.	it was it was	13

**Table 5.6: Multi-word clusters revealed by corpus analysis of SaFGELT.**

In interviews, ‘I’ proves “real informants” have provided data of direct relevance to the enquiry (Dörnyei 2003). High-frequency of ‘I’ has been observed across discourse genres in a range of spoken corpora samples, including intimate, social, professional, pedagogical and transactional (Clancy 2016, p. 59). Its number one ranking in SaFGELT is hence reflective of typical, conversational discourse. As stated, the focus group interviews were an opportunity for ELT teacher voice and evaluations to be heard first-hand, on record, outside institution confines, justifying pronoun ‘I’ as a starting point for each analysis chapter, then encouraging closer, more critical investigation.

### 5.3 The pronoun ‘I’ and ELT AS PATH

Placing oneself in the subject position, ‘I’ suggests becoming “the quintessential agent” in one’s actor role (Dixon 1994, p. 84). This demonstrates successful action outcome which is “indicative of agency” (Copland and Garton 2011, pp. 249-250), and is visible in much of this chapter’s data in ‘I’ references. The response given by **Participants 1** and **2** in **Focus Group 1**, females aged 44 and 27 with twenty-one and seven-years’ teaching experience respectively, to question *Why did you decide to work in ELT?*, exemplifies:

#### Extract 5.1

**FG1-1: I** know for me, the reason **I** preferred ELT was how DYNAMIC (**FG1-2: the same**) and how VARIED it was, so you could teach the same skill in a million different ways so the day was never boring

‘Know’ is among the most frequent verbs expressing epistemic modality, in commitment to propositional truth (Lyons 1977). Use of the affirmative form of ‘know’ by **Participant 1**, the more senior, experienced teacher, demonstrates effectiveness of this linguistic choice in expressing commitment to her response to the researcher’s question: there is no hedging. ‘I know’, identified in Table 5.3, hence serves to perform a ‘true’ epistemic function (Koester 2006, p.79) of certainty in her reply. The younger, less experienced **Participant 2’s** equally unhedged, short, preferred response (Li and Walsh 2023) concurs with **Participant 1: ‘the same’**. The cluster ‘I know’ thus underlines the agency that ELT, as a chosen career, afforded both in providing daily, mental stimulation.

**Participant 1** draws comparisons between ELT and secondary school teaching, demonstrating how, similar to other professionals, ELT teachers “resort to and depend on the use of metaphor when it comes to verbalizing their experience” (Thornbury 1991b, p. 193). Her hyperbolic ‘a million different ways’ enhances ELT as a career option, numerical intensifiers serving highly evaluative functions (McCarthy and Carter 2004), in this instance affirmative. Hyperbole, asserting “more than is objectively warranted” (Gibbs 1993, p. 266) works metaphorically. It also functions pragmatically in specific contexts where extreme exaggeration serves as a framing and reasoning device (Burgers *et al.* 2016, p. 415). This is evident here as **Participant 1** frames her ELT description, reasoning that it is preferable as a teaching career option. Applying Owen’s criteria

(Section 4.4.1), strong intonation with raised volume was applied on **Participant 1's** choices of 'DYNAMIC' and 'VARIED', constituting enforcement, with thematic recurrence visible in 'VARIED' / 'a million different ways', and 'DYNAMIC' / 'never boring' emphasising favourable, ELT evaluation. This is one example of how corpus analysis focussing on 'I', along with multiple CTA readings of data, could assist the Metaphor Identification Procedure (Appendix G). These are examined at consistent points in this chapter, illustrating teacher evaluations of how, and why, they chose ELT AS PATH.

Consistent with LIFE = PATH as a root analogy (Goatly 1997, p. 49), target concepts like careers can be represented as events, such as a journey e.g., 'be on a career path'. Metaphorically, words used for physical journeys such as 'road' and 'path' describe people's lives, relationships, and careers (Lakoff 1993, pp. 222-225). The 'road' to a goal or target is the manner in which you hope to achieve same, contrasted with one's career 'path' in which things are done to attain particular levels, or hold progression status (Deignan 1995, pp. 191-194). For instance, despite his original intention to study film, 28-year-old, male **Participant 23** opted for Irish ELT, directly referencing the metaphorical 'career path' expression in an 'I'-focused, empowered, professional life-choice:

### **Extract 5.2**

**FG14-23:** ...as **I** continued in this **career, path**, my school, has a lot of, uh, benefits, so **I** felt very secure and so then **I** decided to stay on longer....and **I**...changed my ideas from becoming a film professor to studying linguistics

That his school provided opportunities for progression encourages **Participant 23** to remain on ELT AS PATH. The issue of work conditions, and how they impacted teacher evaluations, is explored more thoroughly in Chapter 7 investigating ELT AS BUSINESS.

Both **Focus Group 4** participants, a 35- and 36-year-old couple each with ten years' experience, had worked in Far East Asia. They outlined a prerequisite, international working spell, demonstrating ELT AS PATH, using the idiomatic phrase 'go down that road' (marked in bold):

### Extract 5.3

**FG4-8:** I often recommend that to people who think about TEFL, I say ‘Do a year abroad, you don’t, you know, you don’t have to, do a year and see if it’s for you because (**FG4-7:** mmm) it’s VERY OBVIOUS VERY QUICKLY if you’re suited to it or not, it’s very it will become very clear to you very quickly (**FG4-7:** yeah) if this is something you want to do

**Researcher:** teaching in general?

**FG4-8:** yeah

**FG4-7:** you can tell from certain people if

**FG4-8:** yeah, very, very quickly so don’t commit to anything yet, go and do a couple of months’ summer camp somewhere...before you invest and before you **go down that road**

A strong, common-denominator theme emerges from use of ‘I’ in this extract: desire to ‘see the world’ (Codó 2018, p. 437), investigated in Section 5.3.2. This was the initial impetus that drew many participants to pursue ELT, especially in their younger years, embodied metaphorically as LIFE = JOURNEY, by extension PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY IS A JOURNEY and CAREER IS A PATH (Kövecses 2010), hence ELT IS A PATH.

Positive evaluations were observed in a range of ‘I’ combinations in **Focus Group 10**. In response to *Why did you decide to work in ELT?*, ELT AS PATH was instigated by a desire to help others learn. This was evident in ‘I’ combinations including ‘I love’, ‘I was’, ‘I decided’ and repeated use of ‘I can’ by **Participant 17**, a 40-year-old Romanian male with ten years’ experience. The sole non-native teacher to be interviewed, he explains what motivated him to become an ELT teacher. As a high school student, another teacher had served as a positive role model:

#### Extract 5.4

**FG10-17:** I love, I love languages, ahnd..I was very inspired by one of my teachers...ahnd I decided well actually, I can, I can help...you know, people uh learn or ah...just be better people, and that's why I did it!

His focus group partner, **Participant 18**, was an Irish-national female aged 37, also with ten years' experience. She had undertaken an unusual spell of work abroad in Australia, provoking equal desire to assist learning away from more traditional, pedagogical routes. Such avenues were dismissed in use of idiomatic phrasal verb 'pushed on':

#### Extract 5.5

**FG10-18:** ...I was a home-school teacher in the Outback and introduced as "the Govvie", so I have been Mary Poppins! and that...got me, REALLY got me thinking about it, that I'm I'm ENJOYING this, ...I was never **pushed on** primary or secondary, ahm, but I loved it...like a bit like...[Participant 17] said, facilitating learning in some way

It is evident in this extract, as with the participants in **Extract 5.1**, that **Participant 18** considered ELT a more desirable, career option over state-sector teaching, with positive views of ELT AS PATH expressed in varying 'I' combinations. Of relevance is her negated, adjectival use of the phrasal verb 'push on', consistent with the Table 5.4 appearance of 'don't want to', hence significant in terms of CTA recurrence. Idioms referencing momenta such as pulling or pushing denote effort: e.g., 'pull your weight', 'pull your finger out', 'to do sth at a push', 'push one's luck', 'push through legislation' (McCarthy and O'Dell 2002, pp. 42-46; Goatly 1997, p. 44). They embody CHANGE = MOVEMENT and PURPOSE = DIRECTION root analogies (Goatly 1997, p. 49). To 'push on' suggests to continue with an activity, thus moving forward and progressing, in a determined manner (Cambridge University Press 2024a). However, when used negatively in a participle, hence adjectival phrase, it takes on a different meaning, equating to not being driven or compelled to act, or display momentum. 'I was never pushed on primary or secondary' is an expression of stance by **Participant 18**; her 'I' use states a desire to teach, but specifically through ELT. 'Not pushed on' is hence serving similar, desiderative function as 'don't want to', in expression of what it was that she did not want to do.

‘Want’ is the most common verb co-occurring with *to*-clusters e.g., ‘I want *to* go home’ (Biber *et al.* 1998, p. 7). Repeated CTA readings of data saw one specific, consistent pattern emerge, where participants expressed strong desire to be a teacher, through use of the cluster ‘I wanted’. It appeared in six out of fifteen focus group interviews, whereby desire to teach through the ELT medium was explicitly expressed. How desire was also expressed for others to do so, outlined through ‘want’, is next examined.

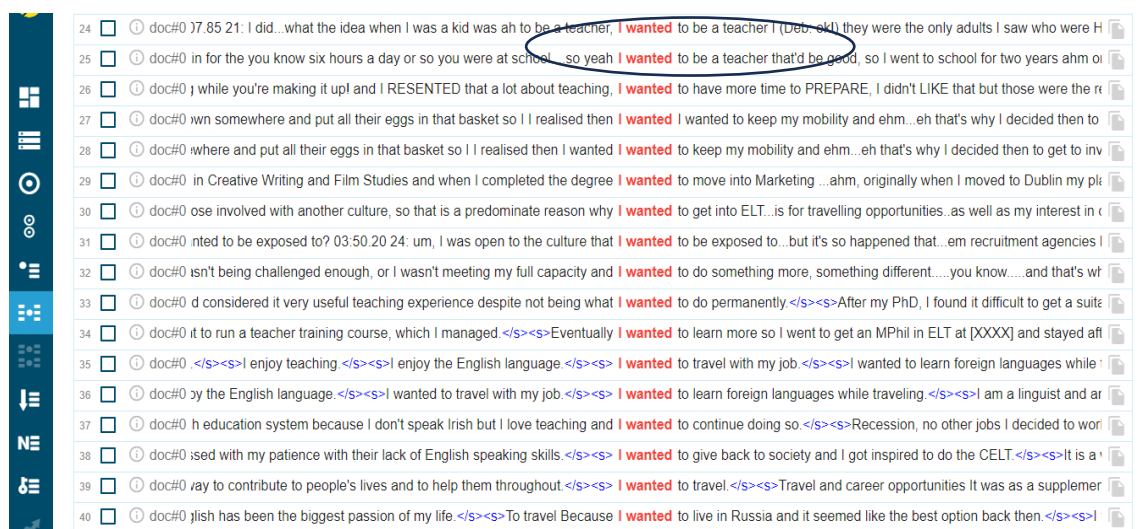
### 5.3.1 ‘I’ referencing the theme of wanting to teach

Table 5.7 demonstrates that the two-word cluster ‘I want’ appeared eighteen times in SaFGELT, with ‘I wanted’ demonstrating almost twice that frequency.

N-gram	Number of occurrences	Frequency per million tokens
I want	18	101.44
I wanted	32	180.34

**Table 5.7: The frequency of occurrence of ‘I want’ and ‘I wanted’: SaFGELT (normalised per million words).**

Of twenty-four teachers interviewed, seven alluded to desire to teach in some capacity, representing almost thirty per cent of the total cohort. Of these, three directly referenced epistemic modal verb ‘wanted’ with ‘I’; examples are visible in concordance lines in Figure 5.2. It was thus deemed necessary to explore extracts in which these clusters surfaced more critically, to tease out emerging themes.



**Figure 5.2: Concordance lines with cluster ‘I wanted’ collocated with ‘to be a teacher’.**

One such extract revealed **Participant 21**, a 43-year-old American national with 18 years' teaching experience, making a strong case for the desire to become a teacher, reiterating the affirmative influence of a teacher role model offered by **Participant 17** in **Extract 5.4**. He expresses desiderative function of 'want' in fulfilment the position can bring to one's life, with repetition of 'I' and phrase 'to be a teacher', recurrence in 'adults'/'their lives', and enforcement on strong intonation of the positive, adjectival evaluation HAPPY:

#### **Extract 5.6**

**FG12-21:** ...the idea when I was a kid was ah **to be a teacher, I wanted to be a teacher** I...they were the only adults I saw who were HAPPY with their lives!

Speakers encode 'affective stance' through lexical choices like evaluative adjectives (Biber and Finegan 1989): 'happy' serves this purpose in **Extract 5.6**. For **Participant 21**, this early experience impacted him in an equally positive way, teacher role models perceived as contented professionals who loved and were fulfilled by what they did, leading to his empowered choice to pursue teaching in later life through ELT. This is expressed through 'I wanted'.

**Participant 17** uses 'I want' to elaborate upon his earlier, stated desire to teach in **Extract 5.4**. In contrast to **Participant 21**, he outlines negative, lived experience of low remuneration in Irish ELT despite a high skillset, comparing the livelihood a tourism-based profession in his home country would provide:

#### **Extract 5.7**

**FG10-17:** I'm not motivated by money...ah...because otherwise I would have left it a long time ago...I would have left it when I was offered, you know, €6 an hour, like, 'Are you KIDDING me?' [laughs derisively] you know? Or €13 an hour in certain schools... 'Are you kidding me?'...Knowing that I have a degree in Geography, and also a, a Professional Tour Guide...and I, I did an, I had ahm, tourists in five countries, I speak six languages, I can make EASILY €180 euro a day in 6 hours (**Researcher:** [quietly] yeah) ah but I ga- I decided no, **I want to TEACH**

**Participant 17** repeats ‘I would have left it’ twice, indicating desire to teach overrode ambitions of profit to be made in ELT, recurrence of ‘€6 an hour’/ ‘€13 an hour’ underlining poor remuneration. That **Participant 17** twice references ‘you know’ when discussing ELT pay reflects shared knowledge of this ‘common sense’ state of affairs (see Section 2.3.1) between himself, his focus group partner, and the interviewer, defining the ELT world in Ireland and internationally. This taken-for-granted reality is reinforced, yet given an evaluative stance of derision, repetition of ‘are you kidding me?’ clearly rejecting such low standards. Regardless, it is his empowered decision to remain in ELT, evident in the enforcement in ‘I can make EASILY €180 euro a day in 6 hours...but I ga-I decided no, **I want to TEACH**’.

High teaching standards were prioritised in **Focus Group 2**. From the perspective of empowerment, **Participant 3**, a 34-year-old female with 13 years’ experience, is emphatic in her use of ‘I want’ to reveal the impact of negative student evaluations of poorly performing teachers. She uses ‘I don’t want’ to voice repercussions on her, a subsequent, disempowering ripple effect:

#### **Extract 5.8**

**FG2-3:** but like, you kno-ow...yeah, **I don’t want** to be working with a colleague who is...perceived as not a good teacher by some of the students... like that’s a NIGHTMARE

**FG2-4:** yeah

**FG2-3:** ‘Who’s your next teacher?’ ‘X’. ‘Oooh my God.’ You know? And then YOU have to deal with that...**I want EVERYBODY to be a good teacher**, do you know? ‘Cos that makes for a BETTER SCHOOL, and like that’s where you work, do you know?’

Wenger (1998) notes routine idiom and metaphor use to frame problems in institutional contexts; high usage denotes intimacy and in-group membership (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007 pp. 90-92; Koester 2006, pp. 98-99). McCarthy and Carter (1994, p. 11) outline ‘observation-comment’ patterns of idiomatic use, where factual phenomena are observed, discussed and evaluated in a concluding segment (Labov 1972; McCarthy 1998), evident

here. In addition, personal pronouns build relationships and group identity in workplace meeting discourses, particularly when combined with such evaluative language as observed here, to create a shared company image, e.g., ‘our success’ (Poncini 2002). In **Extract 5.8**, ‘I’ and ‘you’, combined with evaluative language, indicate **Participant 3’s** perceptions of her school workplace, and pedagogical standards she wants maintained. As a focusing device to highlight feelings of displeasure (Amador Moreno 2012, p. 31; Levey 2006) ‘like’ is also evident in the extract, in downtoning her strong criticism of certain, underperforming teaching colleagues. Recurrence of underperformance in ‘perceived as not a good teacher’ / ‘nightmare’ and expletive ‘ooh my God’, a typical modal item to express strong speaker judgement (Koester 2006, pp. 129-130), underscores multiple repetitions of ‘you know’ as shared knowledge between **Participant 3** and her 29-year-old, female partner, **Participant 4**, who concurs with ‘yeah’. Enforcement in raised volume on her linguistic choice of the highly negative noun ‘NIGHTMARE’ exemplifies hyperbolic evaluation of this problematic situation, requiring a solution (McCarthy and Handford 2004). This she offers in the balanced statement of ‘I want EVERYBODY to be a good teacher’. Use of strong intonation on the Extreme Case Formulation ‘EVERYBODY’ (Pomerantz 1986), as the object of her utterance, attributes a potential solution to the issue of teacher underperformance, justifying and defending her previous stance on poor productivity as nightmarish. In so doing, she stresses that it is simply not enough to have a desire to be a teacher; one must strive to be the best teacher one can be, for the sake of every other teacher in the school. The quadruple repetition **Participant 3** employs of ‘you know’ suggests strong, shared knowledge of a ‘common sense’ state of affairs of perceptions of below-par, ELT teacher performance, an evaluation held by both these participants, and a theme explored more thoroughly in Chapter 8.

**Participant 7**, a 35-year-old male with ten years’ experience, employs ‘I wanted’ to reinforce this theme of the need to consistently aim for high teaching standards:

#### **Extract 5.9**

**FG4-7: I wanted** to live somewhere that was, you know, different and a bit of FUN to live in...and then, when you’re back living in Ireland.....this is your life, you live here, and you know the job you’re doing, you kind of think, ok, a bit

more...gonna put more into it and actually try to be, **GOOD AT IT**...rather than just be, you know, doing it

**Participant 7** shares sentiments of **Participant 4** in striving for excellence in his own teaching, ‘you know’ suggesting once more that bare-minimum delivery is a ‘common sense’ perception of ELT teacher performance. In referencing ‘when you’re back living in Ireland’, ‘this is your life’, ‘you live here’ and ‘gonna put more into it’, **Participant 7** reflects *Centre for British Teachers* findings of a “hard-headed practicality” that sets in for many ELT teachers at a particular life crossroads (Section 2.3.2). Discovery through a combined travel-teaching experience that ELT AS PATH was what one wished to pursue is reinforced further by **Participant 5** in **Focus Group 3**:

#### **Extract 5.10**

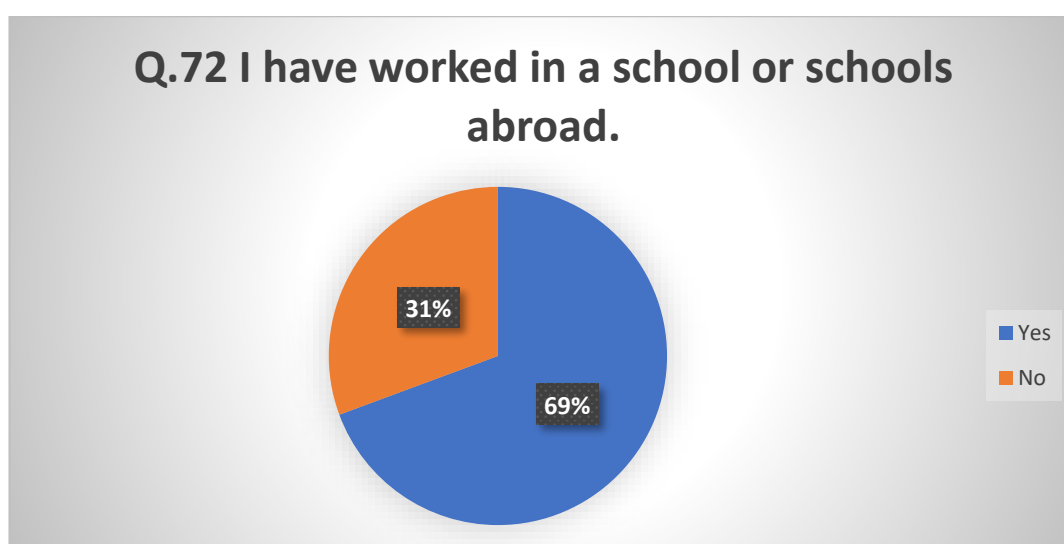
**FG3-5:** when I returned, from Japan, a little earlier than I anticipated for...for family reasons really...I found that I had really enjoyed teaching, and that it was something I was good at and **I wanted to continue at**

Very few respondents in the 1989 British study seemed motivated by either a desire to teach, or to discover more about ELT. This is consistent with Johnston’s observation of a “lack of agency” or stated career path progression among his observed, Polish ELT teaching cohort (1997, pp. 691-698), and more recent findings of Meilani *et al.* (2022) of real reluctance to pursue ELT AS PATH. Conversely, sentiments expressed by all six participants in this section mirror research findings in which wanting to teach was a powerful driving force (e.g. Martinez *et al.* 2010, p. 289; McTier and Beatty 2023). **Participant 3** in **Extract 5.8** underlines how desperately she wanted all teacher-colleagues to aspire to the highest ELT standards, which her partner concurred with. Two out of four male teacher participants stated outright that they had wanted to be teachers from the outset, encouraged by positive role models in their school experience, one of whom was not discouraged by poor remuneration. This ‘common-sense’, Irish-ELT-world reality receives fuller exploration in Chapter 7. The third and fourth males, **Participants 5** and **7**, alluded to wanting to improve their own teaching performance on return to Ireland. Five of six participants used ‘I’ in ‘want’ combinations.

Thus participants in **Extracts 5.1-5.10** either categorically wanted to teach, choosing ELT as the means through which to fulfil this ambition, or wanted others to do so, with certain participants wanting all who choose to pursue ELT AS PATH to aspire to high standards. It is, nevertheless, the other point **Participant 7** makes in **Extract 5.9**, wanting to live somewhere ‘different and a bit fun’, and **Participant 5**’s mention of returning from Japan, that leads to the next theme examined through ‘I’. The second subtheme emerging from interviews in use of ‘I want’ was that of ELT as motivation to travel, and travel as impetus for pursuing ELT AS PATH.

### 5.3.2 ‘I’ referencing the theme of travel

Self-discovery, through combined travel-and-teaching, that ELT was the path which participants wanted to follow presented as a consistent, CTA theme. The ‘backpacker teacher’ has been a pervasive, historical perception of ELT practitioners, feeding societal views that it is somehow not ‘real’ teaching, and primarily undertaken to fund travelling (Section 2.3.3; examined in Chapter 8). Critical analysis of multiple interviews revealed a desire to travel that was consistent with findings from the online survey. Of 62 responses to the statement *I have worked in a school or schools abroad*, 43 or nearly 70% replied ‘yes’ (Figure 5.3; Section 4.1), demonstrating a cohort with extensive teaching experience in Ireland and internationally.



**Figure 5.3: Percentage breakdown of international teaching experience of 62 respondents.**

Corpus investigation revealed concordance lines displaying ‘I want’ combinations in Figure 5.4, demonstrating both *to*-infinitive and gerund forms of the verb ‘travel’.

24	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 07.85 21: I did...what the idea when I was a kid was ah to be a teacher, I wanted to be a teacher I (Deb: ok!) they were the only adults I saw who were H
25	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 in for the you know six hours a day or so you were at school...so yeah I wanted to be a teacher that'd be good, so I went to school for two years ahm or
26	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 ; while you're making it up! and I RESENTED that a lot about teaching, I wanted to have more time to PREPARE, I didn't LIKE that but those were the r
27	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 wn somewhere and put all their eggs in that basket so I realised then I wanted I wanted to keep my mobility and ehm...eh that's why I decided then to
28	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 where and put all their eggs in that basket so I realised then I wanted I wanted to keep my mobility and ehm...eh that's why I decided then to get to inv
29	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 in Creative Writing and Film Studies and when I completed the degree I wanted to move into Marketing...ahm originally when I moved to Dublin my pl
30	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 ose involved with another culture, so that is a predominate reason why I wanted to get into ELT...is for travelling opportunities, as well as my interest in c
31	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 nted to be exposed to? 03:50:20 24: um, I was open to the culture that I wanted to be exposed to...but it's so happened that...em recruitment agencies I
32	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 isn't being challenged enough, or I wasn't meeting my full capacity and I wanted to do something more, something different...you know...and that's wh
33	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 d considered it very useful teaching experience despite not being what I wanted to do permanently.</s><s>After my PhD, I found it difficult to get a suite
34	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 it to run a teacher training course, which I managed.</s><s>Eventually I wanted to learn more so I went to get an MPhil in ELT at [XXXX] and stayed aft
35	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 </s><s>I enjoy teaching.</s><s>I enjoy the English language.</s><s> I wanted to travel with my job.</s><s>I wanted to learn foreign languages while I
36	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 y the English language.</s><s>I wanted to travel with my job.</s><s> I wanted to learn foreign languages while traveling.</s><s>I am a linguist and ar
37	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 h education system because I don't speak Irish but I love teaching and I wanted to continue doing so.</s><s>Recession, no other jobs I decided to wor
38	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 sed with my patience with their lack of English speaking skills.</s><s> I wanted to give back to society and I got inspired to do the CELT.</s><s>It is a
39	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 ray to contribute to people's lives and to help them through out.</s><s> I wanted to travel.</s><s>Travel and career opportunities It was as a supplem
40	☐	Ⓞ doc#0 lish has been the biggest passion of my life.</s><s>To travel Because I wanted to live in Russia and it seemed like the best option back then.</s><s>I

**Figure 5.4: Concordance lines with cluster 'I wanted' show collocations with 'travel' and related synonyms as reasons for deciding to enter ELT.**

Travel opportunity as a powerful, motivating factor for pursuit of ELT AS PATH was succinctly put by **Participant 5** in **Focus Group 3**, a 37-year-old male with fifteen years' experience:

**Extract 5.11**

**FG3-5:** [reading aloud] *Why did you decide to work in ELT?* ehm...short word I wanted to travel...

**Participant 24** in **Focus Group 15**, a 33-year-old female of nine years' experience, elaborates:

**Extract 5.12**

**FG15-24:** ...my initial I suppose rationale for going into this industry was based on my interest in culture...number one...as well as the opportunities that it would give me...in terms of **travel** and in terms of you know being I suppose involved with another culture, so that is a predominate reason why **I wanted to get into ELT**

It is clear that travel and a keen interest in learning about other cultures were the driving forces behind **Participant 24's** journey on ELT AS PATH. Of note is her choice of the

ELT-descriptive term ‘industry’, one of the frequent, nominal references that emerged in Section 4.6, examined in detail in Chapter 7.

**Participant 23**, a 28-year-old Canadian had, along with one other female participant, the least teaching experience among all interviewees, with just four years’. Living and teaching in Ireland, he describes travel motivation in **Focus Group 14**:

### **Extract 5.13**

**Researcher:** So what brought you to Ireland?

**FG14-23:** ahm well I...wanted to live in Europe...I- the kind of...the BIG story

A common ELT/travel thread runs through ‘I’ in these extracts. **Participant 23** found, through ELT, a means of travelling to and staying in Ireland, while the opposite occurred for participants in **Extracts 5.11-5.12**, where travel fostered a desire to teach English, and follow ELT AS PATH abroad. This sentiment was extended by **Participant 4** in **Focus Group 2**, a 28-year-old female with nine-years’ experience. Her ‘I’ use described why she opted to teach a forty-hour rather than a twenty-hour week in Sydney, an expensive city with observed, ELT pay rates upward of AU\$60 (€38) per hour, in contrast with the €10-€28 the survey recorded on offer in Irish schools, with an hourly average of €20.30:

### **Extract 5.14**

**FG2-4:** I did forty, like I did doubles, uhm, **I like to travel** and I always like to have my savings and you could live off twenty, (**FG2-3:** yeah) I lived alone as well like so you know rent is ridiculous, like if you shared with someone you know it would all (**FG2-3:** yeah, rent is high yeah) uhm but like I was telling...like it’s all (**FG2-3:** but that’s fantaz money)

Speakers use evaluative adjectives in workplace-related discourse to demonstrate involvement and solidarity (Coupland 2000, p. 6). **Participant 3’s** choice of the highly-emphatic adjective ‘fantaz’ (i.e., fantastic) indicates such solidarity-building, observation-comment pattern genre (Koester 2006, pp. 140-141). Both appreciate a need

for school operator adherence to fair remuneration for professional teaching service rendered.

However, not every participant made a comfortable globetrotter. Although the travel bug had bitten **Participant 12** in **Focus Group 6**, a 44-year-old female with twenty-two years' experience, despite her strong desire to teach, things did not go quite according to plan. Her 'I' use references the idiomatic expression 'hit the road', i.e., 'to begin to travel' (McCarthy and O'Dell 2002, p. 88) and 'make my way around the world' in embarking on ELT AS PATH:

### **Extract 5.15**

**FG6-12:** I... studied.. Spanish at university, so for me it was, it was my means, my means **to travel!** yeah, English and Spanish was my degree...so...at that time I was going, **I was travelling the world, I was...gonna teach and make my way around the world**...and failed miserably after one year! [laughs] because I got very homesick and came back...(2 sec pause) ..so that was my, initial plan or whatever, it had always been teaching, and...when I started Spanish, that was it!...and **I hit the road**

In contrast, **Participant 22** in **Focus Group 13** uses 'I' to reveal need for constant travel, realised through reference to synonymous terms 'mobility' and 'mobile':

### **Extract 5.16**

**FG13-22:** **I VALUE my mobility**....and I think after the crisis of 2008...ehm.....a lot of, sort of, I was born in '81, so I think a lot of people in my generation.....(1.5 sec)..either gave up on the idea of ...ever **OWNING** a home.....eh and would rather just, you know, be highly...**MOBILE**, or decided that they were going to.....settle down somewhere and **put all their eggs in that basket**

There is a shared-knowledge resignation toward need for travel in this extract in use of 'you know', the antithesis of the idiom 'settle down', i.e., living a stable, quiet and routine life in one place (Flower 2002, p. 125). **Participant 22** embraces the travel pursuit,

contrasting with **Participant 12**'s rejection of it, despite her initial enthusiasm. The idiom 'put all [one's] eggs in one basket' includes preposition 'in', which ranked number 13 in the single-word frequency list (Table 5.1). 'To put all your eggs in one basket' means placing effort, money, or resources into one course of action which, if unsuccessful, leaves you optionless (McCarthy and O'Dell 2002, p. 66; Anderson and Pelteret 2012, p. 79). A proverb, it is metaphorical in instantiating the Root Analogy ACTIVITY = PLACE, more specifically ACTIVITY/PROCESS = MOVEMENT FORWARDS, as well as the conduit metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Goatly 1997, p. 60). As a multi-word phrase, it is used to advise others against the sort of financial risk-taking that can ultimately lead to economic demise, and resurfaces in Chapter 7 in relation to the theme of precarity in ELT AS BUSINESS. Being able to travel has been highly empowering for **Participant 22** and his peers, heartening given the fallout from the global economic crash they had had to endure. The post-2008 reality of Ireland's Celtic Tiger boom, outlined in **Extract 5.16**, concurs strongly with Holborow's crash-aftermath analysis: high unemployment, negative growth rates and "large swathes of *human capital* idle and discarded...highlight the gap between human potential and human devastation" (2012, p. 50; italics Holborow's). In such a bleak scenario, it is encouraging to note the empowerment that ELT mobility gave **Participant 22** as a solution to economic precarity. Particularly apt is that this post-lockdown, online interview was conducted on his mobile phone on a forest trail walk, a nod to the peripatetic TEACHER AS BACKPACKER, investigated in greater detail in Chapter 8.

It was through gaining teaching experience abroad that self-realisation occurred for the participants thus far in this section: they wanted to teach, and they wanted to become ELT teachers, thus embarking on ELT AS PATH. This suggests travel as something of an essential pre-requisite to this teaching epiphany, embodying an identifiable contemporary, chosen ELT 'lifestyle mobility' (Cohen, Duncan and Thulemark 2013), or 'late modern cosmopolitan disposition' (Hannerz 1996; Codó 2018). However, economics clearly dictated need to travel for some of this cohort, as **Participant 22** indicates in referencing the 2008 crisis. While **Participant 23** mentions how the security his school offered encouraged his career focus shift in **Extract 5.2**, unemployment as prompting departure from Ireland in the next extract contradicts observations of ELT employment uptake abroad as "primarily not economic" (Codó 2018), and gap-year "TEFL tourism" (Stainton 2018; Section 2.4). This was demonstrated in 'I' use in **Focus Group 4**.

A teaching opportunity presented itself abroad, allowing **Participant 8**, a 36-year-old female of ten years' experience, to escape unemployment:

**Extract 5.17**

**FG4-8:** I was mid-twenties, late-twenties, unemployed....[unclear] so, I just looked on, at the time it was the FÁS employment website, I saw an ad to go to Korea..and I was always interested in culture and **travel** and things like that so I thought 'Ok!' I applied actually not expecting to get the job,.....but I got the job, and that was, that was it. I went to Korea. On a whim. I didn't research Korea, I didn't look for any other TEFL jobs, just saw that job and thought 'ok, I'll apply for that' and went directly to Korea

**Researcher:** and had you done... any TEFL course?

**FG4-8:** NOPE!

With this observation, a third theme emerged in 'I' combinations that referenced travel: the decision to upskill on return to Ireland from a teaching stint abroad, and gain ELT-specific qualifications.

### 5.3.3 'I' referencing how travel influenced ELT qualification uptake

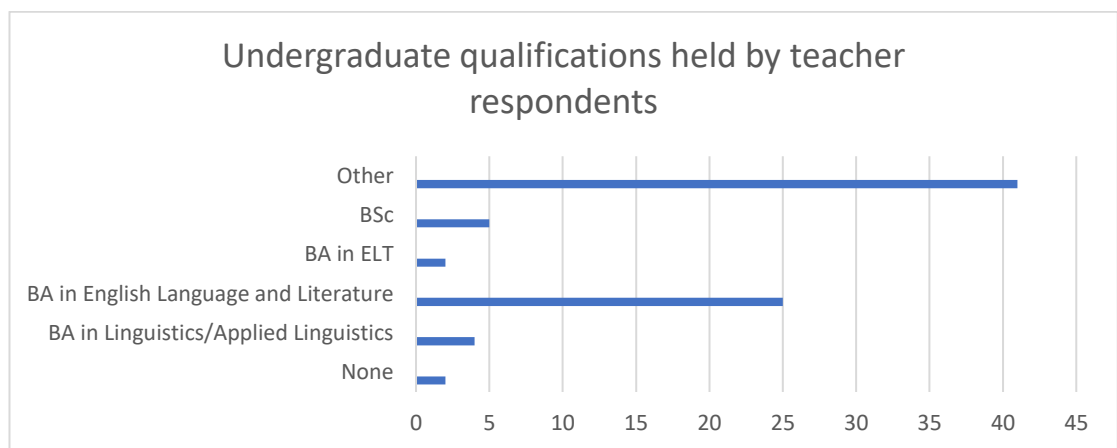
In Section 5.3.1, participants used 'I want' in stating categoric recognition not only of the desire to teach, but also for a desire to be good at teaching, while Section 5.3.2 outlined broader 'I' application of a clearly-expressed, participant desire to travel. In this pursuit, CTA reading of the data demonstrated a recurring, thematic link between travel and qualifications, and how the need for upskilling became apparent as a result of completing an initial ELT spell of work, in another country. In **Focus Group 4, Participant 8** uses 'I' in outlining the qualifications she held before accepting her first ELT job offer abroad:

**Extract 5.18**

**FG4-8:** In my undergrad I had English but it's English Literature, there's no, no, ZERO grammar, I have **a degree in English** but it, it's ZERO grammar

content...so no, **I HAD** my...finished **my master's**, spent two or three months in Peru, in an orphanage, and done a little bit of English with the kids, but in variant form, you know, game playing and this sort of very, vocabulary, you know no grammar, vocabulary, sort of, so, had a little bit of background but not, **I** mean, not enough....it wasn't making a CAREER CHANGE CHOICE (**Researcher:** mm-huh)..ok, things are not looking good here, **I'll go and travel the world**

**Participant 8's** use of 'I' references an undergraduate qualification consistent with survey findings: the most common was not, in fact, a BA in ELT, held by only two (2.53%) of 79 respondents, but a BA in English Language and Literature, which 25, nearly 32% of respondents recorded (Figure 5.5).



**Figure 5.5: Breakdown of 79 teacher responses to Q.10 What type of undergraduate qualifications do you hold?**

In South Korean ELT school-hiring practices, lack of experience is consistent with observations of “the social costs of a neoliberalized ELT profession” (Jenks 2019, p. 527), where only individuals from one of seven, native-speaking countries may legally teach English (the US, the UK, Ireland, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand). An obligatory photograph submission promotes white privilege in Korean ELT; a curious logic links native-level competence solely to race or ethnicity, and ultimately reflects how the larger Korean ELT market “views English through a race-based prism” (ibid, pp. 527-533). In describing her Korean experience, **Participant 8's** 'I' use suggests she was hired largely due to her white, Irish-nativeness, rather than professional capability at that point in her career (Section 2.4). This is underscored as common-sense knowledge in her 'you know' application, and exemplifies how non-Caucasian, ELT teachers are

disadvantaged by such belief systems. The potential of values favouring whiteness over expertise to influence similar, questionable, ‘common sense’ ELT practices are revisited in Chapter 7.

How travel was thematically tied not only to ELT AS PATH, but also to one, ELT-specific qualification is evident in ‘I’ use in the following two extracts:

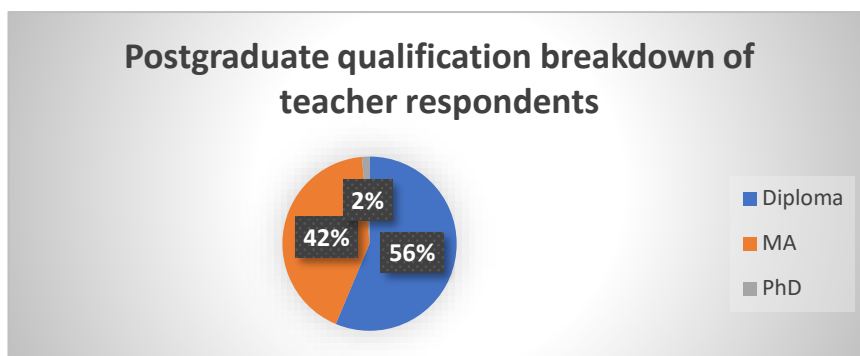
#### **Extract 5.19**

**FG13-22:** I wanted I wanted to keep my mobility and ehm...eh that’s why I decided then to get, to invest in the **CELTA** eventually...ehm...so yeah I suppose that was kinda it’s something that...ALLOWS me to **travel**

#### **Extract 5.20**

**FG15-24:** ...I’ve completed two **master’s** (**Researcher:** ok) so my first, first **master’s** I would’ve completed, and at that time I was doing a **CELTA** course as well, so when the recruitment agencies came, you know [name of university] as you know in [other university] as well....um they have a teachers’ recruitment fair....so all the different recruitment agencies from...Ireland as well as the UK, and in this context the Middle East, they came to the university...they pitched, you know they gave presentations, on the benefits and all the different packages...of going out to this region and I was sold on that

Both **Participants 22** and **24** allude to CELTA, one recognised, prerequisite ELT qualification in addition to a bachelor’s degree (ACELS 2023). How such certification enabled travel is clear in these extracts; **Participant 22** directly references ‘I wanted’ in ‘I wanted to keep my mobility’, while **Participant 24** uses ‘I’ to not only mention her CELTA course, but how additional, master’s qualifications permitted access to Middle-East, ELT recruitment. Holding postgraduate qualifications, in her case two master’s degrees, **Participant 24** was representative of many survey participants, illustrated in Figure 5.6.



**Figure 5.6: Percentage breakdown of types of postgraduate qualifications held by 76 teacher respondents.**

Of 76 respondents to *Do you hold postgraduate qualifications?* 58 in fact did, demonstrating almost 70% qualified to postgraduate level. A total of 102 responses revealed some holding as many as four: Figure 5.6 illustrates the basic range. Of certificates and diplomas, the CELT (Certificate in English Language Teaching, QQI Ireland), held by nearly 17% of respondents, and CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults, Cambridge), by almost 18%, were most prevalent, consistent with descriptions given by **Participants 22** and **24**. For **Participant 22**, ‘I’ outlines how travel was the impetus for CELTA certification, while **Participant 24** uses ‘I’ to indicate how postgraduate certification enabled travel. The survey revealed nearly 42% of respondents holding master’s degrees, either in ELT (5.88%), English Language and Literature (6.86%) or Applied Linguistics (8.82%), while the remaining 19.61% recorded MA qualifications in the ‘Other’ category (Figure 5.6). Despite this range, why so few held either a specific master’s in ELT, or the DELTA considering the practical teaching component offered by the second of its three modules, would require further research to ascertain.

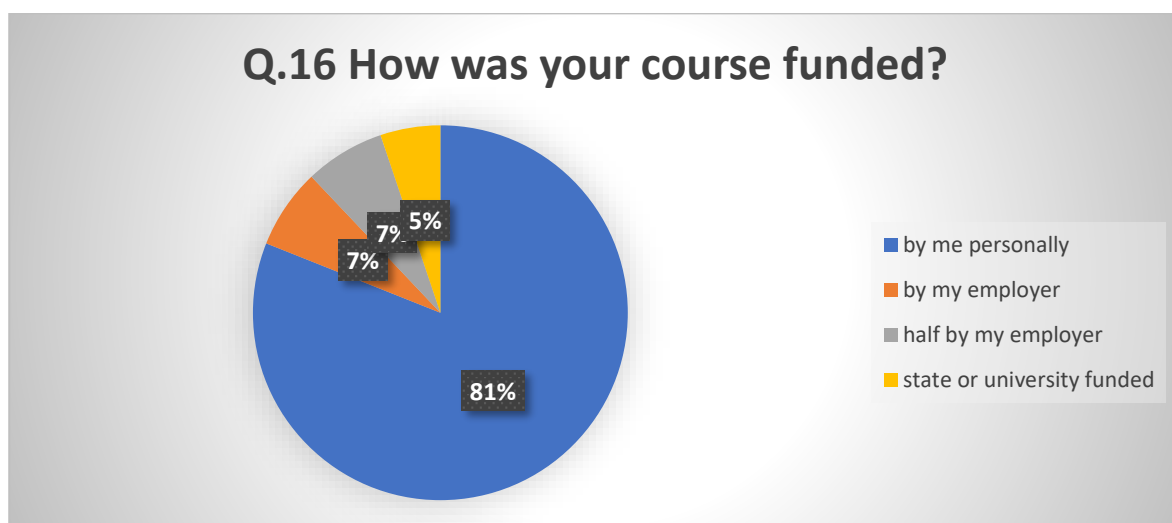
Consistent with survey data and **Participant 22**’s experience in **Extract 5.20**, **Participant 8** in **Focus Group 4** uses ‘I want’ and ‘I wanted’ to outline how pursuit of CELT and CELTA after teaching abroad allowed successful transition to ELT from a totally different discipline:

#### **Extract 5.21**

**FG4-8:** I came home from Korea..... so I worked in, in Archaeology ‘bout two, three months maybe and then I PAID and did my **CELT**....and ahh at that time

thought, ‘Ok, actually it’s a career’, ahnd... you know **I, I want I really wanted** to do that and do it PROPERLY, so I paid and did the CELTA

Survey responses demonstrated strong commitment to gaining postgraduate qualifications, contradicting previous findings of lack of professionalism within the wider, ELT-teacher fraternity (Thornbury 2001; see also 2.4). This fact is given more complete investigation under the theme of Continuous Professional Development in Chapter 6, examining ELT AS PROFESSION. **Participant 8** is emphatic in her use of ‘I wanted’. It underlines her perceived necessity for certification, contradicting observations of easy access to ELT positions abroad, requiring “little training and/or experience” (Codó 2018, p. 437), and her lived, Korean experience. Nevertheless, she indicates the financial investment she herself made in that pursuit, consistent with survey findings of the vast majority of respondents: 47 out of 58, or 81% had self-funded their postgraduate qualifications (see Figure 5.7).



**Figure 5.7: Breakdown of how postgraduate qualifications were funded by 58 teacher respondents.**

Of those receiving support, only four (5%) had obtained full funding from school employers; a further four had been offered half-funding, the remainder relying on either a scholarship, or state-paid, Back to Work Enterprise Allowance. **Participant 11** in **Focus Group 6** makes use of ‘I wanted’ to illustrate one of the few examples of how access to funding enabled entry to ELT, having been made redundant from a job in finance:

## Extract 5.22

**FG6-11:** Me, I was in the bank for about ten years...had to either do exams to.. progress...or...ooh, not necessarily leave, but you'd be left in the same job forever so...ehh...then...and I was a bit afraid to leave, and **I wanted to go back to college**, and then a few different things happened, and I took the redundancy package, and I went back and I did **my master's**, and that's how I got into English language teaching

A recent arrival with the least experience of the entire cohort at three and a half years', upskilling had been encouraged, with full finance offered for her master's in ELT. 'I wanted' outlines how her redundancy package allowed retraining for alternative ELT employment, setting her in a different career direction, onto ELT AS PATH.

Herein, a distinction can be drawn between the ELT teachers this study investigated, and their Irish, state-sector counterparts. Travel is not a pursuit restricted to ELT teachers. Donnelly (2022) notes upward trend in relocation to Middle Eastern destinations, as described in **Extract 5.20**, among Irish-based, first-level ('primary') and second-level ('secondary') teaching graduates. These cohorts tend to go abroad after qualifying and working in a state-school for a couple of years, often taking a career break from a secure, permanent position (Donnelly 2022). In contrast, the ELT teacher participants have, thus far, typically exemplified the more recent phenomenon of 'lifestyle-driven mobility': "a dynamic and privileged form...which forces us to see the fields of migration and tourism as partially overlapping and deeply connected" (Codó 2018, p. 438). Their extracts embody the ELT 'working tourist' teacher, identified for nearly four decades, for whom travel is both motivator and practice (ibid, pp. 438-439; Stainton 2018). However, in much lifestyle mobility literature, work conditions and labour issues are treated as peripheral topics (Oliver and O'Reilly 2010); this study attempts to address such a research gap in an Irish context.

Donnelly (2022) notes this "new exodus" of state-sector teachers motivated by a "search of adventure" as well as career enhancement. Nevertheless, a more practical impetus in the form of the current, Irish housing crisis is exacerbating such mass emigration (O'Rourke 2017). How said crisis has impacted these ELT-teacher participants is explored in Chapter 7. A two-tier pay structure sees more recent, state-sector graduates

paid less for doing exactly the same work as more senior, primary and secondary-school colleagues (ibid), encouraging the departure of younger teachers (McGuane in Hughes 2019). On return to Ireland, however, “a plethora of problems” include excessive bureaucracy, being placed back at entry level point 1 of the salary scale, and teaching experience abroad not recognised by the Irish Teaching Council (O’Kelly 2019). These factors are of consequence in how they can also negatively impact ELT teachers wishing to register with the Teaching Council and exit ELT, given their proven tendency to travel (Stainton 2018). Chapter 8 themes unpack perceptions comparing ELT teachers with state-sector counterparts, e.g., ELT jobs require little to nothing in the line of qualifications, skill-sets or training (Codó 2018, p. 437; Stainton 2018, pp. 133-134). The survey data of this study cohort, in this section linking the pronoun ‘I’, ELT AS PATH and qualifications, contradict such findings.

At this point, a final sub-theme arose in the role played by fate in one’s choice of profession as ELT teacher, illustrated in ‘I’ references by **Participant 22**:

#### **Extract 5.23**

**FG13-22: I’m I’m just eternally optimistic...I’m a very lucky person and I suppose...I’m always interested to see what the next chapter brings**

Alongside LIFE IS A BOOK emerging as a conduit metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), allusion to luck through use of ‘I’ indicates fate played a part in bringing him to ELT, as with seven other interviewees, explored now.

#### **5.4 The metaphorical sub-theme of ‘falling into’ ELT**

Previous research has seen students attributing EFL success or failure to internal, controllable factors, such as effort put in, or uncontrollable, external forces, e.g., luck (Weiner 1992; Peacock 2009). Over two decades ago, Doble (1997) and O’Keeffe (2001) noted Irish-based, ELT as something people happened upon by chance (Section 2.4). However, similar studies linking such perceptions and evaluations held by teachers themselves, and the impact of such attribution on their lived workplace experiences, appear scant. It was therefore curious to see themes of luck and chance emerge in

multiple, CTA readings of these interviews in a more contemporary context, perceived as playing a positive part in the professional lives of many of these teachers.

In **Focus Group 4, Participants 7 and 8**, a couple each with ten years' teaching behind them, explained their experience of ELT in Australia. Being in the right place, at the right time, benefited them both as they 'wandered into' ELT, shifting pronoun use from first-person 'I' to first-person 'we':

#### **Extract 5.24**

**FG4-7:** we just got very **lucky**, **we wandered into** a school that at that time was just desperately looking for two teachers, [name of DoS] was like, 'Yeah!.....great!...can you...start....tomorrow?' [**FG4-8** and **Researcher** laugh out loud] 'Yes, **we** can!'

Focus shifts back to 'I', nonetheless, in **Focus Group 3**, where **Participant 6**, also with ten years' experience, had a 'chance' entry to the ELT world, having returned from a co-op spell abroad:

#### **Extract 5.25**

**FG3-6:** when **I** came back from Spain, **I** met a guy inside in [university] and hee, it was what's the name of his, [name] was the name of his school, haven't heard about them since, but...**I** was literally walking around the place and he was like ahm....**I**, **I** forget actually exactly how **I** met him, but he was like 'Do you want to teach one of the classes?' **I** was like, 'Yeah, sure', **I** had no job at the time, and kind of just went from there...so it was kind of...**CHANCE**

**Participant 6** uses 'I' to describe the chance element to how he found himself in ELT. Compounding this sense of chance-instigated events is how sketchy the details are in his recollection, from the name of the school Director, to the school name itself, and the actual interview process. This intervention of fate continues in **Focus Group 5** between **Participants 9 and 10**, both female and among the more senior teachers interviewed, with twenty-two years' and seven years' experience respectively. They use 'I' references to

outline how they had each come to ELT by chance, in **Participant 9's** case with no previous teaching experience:

#### **Extract 5.26**

**FG5-9:** I never decided...initially...eh, I was asked, when I lived in Australia, I had an Irish friend...and her husband was Hungarian...and twenty members of his family moved to Australia and they spoke no English whatsoever...sooo, I was asked if I would, ehm, prepare lessons and so on, so that's how I started. With twenty Hungarians!

Her partner, **Participant 10**, had originally been a UK-based, Montessori teacher and had an opportunity to do a CELTA course here in Ireland. However, fate and logistics pointed her towards a master's in ELT:

#### **Extract 5.27**

**FG5-10:** it was a case of, ok...I'll apply for the master's, and if I get it, I'll do that...but if I don't, I'll apply for the CELTA, and I'll have to go down to (city) two days a week...but I got the master's, and that's when it really, you know, it went into it...and, I didn't look back and then that was, you know, it was kind of you **fell into it** and...a bit like yourself [indicates to **Participant 9**]

**Participant 10** uses strong conditionality in **Extract 5.27**, a First Conditional [if + present simple tense + modal verb with future reference] expressing possibility and probability. While this structure indicates a speaker “predicts a likely result in the future if the condition is fulfilled” (McCarthy and Carter 2006, p. 748), chance nevertheless dictates the outcome (ibid); fate played a part in her decision-making on ELT AS PATH.

This direct reference to Irish-based ELT as something one ‘wandered into’, as **Participant 7** stated in **Extract 5.24**, ‘falls into’ as **Participant 8** alluded to, or as a chance, “stop gap” form of employment (O’Keeffe 2001; Doble 1997) concurs with observations made over twenty years previously (Section 2.4). From an international perspective, Thornbury (2001) alludes to ELT as something one “ended up” doing: the responses offered in **Extracts 5.24-5.27** mirror these earlier findings. As examples of

multi-word verbs, i.e., lexical verbs combined with one or two particles to function as a single-meaning verb (Carter and McCarthy 2006, p. 911), ‘wander into’, ‘fall into’ and ‘end up in’ convey strong idiomaticity in the ACTIVITY = PLACE metaphor root analogy: an action is conceptualised as a bounded location into which one can move, and occupy a role or job (Goatly 1997, p. 58). This appears to have prevailed as direct experience in expressed ‘I’ use for many focus group interviewees, particularly among the native-speaker cohort, introduction to ELT and subsequent employment happening by accident rather than design in their younger years. It is a reality re-illustrated by **Participant 15** in **Focus Group 8**. With nine years’ experience as teacher and Director of Studies, she uses ‘I wanted’ in descriptions of how chance brought her to ELT AS PATH. The first, post-lockdown online interview, she describes similar experience of happening upon ELT through her choice of master’s:

#### **Extract 5.28**

**FG8-15:** I never had any idea what **I wanted** to do, so I it was in English and \*Soc I think..(0.5 sec)..ahnd I think it was it was a year-long master’s at the time, I think it’s three years now.., so I kind of said, ‘Look, it’s a year-long, it’s something I’m interested in, it seems interesting, why not go..[laughs] go give it a go!’ D’ya know? Ahm I didn’t know **where it was gonna take me** or what even job prospects there were, I just read the prospectus and thought kinda cool at the time [laughs]

\*Sociological and Political Studies

However, there were participants who had not come to ELT by chance. In his ‘I’ use, **Participant 19**, a male with six years’ experience but the most senior interviewee at 69, embodied observations of ELT as a career choice best-suited to older retirees of independent, financial means (Huete and Mantecón 2012; Section 2.4). He entered ELT “via a circuitous route” after forty years in the media sector, retirement providing secure superannuation:

#### **Extract 5.29**

**FG11-19:** ... **I** enjoyed the teaching, **I** did it, albeit at a fairly..ah, ah, small..ah, ah..salary you know ...and the point **I** made is that **I**, at least **I** have ah the the

safety net of, my [previous media company] ah, pension but...but young people do not have that and why should they be working at €16, €17, €18 an hour (**FG11-20**: yeah) maybe even less? Af- after 6 years **I, I ended up** on €21 an hour...(1.5 sec)..so, but **I** was enjoying it

**Participant 19's** use of 'end up' demonstrates how individual metaphorical, multi-word lexical items "will sometimes realize more than one analogy" (Goatly 1997, p. 59). In this case, it is something problematic in the form of stagnant pay rates decided by language school operators. This extract's 'I' outlines how the 'safety net' afforded by his pension allowed him to engage positively in his ELT career pivot, despite low remuneration, contrasting sharply with the economic precarity described by younger participants in Section 5.3.2. Similar conviction is expressed in **Focus Group 10. Participant 17**, a 40-year-old male with ten years' experience and the only non-native English-speaking teacher to be interviewed, used 'I' to state how ELT teaching was most emphatically not something he'd come to by chance:

#### **Extract 5.30**

**FG10-17:** but...**I CHOSE** this business, not, **I** didn't happen to **fall into** it, **I CHOSE IT**, so...(FG10-18: yeah) that's the way **I** look at it

In contrast, his female, Irish-national interview partner had a curious take on teaching as a calling, irrespective of one's pedagogical field, in her use of 'I':

#### **Extract 5.31**

**FG10-17:** well **I** think it's a **vocation**, **I** mean teaching is a vocation, you you know, w-w- it it IS, you **DO get called to it** and and whether it's ELT, primary, secondary or what, it, it doesn't matter, it's the humans, that **call you** and not the, not the...subject that you teach, you know?

**Participant 17** uses 'I think', a two-word cluster which ranked in position 3 of frequency (Table 5.4), explored in detail in Chapter 8. Her choice of 'vocation', "a strong conviction that it is one's duty or destiny to follow a particular profession, way of life, course of action" (Oxford English Dictionary 2023), and recurrence in references 'get called to'

and ‘call you’, mirror O’Keeffe’s earlier observations (2001, p. 14; Section 2.4), evoking the destiny element that brought so many of the interviewees in this section to ELT.

What follows is a summary of Chapter 5, how the research questions were addressed, and conclusions drawn.

## **5.5 Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has detailed corpus-identified clusters combined with the pronoun ‘I’ in participant responses, primarily ‘I wanted’, to investigate CTA-identified themes of wanting to teach, and wanting to travel. Metaphor analysis revealed consistent overlap between the act of travelling and an ELT experience, through extension of the LIFE = ACTIVITY root metaphor in ELT AS PATH. The ELT AS PATH metaphor directly correlated with survey findings in which 70% of respondents had taught abroad, and saw almost all twenty-four focus group participants citing travel, in some capacity, as a motivating factor for ELT as a career option. Travel was a particular gateway for the Irish-national participants, leading to a chosen, extended ELT AS PATH on return to Ireland. This was where and when they took the conscious decision to become career ELT teachers, pursuing ELT-specific, postgraduate qualifications in order to do so. These were, for the most part, self-funded. The three, non-Irish participants had also all had travel experience, two of whom had taught in their native countries. For the majority of participants, travel appears to have been an essential, affirmative rite of passage to becoming an ELT teacher, consistent with wider, metaphorical perceptions of JOURNEY as positive (Roberts and Bolognesi 2024). Both males and females stressed how ELT was something they decided to pursue more seriously after an initial, ‘ELT tourism’ (Stainton 2018) spell experienced abroad in their younger years.

For many, however, ELT AS PATH had been travelled by accident rather than design, with several exceptions (Section 5.3.2). Those subscribing to the former experience illustrated such through synonymous expressions like ‘wandered into’, allusions to ‘luck’ and ‘chance’. Direct reference was made to the phrasal verb ‘fall into’ (Section 2.4) by two female participants, who stated how this was they had ‘ended up in’ ELT, and identified the metaphorical sub-theme of ‘falling into’ the ELT sector. Six out of twenty-four (25% of participants) reported having ‘fallen into’ the profession in some capacity, rather than deliberately choosing to do so, irrespective of age or gender, five of whom were Irish

nationals, one of whom was British. Among those who had not ‘fallen into’ ELT were the sole, non-native-speaking, male participant, who used that exact phrase to indicate adamantly that he had not ‘fallen into’ the profession, and one American. Both were males in their early forties who had decided upon teaching early on in life, citing positive teacher role models as influencing this decision. Other exceptions included three Irish nationals, one a retired male, another a female in her forties, both of whom had consciously retrained as ELT teachers after retirement and/or redundancy from other sectors; the third, however, had viewed ELT as a ‘calling’, which suggests an element of destiny. This indicates clearly that while ‘falling into’ ELT remained a contemporary reality for many of this cohort, there were those among them who had actively sought out the profession.

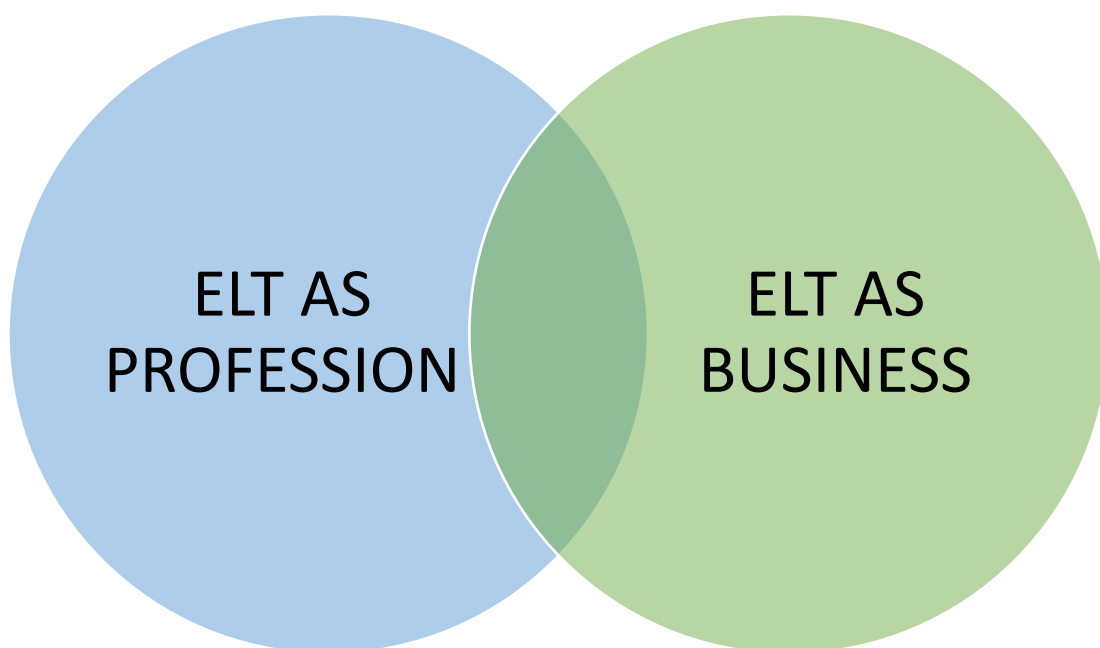
Travel had acted as the key impetus for most of these participants, embodying the earlier TEACHER AS BACKPACKER identity. The mostly middle-aged and older focus group participant profile, and subsequent decisions taken to become career ELT teachers, corresponded strongly with survey findings of a predominantly, middle-aged ELT cohort (Table 4.1). While many may have identified with the TEACHER AS BACKPACKER role, unlike in previous research portrayals (Section 2.4), it was not perceived as pejorative, and acted as an essential ELT AS PATH stepping-stone, onto their final ELT destination. TEACHER AS BACKPACKER will be revisited in Chapter 8 explorations of identity.

Irrespective of metaphorical route taken to and length of time spent within the sector, participants responded differently in their evaluations of Irish-based ELT. What language they used to reflect their professional status within the sector, their descriptions and perceptions of the ELT sector itself, is what the next two analysis Chapters 6 and 7 seek answers to, through the primary study themes of ELT AS PROFESSION, versus ELT AS BUSINESS.

## Chapter 6 Analysis of Data Theme 2 : ELT AS PROFESSION

### 6.0 Introduction

This chapter is the first of two exploring themes relating to, and descriptions and evaluations of, the Irish-based ELT sector, as perceived by study participants in literal and metaphorical terms. Two over-arching themes dominated sector descriptions and represented the strongest reflection of participants' lived experiences of working in privately-run, Irish ELT schools: ELT as a **profession**, compared and contrasted against ELT as a **business**. They are the principal themes guiding this chapter and Chapter 7, embodied metaphorically in ELT AS PROFESSION and ELT AS BUSINESS respectively, illustrated in Figure 6.1.



**Figure 6.1: Overlapping themes: ELT AS PROFESSION and ELT AS BUSINESS.**

How ELT AS PROFESSION interplayed with ELT AS BUSINESS, in many cases overlapped and blurred, and what subthemes emerged, are explored in addressing the study research questions. The linguistic items selected for investigation and analysis, why they were chosen and how is now given attention.

## 6.1 Language focus

This chapter explores the theme ELT AS PROFESSION. The two keyword lists generated for SaFGELT each ranked the term ‘ELT’ as their number one keyword (pink highlight in Table 6.1), with ‘profession’ (highlighted green) another clearly-visible keyword on both lists. This may have been due to one of the questions posed to every focus group being *Do you view ELT as a profession?* Therefore, investigation was merited to ascertain if this was so.

N	Keywords for SaFGELT with LCIE	Keywords for SaFGELT with C-MELT
1.	ELT	ELT
2.	staffroom	professional
3.	participant	participant
4.	CELTA	director
5.	English-language	industry
6.	sooo	profession
7.	prep	union
8.	COVID	online
9.	QQI	country
10.	ACELS	quietly
11.	CPD	city
12.	longer-term	world
13.	IELTS	staffroom
14.	online	sector
15.	long-term	support
16.	TESOL	friend
17.	PD	qualification
18.	hourly	live
19.	admin	Dublin
20.	PhD	social
21.	sooo	goin
22.	DoS	CELTA
23.	entrepreneurial	contract
24.	undergrad	studies
25.	ESOL	English-language
26.	yeaaah	fantastic
27.	attribute	secondary
28.	Sydney	wanna
29.	childcare	training
30.	lockdown	salary
31.	wifi	email
32.	DELTA	owner
33.	Colombia	during
34.	inhouse	contact
35.	MEI	member
36.	something	attribute
37.	salary	regard
38.	Brazilian	PhD
39.	director	COVID

40. profession	TEFL
41. patience	Australia
42. WhatsApp	indicate
43. ILEP	culture
44. Cambridge	sooo
45. teacher	QQI
46. studies	Korea
47. grammar	primary
48. theeee	wage
49. UAE	ACELS
50. Venezuela	rate

**Table 6.1: Top 50 keywords for the SaFGELT subcorpus, measured against LCIE and C-MELT as reference corpora, respectively. ‘ELT’ and ‘profession’ are highlighted.**

Table 6.1 also displays how ELT-related terms ‘TESOL’, ‘ESOL’ and ‘TEFL’ feature in lower keyword positions than ‘ELT’. In addition, the SaFGELT nominal word list displays ‘ELT’ as the sole, sector-descriptive acronym (Table 6.2, position 24, highlighted pink), as well as the word ‘profession’ (position 33, highlighted green).

Raw noun frequency of SaFGELT corpus		
1. teacher	2. school	3. people
4. thing	5. student	6. time
7. kind	8. laugh	9. year
10. language	11. lot	12. job
13. teaching	14. something	15. name
16. hour	17. class	18. week
19. way	20. bit	21. course
22. day	23. work	24. ELT
25.I	26. question	27. participant
28. money	29. business	30. director
31. industry	32. Ireland	33. profession

**Table 6.2: Top 33 nominal forms from SaFGELT corpus, as generated by Sketch Engine.**

Modern language-teacher education has shifted away from a conservative, ‘craft’ model inducting novices into a community of practice (Wallace 1991; Gray and Block 2012, pp. 115-118) towards ‘applied science’ professionalisation, and *good practice* (Cowen 1995, pp. 22-23; italics Cowen’s). A subsequent, ‘reflective’ model has coincided with neoliberal government philosophies worldwide, emphasising experiential, ‘on the job’ knowledge through journal-keeping, peer observation which encourages performance-related feedback, guided lesson planning, and action research; this aims to create reflective practitioners (Walsh and Mann 2015) who, it is hoped, actively partake in Continuous Professional Development (Wallace 1991, p. 13; Thornbury 1991a; Copland and Donahue 2019; Jordan and Long 2022, pp. 187-188; Copland *et al.* 2023). The extent

to which ELT truly values reflective practitioners is explored in Chapter 7. This contemporary shift towards professionalisation of the sector, combined with the corpus revelation of the keywords ‘ELT’ and ‘profession’, strengthened the case for focus on both these terms, which repeated CTA readings saw linked thematically and metaphorically in ELT AS PROFESSION.

Furthermore, subthemes relating to how Continuous Professional Development and feedback provision impact ELT AS PROFESSION were noted, significant given ‘CPD’ and ‘PD’ had also surfaced on the SaFGELT keyword list (Table 6.3, positions 11 and 17 respectively, highlighted yellow). Both items were observable when LCIE was acting as the reference corpus. They are thus additional, significant items for thematic exploration in this chapter.

N	Keywords for SaFGELT with LCIE	Keywords for SaFGELT with C-MELT
1.	ELT	ELT
2.	staffroom	professional
3.	participant	participant
4.	CELTA	director
5.	English-language	industry
6.	sooo	profession
7.	prep	union
8.	COVID	online
9.	QQI	country
10.	ACELS	quietly
11.	CPD	city
12.	longer-term	world
13.	IELTS	staffroom
14.	online	sector
15.	long-term	support
16.	TESOL	friend
17.	PD	qualification
18.	hourly	live
19.	admin	Dublin
20.	PhD	social

**Table 6.3: Top 20 keywords for the SaFGELT subcorpus, measured against LCIE and C-MELT as reference corpora, respectively. ‘CPD’ and ‘PD’ are highlighted.**

Moreover, the cluster ‘have to’ presented in the SaFGELT two-word frequency list in position 21 (Table 6.4, highlighted red), a linguistic device of deontic modality concerned with necessity and permission (Lyons 1977, p. 823; Koester 2006, p. 78). Given the noted, prevalent position of pronoun ‘I’ in the same list (see 4.5.2.1), and that ‘I have’ resurfaced in position 25, investigation of ‘I have to’ was deemed essential in this chapter to quantify

what kinds of obligations were imposed by the ELT sector upon participants, advertently or inadvertently.

N	2-word n-grams for SaFGELT corpus	Frequency
1.	you know	1101
2.	and I	496
3.	I think	473
4.	I was	448
5.	in the	404
6.	don't	392
7.	it was	366
8.	kind of	349
9.	to be	318
10.	of the	318
11.	I do	288
12.	if you	233
13.	and then	226
14.	a lot	211
15.	so I	206
16.	but I	201
17.	as a	198
18.	and it	197
19.	at the	186
20.	as well	184
21.	have to	183
22.	I I	182
23.	to do	174
24.	I know	174
25.	I have	173

**Table 6.4: Two-word n-grams for SaFGELT.**

‘Have to’ resurfaced in position 17 in the SaFGELT three-word cluster list, this time combined with the pronoun ‘you’ (Table 6.5, highlighted in red across SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE). Such cross-corpora prevalence of this cluster prompted deeper exploration in SaFGELT, to see what exactly participants felt those in sectoral power obliged of them. This was especially in relation to CTA-revealed themes of CPD undertaking, receipt of feedback, and membership of two organisations committed to promoting ELT AS PROFESSION containing the keyword ‘ELT’: ELT Ireland and UNITE ELT Branch.

N	SaFGELT	C-MELT	LCIE
1.	I don't	I don't	I don't
2.	a lot of	don't know	don't know
3.	don't know	I think that	I don't know
4.	and I was	I don't know	I didn't
5.	I think it	a lot of	a lot of
6.	I think that	I think it	isn't it
7.	do you know	a little bit	don't think
8.	you don't	at the end	I don't think
9.	at the moment	I think we	I can't
10.	one of the	I mean I	I wouldn't
11.	I don't know	don't think	you don't
12.	don't think	the end of	you know what
13.	I don't think	they have to	know what I
14.	it was a	don't have	going to be
15.	and I think	they don't	I think it
16.	I didn't	in terms of	<b>you have to</b>
17.	<b>you have to</b>	<b>you have to</b>	do you know
18.	English language teaching	kind of a	what I mean
19.	I was like	we don't	I think that
20.	Director of Studies	and I think	you want to

**Table 6.5: Comparative 3-word n-gram list for the three corpora SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE.**

These ‘I have to’ and ‘you have to’ combinations also revealed the extent to which participants felt empowered or disempowered by their status within ELT AS PROFESSION, and how ELT Ireland and UNITE ELT Branch might have contributed to teacher empowerment, especially given the appearance of ‘union’ as a keyword when SaFGELT was measured against C-MELT (see Table 6.3, position 7, highlighted in light blue).

Further corpus analysis had revealed five, significant subject pronouns: ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘it’, ‘they’ and ‘we’, in descending order of frequency (Table 6.6; Section 4.5.2.1).

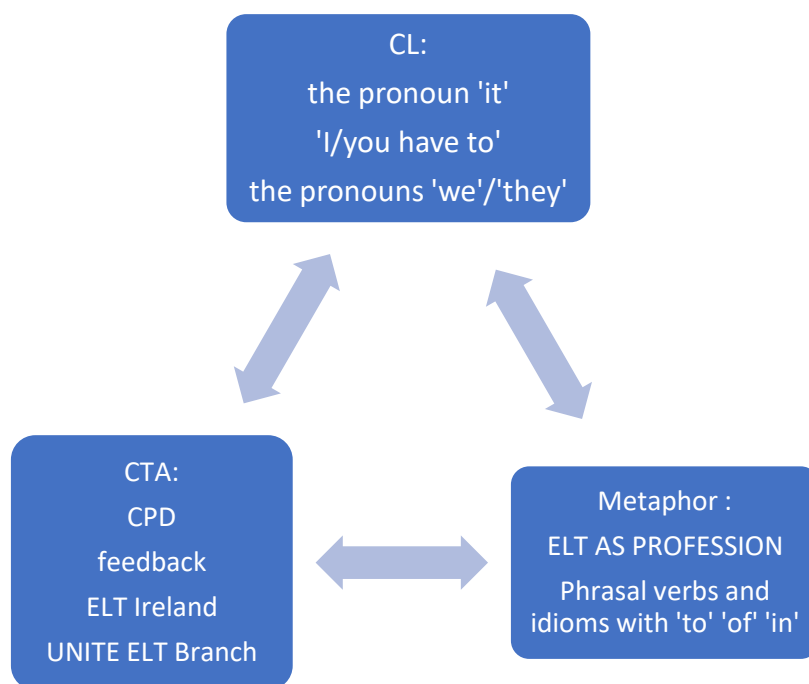
	SaFGELT	C-MELT	LCIE
<i>I</i>	2,954	1,828	3,039
<i>you</i>	2,130	1,341	2,651
<i>it</i>	1,830	1,165	2,404
<i>they</i>	819	1,107	968
<i>we</i>	538	1,000	776

**Table 6.6: The frequency of occurrence of personal pronouns I, you, it, they and we across three corpora, SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE (normalised per 100,000 words).**

Given ‘I’ was the top subject pronoun and ‘we’ featured much lower, exploration of ‘I have to’ took precedence over ‘we have to’ in outlining what teachers regarded as sectoral obligations, what the sector obliged of them, and how obligations impacted them as individuals, first and foremost, over them as a collective. Collective obligations were expressed more consistently in use of ‘you have to’, and synonymous phrases such as ‘need to’ and ‘be allowed to’. ‘You’ presented as the second most frequent pronoun to ‘I’, and in the combination ‘you know’ as the highest two-word cluster (Table 6.4). In accounting for shared knowledge, experience or assumptions (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 34) ‘you know’ often accompanies the kinds of conventionalized metaphors that present in idioms and phrasal verbs, which prepositions characterise in speech communities (Cameron 2010, p. 6; Section 4.5.2.2). ‘You know’ is noted at points in this chapter when ‘common sense’ practices emerged in subthemes of ELT AS PROFESSION.

The subject pronoun ‘it’ surfaced consistently in referencing the ELT sector, unsurprising given ‘ELT’ as the number one SaFGELT keyword (Table 6.1). ‘It’ also references subthemes of CPD, feedback, and ‘common sense’ practice within ELT AS PROFESSION when discussing ELT Ireland and UNITE ELT Branch. Finally, the pronoun ‘they’ required investigating in its references to sectoral stakeholders, including school operators, students, and policy-makers, with a dichotomised ‘we’ and ‘they’ noted at points in this chapter where ELT Ireland, and, in particular, UNITE ELT Branch were thematic foci. First-person, plural pronoun ‘we’ is noted for its frequency in context-specific, professional or pedagogic discourse (Rühlemann 2007, p. 71), as against intimate discourse, where “group identity is a pre-existing concept that is maintained due to the nature of the speaker relationships” (Clancy 2016, p. 60). Whether ‘we’ acted as an interpersonal device in expressing teacher solidarity, given this study’s workplace focus, is discussed at significant points.

Figure 6.2 illustrates the synergy of the three, study methodologies for the specific thematic and metaphor explorations of this chapter, earlier detailed in Section 4.4.



**Figure 6.2: How CL, CTA and Metaphor Analysis as three selected methodologies of this study synthesise in this chapter.**

The corpus-assisted, CTA and Metaphor Analysis of this chapter saw the theme of ELT AS PROFESSION, and its related subthemes, principally emerge from questions adapted from studies by Johnston (1997) and Kennedy and Phillips (1989). These were asked of all participants in the concluding, open-ended survey questions and focus group interviews (Section 4.2.3):

**Question 2:** *What are your longer-term career plans? At what point in time as a teacher did you make that decision? Do you see yourself continuing in ELT? Are there opportunities to grow in ELT?*

**Question 3:** *Do you view ELT as a profession?*

In addition to the corpus-assisted findings of ‘I have to’ and ‘you have to’, pronouns ‘it’, ‘we’ and ‘they’, and examination of how the subthemes of CPD, feedback, ELT Ireland and UNITE ELT Branch contribute to ELT AS PROFESSION, metaphorical references are examined in this chapter. These occur in phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions, especially, but not exclusively, those containing prepositions ‘to’, ‘of’ and ‘in’. All three items appeared in the top fifteen-most-frequent SaFGELT single-words (Table 6.7, highlighted yellow). Given findings linking preposition visibility to metaphor, and high

metaphor prevalence in expression of evaluations of both a positive and negative nature (see Sections 4.4.2 and 4.5.2.2), ‘to’, ‘of’ and ‘in’ are particularly relevant to this chapter’s emergent themes, above all in how ELT Ireland and UNITE ELT Branch have contributed to sector professionalisation.

N	Word	Frequency
1.	I	5241
2.	and	3965
3.	you	3780
4.	the	3721
5.	yeah	3400
6.	it	3248
7.	that	3082
8.	deb	2949
9.	a	2925
10.	to	2847
11.	's	2346
12.	of	2209
13.	in	2167
14.	know	1681
15.	like	1622

**Table 6.7: First 15 items in the single-word frequency list for SaFGELT corpus.**

This chapter begins with an analysis of the pronoun ‘it’, and how ‘it’ was used by participants to describe ELT in its professional capacity.

## **6.2 The pronoun ‘it’ to describe ELT AS PROFESSION**

How ‘it’ presented as a pronoun referencing the keyword ‘ELT’ is examined in this section, concordance lines in Figure 6.3 showing node word ‘it’ collocated with ‘profession’.

1	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 dunno maybe it was just me, but...</s><s>I was never able to VIEW	it	as a <b>profession</b> (1:mm), I just never felt like I had a PROFESSION (1:
2	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 : true, but teaching is STRESSFUL well I just yeah (Deb: I think it is,	it	is a stressful <b>profession</b> isn't it, you know)(6: well like I'm I'm not gor
3	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 UL well I just yeah (Deb: I think it is, it is a stressful <b>profession</b> isn't	it	, you know)(6: well like I'm I'm not gonna disagree with you but I'm ju
4	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 is anything now we don't know' (Deb: yeah)...so it's kinda yeah it's tri	IT	'S A VERY TRICKY <b>PROFESSION</b> TO BE IN (Deb: mmm) that DOES N
5	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 ebody needs a kind word...</s><s>I think social intelligence is vital,	it	's vital in any <b>profession</b> where you deal with people but absolutely v
6	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 there now is...treats it as a longterm thing (8: as a CAREER!</s><s>	it	's their <b>PROFESSION</b> !) well most schools you go to you get a lot of f
7	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 7: take a while, yeah) be pulled in off the street...and do what I do, so	it	's a <b>profession</b> , there's there's a certain standard (7: there's a large I
8	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 e effort, and I think that's probably true for....most <b>professions</b> , isn't	it	?; Int: ok) 1:04:13.09 8: I think it's a huge amount of it IS character....
9	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 I the people who are in it long term, yeah, we would definitely regard	it	as a <b>profession</b> , as our career (Deb: mmhuh; 10: mm) but that's ne
10	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 AS TEACHERS (Deb: mm) in this, <b>PROFESSION</b> you know?</s><s>	It	goes both ways. 59:42.99 Deb: Do you view yourselves as professio
11	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 way that I view my job, as a professional, yes, I, work, I plan, I....treat	it	as any other <b>profession</b> (1 sec)...the lack of benefits the lack of sup
12	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 .</s><s>[emphatic] (2 sec)...sooo yeah, I mean, I liked to, yeah, treat	it	as a <b>profession</b> but I don't see it, yeah, legally as a profession, I sup
13	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 e or, yeah, regulated as a profession .. (3 sec).. 34:24.53 11: I, I think	it	's a <b>profession</b> but I would agree it's , n n, bec, there's NO REGULATI
14	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 n .. (3 sec).. 34:24.53 11: I, I think it's a <b>profession</b> but I would agree	it	's , n n, bec, there's NO REGULATION ..</s><s>NO SUPPORT....ehm...(
15	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 NG BACK (12: we get nothing back yeah yeah yeah) but I would see	it	as a <b>profession</b> , yeah (12: yeah yeah) I would see it as a profession
16	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 but I would see it as a profession, yeah (12: yeah yeah) I would see	it	as a <b>profession</b> (12: yeah, the lack of benefits and the lack as you se
17	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 people...but ahm, no, I'll, asan an area and a <b>profession</b> , I DO ENJOY	IT	and I do HOPE to stay in it...for a long time...as long as they keep me
18	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 don't think...that it's treated that way...ahm I think the teachers view	it	as a <b>profession</b> , but, society at large doesn't really...ahm..(</s><s>1
19	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 's><s>Or security, ahm..it's just not fixed, enough, to..(</s><s>2 sec)	it	IS a <b>profession</b> but it's not, it's not, they're not treated like it is [ELT a

Figure 6.3: Concordance lines with pronoun ‘it’ referencing ELT AS PROFESSION.

Referencing ‘it’, a positive evaluation is extended to ELT by **Participant 8**, a 36-year-old female with ten years’ teaching experience, when asked whether she regarded ELT as a profession. ELT AS KEY TO THE WORLD and ELT AS A WINDOW INTO THE WORLD emerge in relation to ‘it’ in **Extract 6.1**, reflecting the sentiment that metaphors provide us with “bold, rich, and distinctive windows on the world” (Fox 1989, p. 233; Marchant 1992, p. 35):

### Extract 6.1

**FG4- 8:** YOU HAVE THE KEY TO THE WORLD! .....I think **it**, so...**it** broadens your horizons as a person...much better idea of the world and what’s going on there.....**it’s** a real WINDOW INTO THE WORLD that you don’t get if you look online or if you look in...you don’t get **it**.....**it’s** a REAL WINDOW

Metaphors act as powerful reframing tools (Schön 1979), transforming negative perceptions into positive ones, or vice versa; this corresponds closely with the Greek meaning of ‘metaphor’ as ‘change bearing’ (Marchant 1992, p. 44). The metaphorical key-phrase ‘a window to the world’ has been observed in student representations of English coursebooks (McGrath 2006, pp. 171-175). The idiom ‘broaden your horizons’ and repetition of ‘window’ evaluate ELT, ‘it’, as making positive, transparent, societal contributions, while prepositions ‘to’ in ‘key to the world’ and ‘in’ as part of phrasal verb

‘look in’, and ‘window into the world’ form idiomatic expressions countering Anglocentric, inward, web-based media portrayals and thinking.

A couple working at the same school, **Participants 7 and 8** were extremely optimistic, had no intention of leaving the sector anytime soon, and added highly positive, empowered evaluations of ELT, ‘it’, with repetition and enforcement of ‘nice’, and reinforcement in ‘dream job’ and ‘pleasant’:

### **Extract 6.2**

**FG4-7:** **it’s - it’s** a nice job, I don’t dread going into my work, you get the odd class here and there that’s a bit of work...but ehm, that’s usually due to one or two students, or maybe there’s a bad dynamic, but ah the job in general is a nice job, you’re meeting...people from all over the world, ehm, you eh, you know **it’s**, no two classes are particularly, are the same, you know you get people who have a, a different opinion occasionally and **it’s** like ‘Ok, that’s an interesting, you know, perspective’ and **it’s**, NICE

**FG4-8:** ...of course yeah - yeah you have bad lessons, bad days, but **it’s** a, **it’s** a DREAM JOB, **it’s** very, very pleasant

Of note in this extract is that neither participant utters the word ‘profession’ in describing ‘it’, ELT, opting for ‘job’ or ‘work’. In contrast, **Participant 22**, a 39-year-old male with 17 years’ teaching experience, references ‘profession’, yet doubts the professional status of Irish ELT, ‘it’, attributing this directly to work conditions in its current incarnation:

### **Extract 6.3**

**FG13-22:** ...in terms of **it** being a profession...**it’s**...**it’s** ah the terms of employment in Ireland are, are, are not, very - not very good so um I don’t think **it’s** a DECENT profession in this country

As a younger and less experienced teacher, **Participant 22** is hesitant in his evaluation, yet negative of ‘it’: ‘it’ is not a ‘DECENT profession’ in an Irish context, in his view, directly because of the work conditions. By comparison, **Participant 19’s** response to

whether he considered ELT, 'it', a profession, as the most senior teacher interviewed, aged 69, was measured, direct and non-metaphorical, concurring with **Participant 22** in questioning sector workplace standards:

#### **Extract 6.4**

**FG11-19:** Is **it**, is **it** a CAREER...is **it**, ah, PROFESSIONAL? Ahm...well...yeah I mean **i- it it's** a TEACHING JOB [upward intonation], **it SHOULD** be a profession...(0.5 sec)..but...you know the CONDITIONS DON'T ALLOW **IT** I think be, to BECOME that, ah...so..you know..I..ah...if you look at I mean as in a lawyer, a doctor or a, a secondary teacher...they are recognised professions...see can you put English language teaching up there objectively? I don't think you CAN [upward intonation] because ah of, of the CONDITIONS

Paralleling ELT, 'it', to other recognised professions, he ponders ELT professionalism: like **Participant 22**, he believes work conditions contribute to diminished professional status of ELT, 'it'. He extends the same extract, and queries minimum entry-level qualifications like CELT or CELTA, thematically revealed as pursued by so many participants in Section 5.3.3:

**FG11-19:** the ELT course is is just a, is a four-week course...which can give the qualifications necessary ahm and ah but I think that **it** if **it** would be you know if we had this more, ahm RESPECTED qualification then **it** would become...a ahm the short ans- the short answer is NO, at the moment

His emphatic rejection of ELT, 'it', being a profession is reinforced as 'common-sense' acceptance through his use of 'you know', and raises the issue of rigour in ELT certification, re-visited in Section 6.3.1.

**Participant 15**, a 30 year-old female with nine years' experience, offered a hedged response to the question of whether ELT was a profession, multiple pauses in her online interview while describing how work conditions impact professional status:

### Extract 6.5

**FG8-15:** ...it's very un-.UNSTABLE'S not the right word, but..(2 sec) you know, you, you can be working in English language teaching and be on 30 hours a week, for, five or six years and then all of a sudden **it'll** drop to..(1.5 sec) 20...and, you just have to accept that, you've no, is **it** stability the word I'm looking for? Or security? ahm..**it's** just not fixed, enough, to...(2 sec)...**it** IS a profession but **it's** not, **it's** not, they're not treated like **it** is, you know?

In the root analogy COMPLEX SYSTEMS ARE BUILDINGS, the meaning focus is creation of a stable structure for system complexity, such as in ELT, 'it'. This metaphor is linguistically realised in verbs such as 'build', 'construct', 'buttress', and noun forms 'framework', 'solid', 'strong foundation' (Kövecses 2010, pp. 137-140). ELT AS PROFESSION, 'it', in this extract is depicted as inherently unsteady: 'unstable', 'drop', 'no stability', 'no security', 'not fixed'. 'You know' indicates shared knowledge of such precarity. She continues:

### Extract 6.6

**FG8-15:** ...it's...I mean they're all BUSINESSES, I don't think **it's** that any...(2 sec)...**It's** what's done. I don't, think, that **it's** necessarily, language schools are treating their employees BADLY, **it's** just **it's it's** a CULTURAL thing really...within the profession dj'ya know?

While 'profession' is referenced this time, ELT AS BUSINESS permeates, with a meaning shift from 'it' referencing ELT to 'it' referencing substandard work practice, explored thoroughly in Chapter 7. **Participant 15** suggests justification for lack of professionalism expressed by many school operators; substandard displays of professionalism towards teachers is a common-sense, accepted state of affairs, 'a cultural thing', diminishing the status of ELT AS PROFESSION in preference for ELT AS BUSINESS. Nevertheless, the contradictory reference she made to 'it', ELT, being a profession, but teachers not being 'treated like' professionals is clearly reiterated by **Participant 11** in **Focus Group 6**, a female in her forties, owing to lack of government intervention in ELT, 'it':

### Extract 6.7

**FG6-11:** I, I think **it's** a profession but I would agree **it's** , n- n-, bec-, there's NO REGULATION...NO SUPPORT...ehm...(2 sec pause)...but I would see **it** as a profession

These seven extracts demonstrate how, in direct response to the question *Do you regard ELT as a profession?*, teachers gave mixed responses. Two participants, a married couple, gave highly positive evaluations of ELT, yet referenced 'it' as a 'job' rather than 'profession'. Two older, male participants dismissed the notion of ELT AS PROFESSION outright, while a younger female, an ex-teacher now administrator, and one older female, believed 'it' to be a profession, yet this did not manifest in terms of work conditions, or workplace policy. A blurring between ELT AS PROFESSION and ELT AS BUSINESS thus emerged, with clear weighting toward ELT AS BUSINESS. It was therefore imperative to examine ways in which ELT could have been perceived solely as a profession, as distinct from a business. At this juncture, 'have to' emerged in combinations with 'I' and 'you', in expressing what teachers believed ELT necessitated from them.

### 6.3 'Have to' describing obligation in ELT AS PROFESSION

References to ELT AS PROFESSION largely, but not exclusively, revolved around obligations required of teachers by ELT workplaces, realised through use of 'have to' and synonymous devices of deontic modality: 'have got to' and 'need to'. The clusters 'I have to' and 'you have to' reference degrees of necessity (Lyons 1977, p. 823; Carter and McCarthy 2006, p. 678). The deontic nature of 'you have to', in position 17 of the three-word frequency list, merited investigation of what types of sectoral obligations were placed on teachers, reinforcing individual expression of 'have to' in 'I' combinations, which 'I have' in the two-word n-gram list may have alluded to (Section 6.1, Tables 6.4 and 6.5). By introduction, the dynamism ELT requires, and subsequent energy drain, emerged in **Focus Group 4**, the variant 'have got to' – 've gotta', used by **Participant 8**, a 36-year-old female, in conjunction with 'you have to':

### Extract 6.8

**FG4-8:** **You've gotta** be all smiles and all energy...and the lower the energy in the class, the more high-energy **you have to** be

**Participant 3** in **Focus Group 2**, a 33-year-old female, concurs with such sector obligation, expressed through 'have to'. Despite fatigue through less holiday received than state sector teachers, she feels obliged to justify what appears a short working day to her partner, through negation of 'you have to':

### Extract 6.9

**FG2-3:** and like I sometimes feel a little bit l- cos I'd be TIRED (**FG2-4:** yeah) you know when I come home...and like my partner is VERY...understanding, and sometimes I find myself OVER-EXPLAINING to him, 'Well, actually, kind of what I do is I'm LECTURING', and he's like, '**You don't have to** tell me... (**FG2-4:** yeah) you've DONE your full day's work', whereas it's only 1 o'clock...you know, so to the outside world it LOOKS a certain way

'You don't have to' describes conflict between the optics (i.e., her working day is from 9am until midday, yet fatiguing), denoted by 'you know', and the high-adrenaline, physicality of teaching. This is hence not only for her personally, for all ELT teachers. Multiple uses of 'like' hedge the explanation she gives her partner, 'a little bit' and 'actually' apologising for a shorter working day that is, nonetheless, equally as demanding as any job with longer hours. 'A little bit' could also be serving to hedge the fact of her suggesting that her ELT teaching is on a par with university-level practitioners, who often also work fewer contact hours. This aligns with themes of perceptions of ELT teachers held by society at large, explored in depth in Chapter 8.

Asked whether she regarded ELT as a profession, Central-American-based **Participant 16** in **Focus Group 9**, a female aged 34 with nine years' experience, responded in the affirmative, emphasising necessity of qualifications to fulfil ELT teaching obligations. However, her response references 'ESL' and 'industry', not 'profession', again mirroring ELT AS PROFESSION and ELT AS BUSINESS overlap:

## Extract 6.10

**FG9-16:** ...if you want to work in the ESL industry, now that is not everywhere, but in the majority of places, ahm **you have to** be highly-trained, and the majority of places expect at least a degree, if not a master's, ahm, so yeah, from that point of view definitely, you can't just, just anybody, any person can do it

Reference to being 'highly trained', holding 'at least a degree' and 'a master's' is consistent with the theme of qualifications explored in Section 5.3.3. This thread ties thematically to Continuous Professional Development, obligations relating to CPD undertaking, and how this could have distinguished ELT AS PROFESSION from ELT AS BUSINESS. Investigation of how participants evaluated the role CPD obligation played in their professional lives is thus next presented.

### 6.3.1 The pronoun 'it', and 'have to' describing the subtheme of Continuous Professional Development

Relating to qualifications, key Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.3) subthemes emerged from the terms 'CPD' and 'PD' as SaFGELT keywords. Teacher attitudes to Continuous Professional Development have been the focus of recent research in Ireland (e.g., Tobin and Bennett 2023). 'CPD' surfaced in position 11 as a SaFGELT keyword with LCIE as a reference corpus, yet not at all with C-MELT (Section 6.1, Table 6.1). Although C-MELT is a corpus of teacher meetings primarily focused on student issues, it was nonetheless curious to see absence of 'CPD', given one of its investigated topics was listed as 'professional development' (Vaughan 2009, p. 82). A clear theme in terms of sector expectations of teachers, survey respondents viewed CPD in largely positive terms (Figure 6.4).



**Figure 6.4: Number of workshops or conferences attended by those who had indicated attendance in the previous twelve months.**

Figure 6.4 provides a breakdown of the number of workshops or conferences attended by those who had indicated such in the previous twelve months. 47 out of 76 survey respondents (61.48%) had attended at least one ELT workshop or conference in the previous year; only 29 (38.16%) had attended none. The majority (51.06%) had attended one to two, with 12.77% stating they had been at five or more that year alone. Reasons for attendance among 88 respondents (Figure 6.5) included personal (23.86%), or professional development (46.59%), while nearly 30% were fulfilling employer obligations, or those of regulatory bodies QQI or ACELS: i.e., because they had to.



**Figure 6.5: Reasons respondents gave for attendance at workshops and/or conferences.**

Given that both terms ‘QQI’ and ‘ACELS’ had surfaced as keywords when SaFGELT was measured against reference corpus LCIE (Table 6.1 in Section 6.1), this survey data was significant, and consistent with focus group interview findings. For more than half of survey respondents, workshop or conference attendance had played a significant role in contributing to either personal or professional enhancement. Such self-motivation was evident in **Focus Group 5. Participants 9 and 10**, females in their fifties and sixties respectively, enthused about CPD undertaking, referenced by ‘it’. They discussed MOOCs, ‘Massive Open Online Courses’ (Tracey 2013), evaluated as ‘fantastic’. Voluntary availing of free courses demonstrated a lifelong-learning commitment to CPD:

### **Extract 6.11**

**FG5-9:** It’s just something you do of, just out of interest (**FG5-10:** mmhuh) and just I suppose, I dunno, personal development and

**FG5-10:** it is, but they are fantastic (**FG5-9:** ohh, SUPER!!)

**FG5-10:** They’re brilliant to do to re- revise back on

**FG5-9:** and what I like about them too is you, you really get top-notch people.....(**FG5-10:** yes) you don’t get like eh, like a tutor or something (**FG5-10:** no no, you get) you get top-notch people

Speakers in workplace contexts will use evaluative adjectives to show not just involvement in discourse, but solidarity (Koester 2006, p. 144; Coupland 2000, p. 6). Their descriptions of MOOCs see recurrence of highly positive evaluations: ‘fantastic’, ‘super’ and ‘brilliant’. That these courses are delivered by experts in their field underlines the contribution of MOOCs in ELT-teacher upskilling. A notch is a literal V-shape, cut into a hard surface. It is also an imaginary point in a comparative value system, where a higher position is better, in keeping with the GOOD = UP root analogy (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Goatly 1997); ‘top-notch’ implies excellence (Cambridge University Press 2021a) and reinforces recurrence of their positive adjective choices. Noteworthy is absence of ‘have to’ from this extract. There is no sense of obligation expressed by **Participants 9 and 10**, choosing to engage in CPD of their own accord.

However, **Participant 2**, a 27-year-old female with seven years' experience, reveals a different scenario, where CPD, 'it', was inaccessible. 'Like' downtones her criticism of this state of affairs. 'You know' outlines her evaluation of substandard, accepted, 'common sense' practice at one, non-ACELS regulated school in which she had been DoS, where CPD was neither available, nor encouraged:

### **Extract 6.12**

**FG1-2:** there was no CPD (**FG1-1:** yeah yeah) there was NOTHING, there was like, there wasn't even observations (**FG1-1:** yeah) y'know, and I was implementing these observations obviously because I was the Director of Studies (**FG1-1:** mmm) and I wanted the teachers to, you know, see that I was helping them along etc (**Researcher:** mmm) but **it** was just, like, foreign territory (**FG1-1:** yeah) d'ya know, they'd never done ANYTHING (**FG1-1:** yeah yeah) like that before

**Participant 2's** use of 'you know' denotes tension between two common-sense, ELT states of affairs: that an unregulated school is less likely to implement CPD, but that also, in her DoS capacity, she was obliged to uphold standards of professionalism, and ensure teachers had CPD access. Metaphorical CPD AS FOREIGN TERRITORY emerges from the root analogy ACTIVITY = PLACE (Goatly 1997, p. 49), highlighting how conflicts can arise among differing values. Those given priority depends on culture or subculture inhabited, as groups can share values that contradict mainstream culture (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 23). ELT teachers have historically been perceived as inhabiting a different educational world, apart and distinct from that of mainstream primary or secondary school counterparts; such positionings will be examined in Chapter 8. ELT itself revolves around a global landscape, with Chapter 5 (5.3.2) demonstrating a keenness towards travel among this teacher cohort, and ELT practitioners in general. However, as the term chosen by **Participant 2** to describe CPD, 'foreign territory' carries an undertone of something unfamiliar, distant and perhaps something she feels detached from, a location alien to herself and, by extension, to the teachers in her care. This suggests a degree of disconnection, thus disempowerment, where CPD was concerned, both on her part and on the part of teachers she was managing.

Survey responses in Figure 6.5 indicated many participants believed themselves obliged to partake in CPD by regulatory ELT bodies and school operators alike. **Participant 1** disputes this, using ‘like’ as a focusing device for feelings of displeasure towards the practice of enforced CPD. Multiple uses of ‘you know’ emphasise shared knowledge, with ‘have to’ questioning the obligatory status of CPD, ‘it’, shared by her focus group partner:

### Extract 6.13

**FG1-2:** and more like even **you HAVE to do it**, y’know, maybe for ACELS now **you DO have to do it**, but...in all my research that I have done, I know for ILEP, there’s no, that **you HAVE to do it**, d’ya know? (**FG1-1:** mmm) And in researching ACELS I didn’t see that like **it** was an actual obligation of your school (**FG1-1:** mmm, mmm) d’ya know? It just kinda said like you **SHOULD** be encouraging your teachers in trying to, d’ya know....but not like (**FG1-1:** where to go on the course) y’know, **you’ve GOT to** do this

**FG1-1:** but not frogmarching everybody into an observation or a peer observation (**FG1-2:** so frequently as well) not **SO** frequently...cos **it** was always, for me **it** was always the straw that broke the camel’s back, **it** was always just one little thing (**FG1-2:** sure) too much (**FG1-2:** yeah) for my day, for what I was getting paid (**FG1-2:** mmhuh) y’know?

Repetition of ‘like’ occurs in younger, female **Participant 2**’s exchanges, against its virtual non-appearance in the more direct discourse of 44-year old female **Participant 1**. The root analogy **ACTIVITY = PLACE** focuses on causation of movement. Goatly (1997, p. 58) offers as an example “talk/frighten someone into/out of an activity”. In **Participant 1**’s exchange, ‘frogmarching everybody into’ indicates coercion of teachers into the CPD-related activity of peer observation. The verb ‘frogmarch’ evokes forceful motion of a person forwards, held face downwards by all four limbs and under duress, resembling a frog (Penguin English Dictionary 2003). This suggests lack of agency on CPD-related decisions, an essential component of career enhancement. The idiom ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back’ embodies a beast of burden bearing one additional load, which causes physical collapse: “the latest in a series of unpleasant or undesirable events” rendering a situation intolerable (Cambridge Dictionary 2024e). This furthers **Participant 1**’s

negativity towards enforced CPD, ‘it’, and related sense of disempowerment through enforced undertaking of same.

The issue of payment ties into the CPD scenario described in **Extract 6.13**, a subtheme discussed in other focus groups. Non-payment for CPD attendance, ‘it’, among other unpaid duties, e.g., keeping class attendance lists, marking latecomers, and attending meetings, emerged in **Focus Group 3**. Two male teachers in their thirties express strong criticism of this common-sense state of affairs, with ‘d’jya know’:

#### **Extract 6.14**

**FG3-6:** Continuous Personal Development [sic]...and make sure **it’s** all done, and the students can’t do this, and **you have to** police them on that...and then at the same time

**FG3-5:** be in half an hour early on a Monday, that we’re not gonna pay you for

**FG3-6:** yeah! and then that’s, on the flip side of that then you’re sitting down eatin’ your lunch and there’s a meeting going on around you, and you’re not being paid for any of this, and you’re like, ‘Well,’ ...d’jya know? How can you preach professionalism if you’re not acting professional?

Double-standard expectation of teacher professionalism, but non-reciprocity in delivery of equitable work conditions, is highlighted in **Extract 6.14**. This is mitigated with ‘like’ and acknowledges shared understanding in ‘d’jya know?’ The proverb ‘to practise what you preach’, i.e., lead by example, and adhere to same, elaborates. The reality is that professionalism is not observed from the top down, in **Participant 6’s** view, when teachers are not paid for meeting attendance. This perceived necessity for paid CPD, ‘it’, resurfaced in **Focus Group 2** between two females aged 34 and 29, the younger **Participant 4** using far more hedging in her evaluation, with ‘like’ and ‘kind of’:

#### **Extract 6.15**

**FG2-3:** ‘cos **it’s** motivation as well and acknowledgement and...you know

**FG2-4:** it just kind of shows you're kind of appreciated as well, and like if you ARE going to workshops, if you ARE doing [C]PD (**FG2-3:** mm) like you know you should kind of get praised or like you know, not even praised but...you get what you SHOULD GET, you know?

**FG2-3:** remunerated yeah, basically

**Participants 3 and 4** express the role fair remuneration plays in teacher empowerment, yet repetition of 'you know' suggests a different, shared reality has been experienced by both. Despite high levels of survey-recorded, voluntary CPD attendance illustrated in Figures 6.4-6.5, only 34.04% of respondents had been paid for attendance. Moreover, almost half the survey respondents had had to travel outside their town or city to attend workshops or conferences, yet only 31.91% reported receiving travel expenses for so doing. This demonstrates a cohort motivated to undertake CPD that was, for the most part, self-funded, and is consistent with the theme of self-funding of qualifications revealed in Section 5.3.3. Repetition of 'you know' underlines this common-sense practice.

Despite support for CPD, one teacher, a male with ten years' experience in Ireland and abroad, demonstrated total lack of awareness of what 'it' truly entailed. This extended to not actually realising what the acronym 'CPD' itself stood for, in **Focus Group 3**. Not a novice, **Participant 6** expressed criticism of assumptions on the part of a Director of Studies in one school that every teacher inherently understood what 'CPD', or 'it' meant:

#### **Extract 6.16**

**FG3-6:** I've listened to [my DoS] all week, go on about... 'CPTee or CPDee [exaggerated] and whatnot...ah, which is fine...ah like I had a CPD class today, games...one of the teachers took **it**, and **it** was BRILLIANT and I took things from **it** (**FG3-5:** mm) but then when like, like, cos I didn't know what CPD was for a long time in the other school until I'd say I think it was, I was, 'What is, what do they [referencing previous DoS] keep going on about?' [bursts out laughing] but **it** was never EXPLAINED to us!

The particle ‘on’ surfaces here. At its most fundamental, the phrasal verb ‘go on’ means ‘continue to happen or exist’ (Flower 2002). Here it is evaluative, expressing mitigated displeasure, with repetition of ‘like’, at how **Participant 6** perceives his DoS imposing peer observation on him and fellow teachers, despite not making it inherently clear what ‘CPD’, ‘it’, actually meant, or entailed.

In **Focus Group 11, Participant 20**, a 33-year-old ex-teacher and ex-DoS with ten years’ experience, explains how the Cambridge qualification model does not compel schools to provide CPD for teachers. This contributes to lack of professionalism in her estimation, highlights the dilemma of deregulation, and might explain **Participant 6’s** lack of term-awareness in **Extract 6.16**, adding to general teacher confusion as to how truly obligatory CPD, ‘it’ is:

#### **Extract 6.17**

**FG11-20:** I think PART of the problem is that **it’s** there isn’t...there’s NO REQUIREMENT AT ALL.....NO REQUIREMENT WHATSOEVER, number one for, schools to offer any ahm Continuous Development for teachers, AT ALL, **it** is RECOMMENDED, which as we all know means absolutely nothing

Repetition of enforced ‘NO REQUIREMENT’ and use of ‘AT ALL’, ‘WHATSOEVER’ and ‘RECOMMENDED’ underlines how lack of compulsion to provide clear guidelines on what is obliged of ELT practitioners is problematic for professionalisation. In so doing, she explains the deficit in rigour of the existing Cambridge CPD model, ‘it’, earlier raised in **Extract 6.4** (Section 6.2), and how this devalues ELT teacher qualifications like CELTA:

#### **Extract 6.18**

**FG11-20:** you do a four-week qualification, you’re a tea-, you’re a qualified teacher THE REST OF YOUR LIFE...that’s, there, I, I know **it’s, it’s** annoying but I personally believe that there should be some sort of renewal or review scheme or like you, because it’s Cam- I think I personally I think it’s because **it**, everything is based on the CAMBRIDGE model...and the Cambridge model of

assessment is that once you get your certificate, your certificate is valid UNTIL YOU DIE...like, if you get the ahm the Cambridge First...you can say you're B2 in English even if you NEVER speak a word again! And **it's** the same with the CELTA, you know? And the CELT is modelled on the CELTA

The UK-based Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, also known as the Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) is one of two popular, initial ELT qualifications (Jordan and Long 2022, p. 195; Section 5.3.3). Block and Gray (2016) observe how marketisation of education impacts teacher-training courses like CELTA, and its Irish equivalent, CELT. By focusing on “little more than the technical minutiae of teaching” (Block 2017, pp. 52-53), such courses have been singled out as “emblematic of the deskilling and discrediting of professionals” permeating multiple fields (ibid). This was observed in the lived experience of **Participant 17** in **Focus Group 10**, the only non-native speaking teacher to be interviewed. Non-native-speaking teachers have historically been considered lesser than their native-speaking, ELT colleagues (Section 2.3.3). **Participant 17**, a 40-year-old Romanian male fluent in six languages and holding qualifications on a par with the Irish-national respondents in the survey (Section 5.3.3), embodies Curran and Jenks' findings of enhanced, multi-lingual ability among non-native speaking teachers (2022, pp. 14-15). He recounts what the Irish-based sector obliged of him before it would employ him:

### **Extract 6.19**

**FG10-17:** I needed ah, uh, ehm PROOF that I spoke English...(1 sec)..uh, which was very interesting because all of my interviews were in English! [laughs] It's like, 'Oh, you will need, ah, proof, yeah?' ahm but back in Romania I used to translate...TV shows and conferences, radio shows, and then **I have to, I had to**, do a, a course, so I did, with a, a language school...I did **it** for like two months and then I passed the CAE with As...like 'Yay! So ah, now I speak English!'

Humour is often used in workplaces to resist power asymmetries (Koester 2006, p. 121; Vaughan 2009). It also provides a strategy for decreasing anxiety in spontaneous interaction, serving as “a tool for understanding how interlocutors deal with troubles” in communication breakdown (Çopur, Atar and Walsh 2021, p. 280). **Participant 17** laughs throughout this recount, using 'have to', 'had to' and 'need' to outline the absurdity of

proving his English competence despite multiple, presumably proficient, monolingual interactions with the very recruiters insisting upon such. Gray and Block observe inordinate levels of bureaucratic managerialism in present-day, teacher-training courses, rendering ones like CELTA “overwhelmingly technocratic-reductionist in orientation” (2012, pp. 130-133). A metaphorical hoop-jumping, game-like scenario, ‘it’, transpires, demanded by the CELTA organising body. Repetition of ‘I had to play’ illustrates obliged undertaking of a two-month, Cambridge Advanced Certificate examination course before being permitted to do CELTA:

### **Extract 6.20**

**FG10-17:** ... **I had to play** that, because you know, when I heard that, and I said, ‘Ok, so I can’t do this, I need to go somewhere, to a language school, and do a course...so obviously when I, when I enrolled, I mean the first question, like, ‘Why do you need **it**?’” [laughs] and I was like, [shrugs], ‘You speak English!’, I’m like, ‘Welllll... let me tell you the story!’ ...you know? I enrolled, I did **it** for two months just to learn how to do the exam (**Researcher:** ok) because I’ve never **had...to**, you know back then I..ehm I..I knew about the CAE but I’d never seen an exam...like a format...so I just learned how to do **it**...that was **it** then...I think I started **it** in October and early in December I did the exam and got an A, was like ‘Yayyy!’ uhm, so it was a bit frustrating because **I had to play**...

Discourse of conflict displays greater incidence of subjective-stance emphatic markers than hedging (Koester 2006, pp. 129-131). This is evident in **Extract 6.20** in expressions ‘so I can’t do this’, ‘so obviously’ and ‘let me tell you the story!’ In turn, **Participant 17** demonstrates throughout **Extracts 6.19-6.20** how repetition of ‘have to’ and recurrence in related synonyms ‘need to’ express irritation at this enforced CPD, ‘it’, in the form of examination proof-of-competence (ibid, p. 132). Thereafter, his experience of trying to become employed in an Irish school was battle-like:

### **Extract 6.21**

**FG10-17:** thennn I was told that I COULDN’T, still couldn’t teach here because I, I did a degree...I said, ‘Well, I have the degree’, so **I have to** go through all the...the recognising, you know, at at the time what QQI, but **it** was a, a different,

a different one, they **had to**, uh... y'know, get all my...papers, translated, and **it** was...another struggle because they gave me, uh, much lower ehm level than I actually had...and **I had to** fight back and so on and so forth, so, **it** was uh a bit ridiculous when it comes to, recognising qualifications in Ireland...ah [laughs] so **it** was a struggle! [laughs cynically] constant struggle!

A study investigating potential of corpora to inform Irish-based, ELT training courses focuses critique on pedagogical theoretical frameworks, action research on classroom-based activity, course content and teaching practice (Farr 2022, pp. 463-464). Yet the lived experience of **Participant 17** suggests that contemporary language teacher education, in addition to the crucially important focal features of teacher subject knowledge and reflective practice (Mann and Walsh 2017) in building ELT AS PROFESSION, needs subjection to “a much-needed political economic gaze” (Block 2017, p. 53). **Extracts 6.19-6.21** illustrate frustration caused by the ‘McDonaldization’ (Ritzer 2011, p. 1) of ELT qualifications. This is a phenomenon in which corporate, globalization practices use English to dominate world markets, flood international consumers with products, culture, habits and English-speaking world preferences (Gazzola 2023). Such practices emulate the native speaker as “the gold standard of language learning” (Heller 201, p. 103), discriminating against non-native speakers in ELT employment, particularly in inner-circle countries. In this case, unwanted CPD, ‘it’, was imposed upon **Participant 17**. The ‘struggle’ and necessity to ‘fight back’ on the part of **Participant 17** against what he regarded as unreasonable, CPD demands foisted upon him see need for contemporary ELT trainee courses to honestly acknowledge political economy, wider societal forces impacting ELT teachers, and inform trainees of such through their course content.

Responses on the CPD theme in this section varied. This ranged from full enthusiasm for CPD undertaking observed by two older female teachers in descriptions of MOOCS, to a wider dismissal of its relevance, with an ex-DoS questioning how obligatory it actually was from a regulatory perspective. Resentment at obligation to undertake CPD was expressed by an experienced female senior teacher, two younger males and a non-native speaking male, and was particularly acute when CPD was not remunerated. The view of one experienced, female, teacher-trainer was that the current Cambridge ELT model contributed to a devaluing of CPD-related certification such as CELTA, while a younger, yet experienced male teacher demonstrated a prior lack of awareness of what the term ‘CPD’ even stood for. At this point, and extending the theme of CPD was another

emerging ‘it’ thematic thread: feedback. What exactly feedback is, the extent to which feedback contributed to the development of professionalism within Irish-based ELT schools, and thus impacted ELT AS PROFESSION in participant evaluations, is therefore now defined, and examined.

### 6.3.2 The pronoun ‘it’ in evaluations of how feedback contributes to ELT AS PROFESSION

Feedback constitutes ‘institutional talk’, holding two primary purposes for novice and experienced teachers alike: evaluation and development (Roberts 2013; Copland and Donaghue 2019, p. 403). Administered in a dyadic, post-lesson observation appraisal between a trainer/trainee or supervisor/supervisee, it is “a powerful way to inspire and motivate” teachers (Watson Davis 2015). Feedback serves a “double-bind” function: it initiates teachers into terminology and institutional expectations of what constitutes “good practice”, thus can make them feel like they belong to a community of practice (Copland and Donaghue 2019). However, a sense of coercion by that very community, “those in control of the game (i.e., awarding bodies and institutions)”, can also be created (ibid, p. 405). Reified through an observation form, feedback records a supervisor’s or trainer’s perceptions of a teacher’s lesson in a face-to-face meeting, “giving voice to the institutional document’s discourse of quality, control and power”; it may thus, simultaneously, contribute to empowerment and disempowerment (Copland and Donaghue 2019, p. 413).

**Focus Group 2** discussed how many schools will seek written feedback from students as their course ends, in which, among other aspects of their study experience, they rate their teachers’ professional performance. In an Irish context, the participants explained how this is rarely passed onto teachers. When it is, their lived experience revealed negative rather than positive feedback divulged from management. In contrast, **Participant 4** describes her experience in an Australian school, referencing how often feedback, ‘it’, was administered:

### Extract 6.22

**FG2-4:** every five weeks and everything would be put on a spreadsheet, and **it'd** be like 'here are all your comments, positive AND negative' (**FG2-3:** mm) so you got that feedback, **IT WAS GREAT**

This receipt of feedback, 'it', highlights the performance-based nature of ELT in terms of how students rate teachers' classroom delivery, a reality explored in Chapter 8. **Participant 4** highlights her approval that she was privy to all feedback that students conveyed to school operators about her. Strong intonation on 'IT WAS GREAT' expresses the empowerment this brought her. A similar sentiment is outlined next in detail by **Participant 3**. At her current, Irish-based school, all feedback, 'it' is, in fact, presented once per semester. She also uses 'it' to reference the school:

### Extract 6.23

**FG2-3:** we are RATED by the students for want of a better way of putting **it**...and that score is integral to keeping our job...now, I'm gonna explain this, and **it** SOUNDS...SEVERE...but basically the students are gi-, we KNOW what the students are asked, and the students are asked whatever...some of **it** is mundane like 'Does the teacher give homework? Is the teacher punctual?' Do you know? And then there's a little bit more scope for like level of enjoyment of the class, and you know all this kind of stuff...and our director's VERY honest about how [they run] the school and runs **it** based on 'ARE THE STUDENTS HAPPY?'

Blurring of ELT AS PROFESSION and ELT AS BUSINESS observed in Section 6.1 becomes evident once more. The "high stakes nature" of feedback presented in **Extract 6.23**, underscored by shared understanding of such with 'you know', is consistent with findings where "poor grades on observations can result in termination to employment" (Copland and Donaghue 2019, p. 413). This emphasises ELT AS BUSINESS. From the perspective of ELT AS PROFESSION, however, a feedback form becomes an artefact through which extra support can be offered teachers, situating them at the centre of their professional, developmental trajectory (Mann and Walsh 2017; Copland and Donaghue 2019, p. 404). A positive appraisal can be most empowering, contributing to upward career mobility, as demonstrated by **Participant 24** in **Focus Group 15**. 'It' describes her feedback-related

promotion to the position of manager. This experience is realised in the synonymous phrase ‘my performance appraisal’ in a Middle-Eastern, international school:

#### **Extract 6.24**

**FG15-24:** so I started...the first two years as an English-language teacher, and then I progressed to a managerial position, so for the final three years, I was a manager of an English-teaching department at an international school, and I feel that that really was because of the qualifications that I had...as well as you know **my performance appraisal** on the job

**Researcher:** ...so when you say a manager is that, does that equate to being like a Director of Studies?

**FG15-24:** absolutely, the term that they give **it** is Academic Quality Controller, which is the equivalent to a Director of Studies position

Although essentially a DoS role, the term ‘Quality Controller’ merges ELT AS PROFESSION and ELT AS BUSINESS in **Extract 6.24**. Feedback, in the form of her ‘performance appraisal’, contributed in a positive way to her upward mobility, hence career progression. She in turn became a teacher trainer, providing feedback to novices. She offers positive evaluation on the part played by the ‘professional and performance appraisal’, in objective evaluation of trainee teachers’ capabilities. Typical personality traits the performance aspect of ELT requires are only visible through direct classroom observation of trainees:

#### **Extract 6.25**

**FG15-24:** **it’s** really interesting because you CAN’T TELL until you go in and do that formal observation, where you’ll really see them, in action essentially, and shine in that moment...so I think to give a fair chance to the teacher, a fair opportunity, that we do ahm build that into our **professional and performance appraisal** going forward

**Participant 24** makes multiple reference to phrases with ‘in’: ‘go in’, ‘in action’ and ‘shine in’, acts ensuring teachers have impartial, equitable treatment in demonstrating what they can really do while under observation. This positions feedback within ELT AS PROFESSION, delivered by a professional teacher-trainer, to a trainee striving for professionalism. Nevertheless, the term ‘going forward’, recognised as a corporate jargon-term (Kellaway 2016b), blurs her account into ELT AS BUSINESS. This aligns more with the reality described in **Extract 6.23** of feedback administered by a student, whose sole criterion appears, from the perspective of school operators, whether or not they are ‘happy’. Student happiness, as opposed to whether the teacher has employed pedagogically sound methods, effective classroom management skills, rigorous knowledge of subject matter, and meticulous planning in lesson delivery, demonstrates how feedback potentially compromises and disempowers teachers when ELT AS BUSINESS dominates. As a supervisory model, this may better represent ‘real life’ feedback (Copland and Donaghue 2019, p. 407). It nevertheless encapsulates a CUSTOMER IS KING marketing metaphor (Farooqui 2023), reflecting an uncomfortable truth that negative feedback has “serious consequences” for teacher employees in terms of job security, access to promotion, or salary increase (Donaghue 2016). Given the theme of precarity reported by so many Irish ELT teachers (see 1.2 and 1.5), the student feedback or rating system is potentially, hugely disempowering. This is illustrated next by **Participant 3**. The dual role of feedback contribution to professional development, coupled with its impact on maintaining a teacher’s job, is evident through the influence the students wield in provision of ‘it’:

#### **Extract 6.26**

**FG2-3:** ...EVERYTHING that they give on their feedback form transforms into a MARK out of TEN...so basically your mark out of ten can’t drop below a certain point...or, if **it** DOES you have a chat in the office about why that might be and **it** might be because there’s an anomaly, and that’s fine and that’s understood...OR **it** might be because you need support, a newer teacher to observe classes or whatever...ehm...the whole point about it is you get your fee- WE’RE GIVEN OUR FEEDBACK, **it’s** usually very good, do you know?

Despite potential negative impact, **Participant 3** is accepting of ‘it’, satisfied that ‘it’ is presented to teachers, and suggests that in her workplace experience feedback is generally

positive, a shared knowledge reality expressed through ‘you know’. In **Focus Group 3, Participant 6** is equally supportive of feedback in his school, highlighting that teachers and students were subject to equal scrutiny. However, its role in motivating him to perform appears to have been minimal:

#### **Extract 6.27**

**FG3-6:** it’s quite in-depth, so if you’re doing your job well, they find out that you’re doing your job well, so then...when I got there first I was kinda thinking, ‘Jesus, ok...right, we’re gonna get a score here outta somethin’, so

**Researcher:** and did, did that kind of feel, did you feel like that put you on your toes?

**FG3-6:** nah, not rea- , nah like, I’m kinda, I’m very CONFIDENT, (**FG3-5:** you probably raised your game) I’m very, but my, I feel my my game is alw- my game is always raised, so like I, I always think my, like I DO-O ah try to provide GOOD QUALITY CLASSES and I do think that, I, I TEACH WELL and from, keeping their attention, d’ya know? I mean, younger teachers and some teachers in the school, and I have the craic with the students, ah but at the same time...I’m, I’m DELIVERING on the English

The root analogy GOOD = UP is visible in the expression ‘raise your game’: an activity requiring skill, chance and fixed rules to defeat an opponent, that may involve risk, but ultimately brings advantage and success (Deignan 1995, p. 88). This success is nonetheless balanced by the phrase ‘delivering on the English’, ‘deliver’ another identifiable, corporate term (Kellaway 2016a). It further exemplifies ELT AS PROFESSION/ELT AS BUSINESS blurring. The theme of students being happy re-emerges in ‘have the craic’, an IrEng expression for enjoyment, or having fun.

Some final comments from **Participants 3** and **4** in **Focus Group 2** outlined what feedback, ‘it’, meant for them personally:

## **Extract 6.28**

**FG2-3:** I have all my feedback...but what IS nice about **it** is, is there's a 'THANK YOU' at the end, 'thank you, we appreciate'

**FG2-4:** **it's** a little bit more personal, **it's** nice

**FG2-3:** hard work, yeah, you know, and that's good, you know...**it** IS good and **it** IS important...I think people who work in this industry, **it's** all, **it's** soo, everyone shares the same VIBE about certain things, do you know?

The shared repertoire of an ELT community of practice (Wenger 1998) is expressed in 'shares the same vibe'. The phrase highlights the relational function idioms can serve in positive evaluation, reinforcing the common ground reinforced by 'you know' (Koester 2006, pp. 100-101). 'It' in this extract demonstrates how positive feedback creates a sense of belonging to an ELT collective. Nonetheless, despite school management attempts at implementing objective feedback systems, negative self-perceptions can outweigh how individuals value themselves and their abilities (Copland and Garton 2011, p. 243). This can become intensified if a "psychological feeling of incompetence" prevails (Chang and Strauss 2010, p. 423). While the focus of these studies was on student self-perceptions, it is transferable to ELT teachers regarding sense of agency, "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn 2001, p. 112). In describing her appreciation of feedback, 'it', as an evaluation of her teaching performance, which embraces ELT AS PROFESSION, **Participant 3** nonetheless references 'industry' in **Extract 6.28**. It is thus ELT AS BUSINESS that ultimately prevails.

Hence the subtheme of feedback, 'it', was significant in contributing to ELT AS PROFESSION. Participants in **Extracts 6.22-6.28** accepted that their classroom performance was subject to feedback scrutiny, an obligation required of them as a CPD extension. Male and female participants in this section recognised the practice of feedback, and accepted its importance irrespective of whether it was administered by students, or school administrators. At this point, the contributory role of two organisations toward professionalising the sector in Ireland will be explored, beginning with that played by ELT Ireland.

#### 6.4 The contribution of ELT Ireland to ELT AS PROFESSION

The thematic link between ELT Ireland and ELT AS PROFESSION was realised primarily through corpus identification of keyword ‘ELT’, pronoun ‘it’ referencing this organisation, and cluster ‘you have to’. However, interesting ‘we’ and ‘they’ pronoun use revealed an ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy. This divided ELT teachers from school operators, state-sector teachers and government officials, and is now examined, along with relevant metaphors. The establishment of ELT Ireland in 2014 raised the sector’s professional profile in this country. **Participant 20** in **Focus Group 11**, an Irish national instrumental in the founding of the organisation, explains need for an Irish-based, professional organisation for teachers to access, to enhance ELT AS PROFESSION, referencing ELT with ‘it’:

##### **Extract 6.29**

**FG11-20:** to SHOW that **it** IS...a PROPER, SERIOUS, WORTHWHILE, ACADEMIC, VALUABLE...PURSUIT...that...people CAN do.....**it** IS possible to make a good CAREER for yourself, and **it** SHOULD be treated seriously..... our core ethos, was to make people realise, ELT in the Irish sector, IS NOT A DOSS, is not a BACKPACKER JOB...before 2014, Ireland had NO **PROFESSIONAL organisation** for the English language sector AT ALL, because MEI IS NOT a **PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATION**

Her objective behind co-founding such an organisation, prior lack of which contributed to disempowerment for Irish-based ELT teachers, is accredited to perceptions of the sector held by those within and outside. **Participant 20** categorically distinguishes between ‘it’ denoting ELT AS PROFESSION, promoted by ELT Ireland in her strong intonation on ‘PROFESSIONAL’, and ELT AS BUSINESS, represented by Marketing English in Ireland (MEI). Both ELT AS PATH, and the theme of travel (Sections 5.3 and 5.3.1 respectively) re-emerge, embodied this time in a pejorative TEACHER AS BACKPACKER identity, more closely examined in Chapter 8. Dismissing outright evaluations of ELT as ‘a doss’, IrEng slang for “a situation giving the opportunity for being extremely idle” (Oxford Languages 2023), she outlines what she regards as international, professional ELT bodies of calibre, and compulsion on the part of ELT Ireland founders, expressed in ‘you have to’, to establish suchlike, ‘it’, in Ireland:

### Extract 6.30

**FG11-20:** ...every other country in the world ha-, like LITERALLY in the world had, an ELT professional organisation for TEACHERS....in America, they're, they're down to CITY level in America, ah like in Korea, they have regional, in Japan **it's** reg- like **it's** UNBELIEVABLE! We are, we w- at even, in 2014, so 2013 when we started talking about **it**...we were a...BOOMING industry and had been for a very long time...but the teachers essentially didn't exist! And I think like [name of founder], who founded ELT Ireland, she's, she's the founding president, she came back from working in Spain, where TESOL is a very well-regarded industry for the most part, and the UK, and she was saying, 'What have I walked home into? What is this?' Like, she left 20 years before, and she came back and she was going

**Researcher:** nothing had changed?

**FG11-20:** you **HAVE TO DO SOMETHING!** So we **DID!**

Proactivity using 'have to' demonstrates strong obligation felt on the part of ELT Ireland founders to empower teacher peers, thus distinguish ELT AS PROFESSION from ELT AS BUSINESS. Discourse of conflict arises once again, witnessed earlier in **Extracts 6.19-6.21** (Section 6.3.1), displaying greater incidence of subjective stance markers: 'UNBELIEVABLE!', 'essentially didn't exist' and 'What have I walked into? What is this?' Borne out of frustration, use of 'have to' expresses her irritation (Koester 2006, p. 132).

Perceived teacher non-existence, or in-sector, teacher invisibility, further examined in Section 6.5, mirrors Pollard's (2019, pp. 549-50) UK state-school context, applicable to Irish ELT, whereby "...successive governments have not yet understood that teachers should be treated as active, thinking, value-driven professionals with whom partnerships to develop the educational system should be created". Whether governments accept it or not, "there are some contentious issues in education that cannot be avoided" (ibid, p. 551) and which extend beyond educational outcomes. Teachers have rights, and it is perfectly reasonable they should contribute to policy as activists in ways that ensure they are not

discriminated against. For **Participant 20**, ELT Ireland plays an integral part in this process:

### **Extract 6.31**

**FG11-20:** ...like, that's been a huge part of **it**, **you have to** make people FEEL like professionals, **you have to** GIVE THEM SOMETHING PROFESSIONAL to relate to. How can they otherwise, y'know?

'Y'know' suggests statement of the obvious for **Participant 20**: non-existence of a professional body in Ireland is simply no longer optional. This intensifies her sense of obligation to fellow ELT teachers, through 'you have to' use, in ensuring ELT Ireland's survival, thus elevating ELT AS PROFESSION. However, the organisation has not been embraced by all schools. Many refuse to engage with it, to the point of actively discouraging teachers from attendance at ELT Ireland events. This becomes evident from her account of when the first ELT Ireland conference took place. Herein, a 'we' and 'they' distinction positions ELT Ireland as 'we', while 'they' referencing school operators:

### **Extract 6.32**

**FG11-20:** A LOT of schools ah, REFUSED TO ATTEND, for the pure reason that...**they** thought, if their teachers were mingling with OTHER teachers, in a larger group, **they** would realise HOW BAD their school was.....whereas on the other hand, **we** had people coming to RECRUIT teachers, and **we** were goin', 'No no no! That's NOT what THIS is, this is NOT a HIRING FAIR!'

She continues:

So a lot of BIG schools REFUSED and some of them STILL DO, I can name SEVERAL SCHOOLS, you'd be surprised, WILL NOT ENGAGE with ELT Ireland, because **THEY KNOW**, if their teachers are mingling in this atmosphere, DISCONTENT WILL BREW...like....**it's** SUPPRESSING!  
(**Researcher:** it it's; **FG11-19:** yeah) **it's** SUPPRESSING knowledge!

Modal items expressing speaker judgement include stronger, more forceful expressions of subjective stance besides deontic ‘have to’ (Koester 2006, pp. 129-130). Exclamations, seen clearly here in ‘No no no!...This is NOT a HIRING FAIR!’, and the explicit item ‘you’d be surprised’, are direct and highly evaluative. An extension of the root analogy EMOTION = HEAT (Goatly 1997, p. 48) sees many verbs of cooking used to denote temperature increase, metaphorically conveying stressful situations and intense emotions (Deignan 1995, pp. 111-115) e.g., ‘to stew’, ‘to boil’ and ‘to simmer’. ‘Brew’ intensifies the result of certain schools controlling, hence limiting, their own teachers’ professional potential. ‘It’ in **Extract 6.32** references lack of access to ELT Ireland. In turn, this limits the status of teachers as workers, hence teacher agency, and diminishes ELT AS PROFESSION for **Participant 20**.

In addition to the need for a teacher-based, professional organisation was the reality of inaccessibility to both information on worker-related rights, and a representative group for Irish-based, ELT teachers as workers, at government and policy-making level. Necessity for a body to provide and promote such access was eminent in a final subtheme, which saw the part played by UNITE ELT Branch in promoting ELT AS PROFESSION.

## **6.5 The contribution of UNITE ELT Branch to ELT AS PROFESSION**

The word ‘union’ presented in position 7 of the top 10 SaFGELT keywords (Section 6.1, Table 6.3), measured against C-MELT. CTA reading of this linguistic item uncovered multiple, comprehensive accounts of teacher evaluations on union representation, hence the number of extracts in this section. Until 2017 with the founding of UNITE ELT Branch, lack of union representation for many teachers compounded precarity and disempowerment (Section 2.3.2). How UNITE ELT Branch thematically linked to ELT AS PROFESSION was realised primarily through corpus identification of pronoun ‘it’ referencing the organisation, and cluster ‘you have to’. As with ELT Ireland, ‘we’ and ‘they’ pronoun use revealed greater ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomising, not only between ELT teachers and school operators, but ELT teachers and state-sector teachers, elected representatives, and other ELT teachers. ‘Have to’ determined what kinds of obligatory references emerged in ‘we’ and ‘they’ combinations, which this final section now explores.

Two experienced, male **Participants 5** and **6** in **Focus Group 3**, aged 37 and 33, discuss lived experience of perceived, ELT school double-standards. Once again, ‘we’ and ‘they’ distinguish ELT teachers from school operators, repeated use of ‘you know’ relating common-sense knowledge of such affairs:

### **Extract 6.33**

**FG3-5:** ...workers’ rights would be important to me...and, **WE HAVE NO WORKERS’ RIGHTS** ...**we** have no workers’ rights, you know? And **they** want us to

**FG3-6:** Yeah, **they** want you to be very professional in a, a very unprofessional...ahhh, do you know what I mean?

**FG3-5:** Well, **they** want you to be an employee, but **they** don’t want to be employers

This ‘we’ / ‘they’ division underscores need for teacher access to a professional body like ELT Ireland, stressed by **Participant 20 (Extract 6.31)** in Section 6.4. It concurs with her statement that “to make people FEEL like professionals, you have to GIVE THEM SOMETHING PROFESSIONAL to relate to”. It also broaches issues of poor business practice and models, emphasised with shared knowledge ‘do you know what I mean?’, and overlaps with establishment of a second organisation dedicated to professionalising Irish-based ELT: UNITE ELT Branch. Need for a dedicated workers’ union in the Irish ELT profession is demonstrated in **Focus Group 6**, where the first pandemic lockdown threw ELT AS PROFESSION into question for **Participants 11 and 12**. Two females in their forties, they discussed the government, ‘they’, and the decision to grant ELT teachers, a collective ‘we’, the €350 Pandemic Unemployment Payment as furloughed workers from 13 March, 2020:

### **Extract 6.34**

**FG6-11:** there’s NO REGULATION...NO SUPPORT....ehm...(2 sec pause)... soo even though **WE ARE PROFESSIONALS** in the job (**FG6-12:** yeah)..it’s, **we** give so much and there’s, **WE GET NOTHING BACK**

**FG6-12:** we get nothing back yeah yeah yeah ... I suppose **we** could (**FG6-11:** yeah) ...be thankful that this time **we** were...recognised (**FG6-11: they've** given us, yeah yeah) that **they** DID give it to us THIS TIME

Shift to a collective 'we' in this exchange is reflective of prevailing, pandemic 'We're All In This Together' narratives in public addresses. **Participant 12** touches upon historic lack of clarity, more so willingness, of any one regulatory body or government department to oversee development and implementation of workplace legislation in all Irish-based, privately-run ELT schools (Sections 1.2 and 1.4). There is also a suggestion of luck and government benevolence dictating granting of this payment, or chance presiding over legislative protection, detailed further in Chapter 7.

Teacher non-compliance, when professionalism is viewed as compromised, sees a 'he who shouts loudest' scenario in this exchange between male **Participants 5** and **6** against perceived, unreasonable, and unpaid management demands:

### **Extract 6.35**

**FG3-5:** **they** wanted us to do lots of stuff that **we** weren't getting' paid for and I FLAT OUT REFUSED (**Researcher:** ok) and then **we** got, **we** were allowed not to do it .....ah...ahm...I was just like

**FG3-6:** **you gotta** speak up on common sense sometimes, like, 'Well, I'm not!'

**Extract 6.35** demonstrates how, by using one's voice, ELT AS PROFESSION is secured. Yet irritation of need to do so is evident in 'you gotta' (Koester 2006, p. 132), being obliged to defend oneself against perceived exploitation, the 'common sense' **Participant 6** alludes to. The focus group approach aimed to give similar voice to ELT teacher participants in this study, investigate key political economy constructs such as precarity, and outline current focus on 'narrative turn' in humanities research through exploration of life stories (Clandinin 2007; Block 2017, p. 55). One such instance was how **Participants 9** and **10** evaluated how so many teachers are deliberately dissuaded from union membership by school employers. The pronoun 'it' references membership, with repeated use of keyword 'union':

### Extract 6.36

**FG5-10:** ...it's very hard to put [sic] for people with the, any trade unions (**FG5-9:** mmhuh) again as you said if it's government...you know (**FG5-9:** yeah) you forced to almost join a union...if it's private colleges you're almost forced not to!

**Researcher:** You're actively discouraged?

**FG5-10:** yes! Exactly!

The reality of union membership as a given in the state sector is underscored with 'you know'. They elaborate, 'we' and 'they' distinguishing this time between ELT practitioners, 'we' and state-sector teachers, 'they' in the same extract:

**FG5-9:** but I think **we we've**, ah this is the issue isn't it? Nobody speaks for us. Nobody (**FG5-10:** no) and **we** do, you can see even to this day, how....what the, the secondary school and the primary school teachers how far **they** have advanced (**FG5-10:** mm) but you know **they have to** fight for everything and my God they have one of the most militant unions in the country!...you know...can you imagine...but, it's so hard to get teachers to join unions and say 'Yes! **We** need somebody behind us!' With force, you know and a bit of [gesticulates with upward hand movement]

As the kind of "valuable tool" metaphorical imagery offers teachers to be "a powerful - perhaps the most powerful - force for change" (Thornbury 1991b, p. 197), **Participant 9** employs an ARGUMENT IS WAR root analogy (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Goatly 1997, pp. 48-49). For her, the sentiment encompasses all in the teaching profession. Obligation, 'have to', extends to 'fight for everything', 'militant' and 'force', using paralinguistic, upward hand gesture indicative of GOOD IS UPWARD MOTION, and how union membership empowers. Nonetheless, 'they' in this instance references public-sector teachers, 'you know' the shared-knowledge reality of the power that union membership affords them. Explaining real need for full unionisation of private-sector ELT, she switches to 'we' to address issues of consistently poor work practice.

Perceived lack of a designated union as the root cause of subsistence-level, ELT remuneration is reiterated in **Focus Group 11. Participants 19 and 20** evaluate, through ‘you know’, what has prevented Irish-based ELT evolving into a legitimate profession. They repeat reference to the keyword ‘union’:

### **Extract 6.37**

**FG11-20:** THIS has been, ONGOING, forrr.....I, I’d say AT LEAST, eight years? This discussion and, eight, like, can you imagine any industry, which has....like **we** have so, **we** have basically NO **union** representation, apart from UNITE ELT, who only formed in the last, what, three years?

**FG11-19:** three or four I think, yeah, yeah, yeah

**FG11-20:** [names two people] formed that...like, when I tried, like, I’m a **union** person, like, my [family member], is, essentially works for [name of union], like my, my [other family member] was ahm a shop steward, like it’s it’s NOT THINKABLE for me NOT TO BE IN A **UNION**, I COULDN’T JOIN a **union**, you know?

Recurrence of negation with enforced intonation on ‘NOT THINKABLE’, ‘NOT TO BE IN A UNION’ and ‘I COULDN’T JOIN’ serves to express highly negative stance on what is essentially forbidden union membership imposed by school employers. **Participant 20** goes from collective use of ‘we’ to individual focus upon herself, ‘I’, and how lack of union access ran contrary to her family tradition. **Participant 20** then discloses, through lived experience of her managerial role in one school, low, hourly payrate. Collective action is expressed this time, ‘I’ switching back to ‘we’:

### **Extract 6.38**

**FG11-20:** the most I was ever on was, the lowest was €11, and...and th- well ok in this school **we** were actually told, because the teachers KEPT coming together and CHALLENGING IT and **we** were told, cos **we’re** like a core group, ahm, it was a relatively small school, **we** were told, ‘If the school pays any of you MORE,

the school will not have enough money to operate and you'll ALL LOSE YOUR JOBS'

Modality demonstrated in a First Conditional structure (if + [present simple], [will]) characterises cause and effect process metaphor in policy language, “officially in the subjunctive in order to regulate behaviour across large stretches of institutional time and space” (Graham 2001, p. 769). Subjunctive structures express hypothetical situations (wishes, opinions, emotions, or possibilities). While a hypothetical sentiment normally presents as a Second Conditional (if + [past simple], [would] e.g., ‘If I won the lottery, I would buy a new house’) a predictive First Conditional expresses greater probability and outcome. With lack of a human actor, ‘the school’ becomes the agent taking the decision to underpay. Žižek (1989, p. 26) observes how cynicism and ideology intersect: “one knows the falsehood very well...a particular interest hidden behind an ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it”. Previous extracts in this section have suggested absence of voice through lack of union representation. In contrast, **Participant 20** and her teaching staff, ‘we’, demonstrated decisive and collective denouncement of excuses offered as management justification for underpayment. She continues, a dichotomising ‘we’ and ‘they’, evaluating what school operators obliged of her as DoS:

### **Extract 6.39**

**FG11-20:** something that I have heard in SO MANY SCHOOLS...and that I have BEEN TOLD TO TELL TEACHERS, ‘No, the owner drives a Jaguar, but we can’t pay you 50 cent more because then the WHOLE INDUSTRY will COLLAPSE.’....yeah, yeah who, who believed...HOW STUPID do **they** think we are?

A well-established feature of emotive language is its tendency to be dominated by highly-figurative, metaphorical expressions (Kövecses 2008, p. 380). In her ‘we’ / ‘they’ distinction, **Participant 20** alludes to the COMPLEX SYSTEM AS A BUILDING metaphor, in which ELT AS BUILDING demonstrates the features of instability mentioned in Section 6.2 (**Extract 6.5**), a state perpetuated by school operators, which she was compelled to uphold. In contrast, her current, third-level teacher trainer position casts her in a more supportive role for ELT trainees. This mirrors Marchant’s (1992, p. 43) findings on attitude differences in practices influenced by gender, grade-level and years of teaching experience; caregiving was preferred by longer-established teachers, probably due to their greater likelihood of being parents themselves:

#### **Extract 6.40**

**FG11-20:** ...I'm trying to integrate as much as I can, and things about join a **union**, and I tell them which **union** to join, bec- you know 'cos in a university **we're** allowed do stuff like that, cos **we're** academics and **we** have, **we** have academic freedom... something that I'm trying to do is automa- like, as early as I can, instil that notion...It's your workplace...and you should be valued in the same way that you would in ANY OTHER WORKPLACE IN THE WORLD

Evident is strong evaluation, prefaced by explicit 'and I'm saying', of distinctions between the standards of professionalism that third-level practitioners, 'we', can enjoy, and how private-sector ELT falls so short of this. **Participant 20** outlines a sense of duty, as a third-level-course provider, to raise trainee awareness of professional self-worth as future teacher-workers, and stresses the importance of union membership in this process, with repetition of the item 'union'. This hypothetically aligns ELT trainees with state-sector teachers, 'you know' alluding to the normalisation of union membership for such professionals.

In Ireland, no statutory system exists for union membership recognition, or representation. Under a 1946 Supreme Court decision, employees have a constitutional right to union membership, yet private-sector employers have an equal right to disregard that union (Citizens Information 2021). It is the only western European, EU member state not to have binding, collective-bargaining legislation (Roethig 2020), meaning such access "remains in large part in the gift of employers" (Geary and Belizon 2021, p. 6). **Participant 21** in **Focus Group 12**, a 44-year-old male union member and activist, evaluates repercussions of such anomaly through lived experience of a sudden school closure, compromising ELT AS PROFESSION. Repeated reference to keyword 'union' also sees collective 'we' referencing teachers, 'they', elected representatives:

#### **Extract 6.41**

**FG12-21:** there was NOTHING set up...go to politicians, politicians'd say, 'Go to your **UNIONS**', **we'd** say, "If **we're** IN a **union**, **we** LOSE our JOBS", **they'd** say 'That's RIDICULOUS, you have a CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT to **UNION** MEMBERSHIP

In other words, representation through a union in the Irish-based, private sector depends very much on employer benevolence, expressed in a factual, Zero Conditional [If + Present Simple, Present Simple] sentence structure: ‘If we’re in a union, we lose our jobs’. Highest concentrations of union membership remain in the public sector where, regardless, a 19% decline in collective bargaining coverage has been noted over the past eighteen years (Geary and Belizon 2021, p. 4). This may explain Ireland’s below-EU-average union membership levels, especially among small-to-medium sized enterprises (Gazzola 2023), where many ELT schools reside. Telling in this extract is the disconnect between the perception held by public representatives that union membership is constitutionally enshrined for all workers, and the reality for many ELT teachers, dismissed in intoned ‘RIDICULOUS’. **Participant 21** evaluates short-sighted business models of school operators, ‘they’, with an overdependence on one student demographic, compromising ELT, ‘it’, through school closures in 2014-15 (Section 1.4):

#### **Extract 6.42**

**FG12-21:** you know the kind of type of PYRAMID SCHEME ...for a lot of schools where **they** would take in students, but **they** wouldn’t have the money to actually pay..... **I have to** say...I think that **it** was POORLY MANAGED...and **it** was SHORT-SIGHTED and **it** was people who, weren’t really, **they**, a lot of times **they** were just INCOMPETENT...uh, one of the things that we found with English language, school owners is that...**they** couldn’t manage to sustain, a business, in..(1.5 sec)...in any other form, they tried other businesses but this was a CASH, CASH business, **it** was UPFRONT, BIG CASH upfront (Researcher: [quietly] ok) very much a CAR DEALERSHIP

Novel metaphors have power to create new realities (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, pp.145-156). **Participant 21’s** derisive ELT AS PYRAMID SCHEME is a novel take on the “persuasive and persistent” yet reductive LANGUAGE AS COMMODITY metaphor so dominating the ELT industry (Thornbury 1991b, p. 194). ‘Have to’ expresses compulsion to deliver a direct, yet balanced evaluation of how ELT, ‘it’, was run by many school operators, ‘they’. ‘A lot of’ (Section 4.5.2.2) demonstrates this is not an isolated incident, underlining urgent need for recognition of a dedicated ELT union. ELT AS CAR DEALERSHIP extends ELT AS PYRAMID SCHEME. **Participant 21** aims for fair-mindedness in his evaluation; nonetheless, he is perfectly clear in his stance of ELT AS BUSINESS and certain proven, unsustainable models. Equally clear is who becomes disempowered by

such business incompetence, a collective ‘we’ underlining worst-case-scenario need for unionisation:

### **Extract 6.43**

**FG12-21:** ALL RISK...is...is OFF-SHORED, onto TEACHERS’ LIVES, uh in English-language teaching, as an industry, in Ireland, risk is OFF-SHORED, it’s, y’know, PUT ONTO TEACHERS, so **WE TAKE THE RISK**, the business owners have a steady percentage that always comes in, and if numbers drop...the people who take the losses are working-class teachers that’s, that’s **ALWAYS** the way it’s gonna be unless **we CHANGE** that

Words of direction and movement metaphorically denote economically related situations, companies, and success rates (Deignan 1995, p. 201). They also indicate people’s life progressions, denoting **ACTIVITY/PROCESS = MOVEMENT** whereby “abstract concepts arise from our preconceptual physical experience as infants” (Goatly 1997, p. 49); when babies become mobile, they move toward objects, the metaphorical prototype for purposeful and successful action (ibid, p. 56). Extended to business, **ACTIVITY = VOYAGE** specifically creates an **ORGANIZATION = SHIP** analogy, with ‘onboard’ degrees of power and activity expressed in terms like ‘captains of industry’, ‘run a tight ship’, and a company ‘launched’. However, it also references business disaster, ‘going under’ (Goatly 1997, p. 62), or ‘going down’ alluding to a sinking ship. This is examined in Chapter 7.

Verbalising the nautical location ‘off-shore’, **Participant 21** consciously specifies business. Used adjectivally or adverbially (e.g., an ‘offshore fund/investment’, ‘to locate an account/bank offshore’), it depicts island-based, corporate operations which benefit from tax perspectives (Cambridge University Press 2022a). The lesser-used verb ‘to offshore’ serves a material process of doing or happening (Goatly 1997, p. 87), “to base a business or part of it in a different country, usually because this is cheaper” (Cambridge University Press 2022a). **Participant 21** adapts novel, verbal, metaphorical use of ‘offshore’, to shift financial loss firmly away from the company as an entity, squarely onto the shoulders and salaries of employees. This empowers ELT operators, but disempowers teacher-workers, gaining fiscal advantage solely for the school. It does not regard teachers as equitable stakeholders, eliminates voice, and epitomizes how such disregard “gives the green light to corporations to treat the interests of the workers they rely on as an afterthought” (Roethig 2020). The phrase ‘unless we **CHANGE** that’

underscores solidarity, and justifies trade union existence for **Participant 21** which should not, in his evaluation, be disregarded by employers, their anomalous yet constitutional right under Irish law.

The survey outlined impact of low, non-incremental pay correlating with **Participant 21's** explicit descriptions of precarity. Of sixty-two responses to the statement *I have a mortgage*, fewer than 17% recorded 'yes'. Nearly 84% surveyed did not own their own home. Almost 60% lived in rented accommodation, 21 respondents sharing with people who were not relatives; only eight lived with family members. Similar research revealed nearly 80% of surveyed ELT teachers found or assumed to be renting, two and a half times higher than the general population (Unite ELT Branch 2020a, p. 5; Central Statistics Office 2016). This has direct links to precarious work circumstances (Pembroke 2018, p. 10). The exorbitant Dublin housing market, and that the majority of respondents were from Dublin-based schools (Section 4.1) more than likely influenced survey results. It nevertheless raises concern in terms of proven correlations between precarity, and preclusion from having either a permanent address, or home ownership access (Pembroke 2018, pp. 80-81).

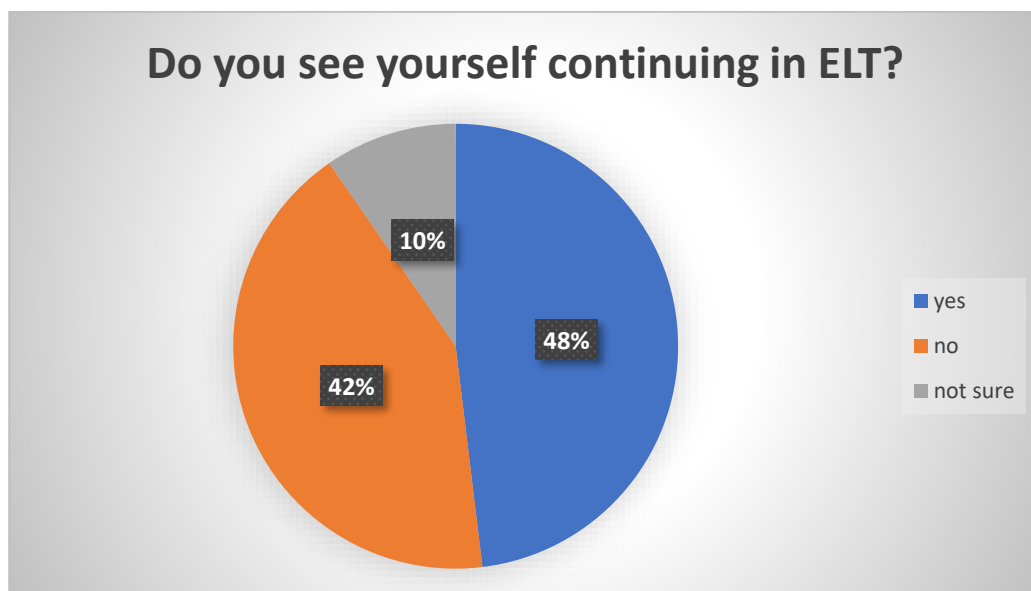
Irrespective, **Participant 21** notes that teachers can be their own worst enemies, their personality types unwittingly maintaining the status quo. 'Have to' and its synonymous 'need to' calls for change of teacher mindset:

#### **Extract 6.44**

**FG12-21:** ....**we have to** have a discussion with the people who, who make the contracts, and um and do the deals, ahnd..(1 sec)...you don't get to do that unless you, unless you can influence things, you **NEED to**...you **need to HAVE POWER**, you **need to** have power in the profession and teachers want to build...**they** ALWAYS want to build ahmm...AWAY from power, **they** DON'T wanna create the conflict, **they** see conflicts coming a MILE AWAY, and **they** know EXACTLY how to, DEFUSE those and move away from them.....but if, if it's DESTRUCTIVE for e-EVERYBODY participating, EXCEPT for the authority figures....it's um, I think it's destructive for, our profession, ahm, because there won't BE a profession if **we** continue to adhere to the current authority as it's structured, it doesn't, it doesn't WORK, it's not INCLUSIVE, it's not realistic, it's not sustainable, and that's why people LEAVE, you know?

Construction references metaphorically embody developing relationships or careers until they are successful. Phrasal verbs like ‘build on’ and ‘build up’ generally convey positive meaning (Deignan 1995, p. 55). The prevalent BUILDING domain in metaphor theory extends to teaching (Martinez *et al.* 2001, p. 971). Learning is likened to setting bricks of a house, a constructivist view based on Vygotsky’s sociocultural ‘scaffolding’ theory (Thornbury 2006, pp. 206-207). Teachers visualised as bricklayers (Provenzo *et al.* 1989), architects, and engineers focuses on teaching as a professional craft and science (Pollard 2019, pp. 12-13). **Participant 21** negatively rationalises ELT teacher power aversion, in a divisive ‘we’ for pro-union teachers who wish to challenge the ELT status quo, and ‘they’ for those who do not. ‘Build away’ illustrates diametrical opposition if it involves confrontation, consistent with avoidance of “outright conflict” in other workplace-related studies (Holmes and Stubbe 2003, p. 137). This fact compromises ELT AS PROFESSION.

The concluding phrase of **Extract 6.44**, a common-sense reality reinforced with ‘you know’, correlates with survey responses. Of fifty-two replies to *What are your longer-term career plans? Do you see yourself continuing in ELT?* Figure 6.6 illustrates an almost fifty-fifty split, 48% seeing it a viable, longer-term, career option, 42% who simply did not, with 10% unsure.



**Figure 6.6: Breakdown of responses to whether teachers saw themselves remaining in ELT or viewed it as a viable long-term option.**

Notable was the less positive nature of these responses than ones given to *Why did you decide to work in ELT?* in Chapter 5, even among many who wanted to remain in the

field: they would only do so if sector conditions improved. These results must be viewed against the backdrop of two pandemic surveys conducted by Unite ELT Branch (2020a; 2020b), whereby 90% of respondents expressed deep worry about the future of the Irish-based sector. In addition, 96% of their 149 respondents stressed need for direct teacher representation on the government's 'inter-agency, inter-departmental Working Group for the English Language Education Sector (Unite ELT Branch 2020b, p. 5). Unite ELT Branch believe this may go some way to addressing concerns about teachers being treated as "an expendable, elastic workforce" (2020b, p. 5), and disregarded as sector stakeholders by employers, employer representative bodies and government alike (ibid, p. 12), despite quantifiable professionalism (Sections 2.4 and 5.3.3).

Wright believes power, or lack of, "implicit in any social role" (1987, p. 16). For **Participant 21**, the establishment and continuation of UNITE ELT Branch is a step toward teacher empowerment. He describes his involvement as part of a self-mobilised, teacher-driven network in setting the union up beyond institution boundaries, 'the walls of the school':

#### **Extract 6.45**

**FG12-21:** it was very GOOD to sit down with people...outside the influence of, you know, outside the, the walls of the school, and discuss the problems, not discuss you know, how **we're** gonna make a new coursebook or how **we're** gonna make a million bucks but discuss the stuff that we never got to talk about...that's the core of people that will, I think, uh, be around to **KEEP** the **union** going, and will, ultimately...make the positive... **IMPACT** that English-language teachers need on the profession to make **it**, um a profession in.....in **LAW**, and in the society, not just in, our, **IMAGINATIONS**, and in our, you know, our **MORAL IMAGINATION** that [in funny, self-important, exaggerated voice] "Yeah, what I do is good and, and **it's** a **REAL JOB!**" [returns to normal voice]...that's **GOOD** but it's **gotta** be there in **LAW**

**Participant 21's** 'you know' alludes to "the four-headed hydra" of ELT: packaged English-language classes, ELT teacher training courses, examinations, and coursebook publications, arguably "driven more by commercial interests than by education

principles” (Jordan and Long 2022, p. 236). Equally, ‘you know’ emphasises how pertinent issues impacting teachers’ everyday lives cannot be broached within school premises (see Section 4.2.3). The necessity for ELT, ‘it’, to be regulated, ‘gotta be there in law’ is highlighted in how teacher activism and union representation proved successful in a UK Supreme Court decision to award higher holiday-pay rates to both those on zero-hour contracts, and summer teachers paid lower rates than year-round colleagues (Butler 2023). For **Participant 21**, mobilisation and collective ‘we’ action tackles real issues impacting teachers’ professional lives over profit. Unionisation results in a sector with legal recognition, on a par with other professions.

Urgent need for legislation supports Wright’s claim that while the position of ‘teacher’ holds certain status, this has to be “won” in social settings (1987, pp. 12-13), explored at length in Chapter 8. **Participant 21** demonstrates solidarity building and humour through use of ‘our’, yet frustration is tangible in the stress he places on ‘it’s gotta be there in LAW’. When asked which direction he would like to see the sector take, he emphasises need for democratic structures inclusive of teacher representation at the aforementioned Working Group for English Language Education, set up for MEI to engage with government in response to the pandemic, but exclusive of direct teacher input. Pressed on this state of affairs, **Participant 21** makes it clear; this is ultimately disempowering through creation of an unjust, novel TEACHER AS ENEMY OF THE STATE created by policymakers, ‘they’:

#### **Extract 6.46**

**FG12-21:** the identity of a teacher as an ADULT, an English-language teacher as an ADULT and as a CITIZEN, as a CONTRIBUTOR to the industry, um, THAT’S BEING SUPPRESSED....with AS MUCH ENERGY AS POSSIBLE, BY THE STATE ITSELF...um and it’s very clear and very helpful that **they’re** EXCLUDING teachers...because you can MAKE THAT ARGUMENT to people and say, “You ARE excluded....you are actually, you’re not you’re not INVISIBLE, you’re actually....you’re the ENEMY...for the state”, **they** don’t want ya’ to be in there.....the state is taking its lead EXCLUSIVELY from businesspeople, this also illustrates the, you know, the philosophy of...of the state at the moment which is ‘If there is money to be made from it, let business leaders um tell you what to do’

This is **Participant 21's** first direct reference to 'industry' and ELT AS BUSINESS. He uses the same term, 'suppress' as did **Participant 20** when she referenced school operators diminishing ELT AS PROFESSION (Section 6.4, Extract 6.32). This time, the state itself causes suppression of ELT AS PROFESSION, through exclusion of teachers at Working Group talks. While 'we' has power to create "an element of solidarity and collective effort", pronouns can also, paradoxically, mark higher status and position (Wright 1987, p. 14). The Working Group 'we' is exclusive of teachers, scapegoated and othered by 'you' in **Participant 21's** evaluation. However, he contradicts **Participant 20's** earlier observations of teacher invisibility (Section 6.4, Extract 6.30). TEACHER AS ENEMY OF THE STATE, ironically, holds higher status than TEACHER AS INVISIBLE; at least one's physical existence is acknowledged through the former. An unhealthy alliance perceived between school operators and government, referenced in his 'they' use, disfavours teachers, creating this dysfunctional analogy.

In 2019, Ireland registered the highest EU growth in gross domestic product for the third consecutive year. Ireland also has the fifth highest number of billionaires per capita on earth (Roethig 2020). Unequal wealth distribution nonetheless prevails, driven primarily by "active suppression" of wages and work conditions (ibid). **Participant 21** echoes Gray and Block's (2012, pp. 121-122) observations of neoliberal, ideological impact upon education. Within ELT specifically, this means "quality" (in delivering the commodified language product) is gauged "through the blinkers of quantity" (how much profit can be made). It highlights the problematic, "profoundly contradictory and dualistic" nature of the neoliberal project (Gordon and Whitty 1997, p. 45), an ostensibly rationalised system leading paradoxically to education "inefficiency, unpredictability, incalculability and loss of control" (Ritzer 1999, p. 93). For **Participant 21**, lack of access to union membership is what intensifies fallout for teachers, and diminishes their professional standing in Irish ELT:

#### **Extract 6.47**

**FG12-21:** there's only I think maybe three different schools in Ireland out of the hundred different schools that operate year-round, that have recognition agreements with our trade **union**...and that's, that's a REALLY BAD reputation [laughs wryly]

The revelation of so few schools nationwide opting to recognise the ELT Branch of UNITE, indicated in keyword ‘union’, is indicative of lack of legal compulsion to do so (Roethig 2020). **Participant 21** suggests Ireland’s stance in this regard needs reviewing if teachers are to become truly empowered within the private ELT sector, and the sector itself considered a true profession. This concurs with EU calls urging the Irish government to “redress the power imbalance between workers and multinational corporations”, and for direct EU intervention to ensure Ireland officially addresses “its woeful track record on collective bargaining” (Roethig 2020).

To conclude this section, as a panacea to precarity and its impact on ELT AS PROFESSION, **Participant 19** in **Focus Group 11** suggests similar government intervention, referenced by ‘they’, and the phrasal verb ‘take over’, with decentralised, state-run schools established outside the greater Dublin area, ‘it’ referencing ELT:

#### **Extract 6.48**

**FG11-19:** They’re gonna have to rebuild **it** anyway after COVID, ah, so let’s, why not rebuild **it** like, you look at at...y’know, potential venues for ah y- I, I taking **it** out of Dublin... And **we**, here **we** are BRINGIN’ all this money and yet...the teachers...ahm, are treated so badly! And ahm **they’ve GOT to**...try and, y’know, make it a HEALTHIER situation...**they** can’t....expect all these people to come and spend money here without looking after the the people who are providing **it**

He concludes with a proviso, embodied in a health-related metaphor, and ‘we’ and ‘they’ distinction. **Participant 19** stresses responsibility and an obligation on government, ‘they’, to both teachers, ‘we’, and students, in regulating Irish ELT. Despite optimism of robust, future, Irish-based ELT, frustration is evident through application of ‘GOT to’, underlining urgency in his belief that government obligation towards complete sector overhaul is the only perceived way forward. It is perhaps fitting that health should be a literal, and metaphorical, post-pandemic sector focus, as a final perception in themes that emerged from this cohort on ELT AS PROFESSION.

## **6.6 Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter has centred its investigation around the primary theme *ELT AS PROFESSION*, to off-set *ELT AS BUSINESS*. Focus on keywords ‘ELT’, ‘profession’, ‘CPD’ and ‘union’ saw subthemes of CPD and CPD-related feedback, *ELT Ireland* and *UNITE ELT Branch* investigated for the roles they played in contributing to *ELT AS PROFESSION*. Taylor (2022, p. 608) stresses the “added value” corpus investigation brings to analysis through data triangulation, where intertextuality and unexpected findings enable observation of “power relationships and the ability to investigate topics which impact our society”, complementing CTA application. This chapter demonstrated how, through pronoun keyword ‘I’, pronouns ‘you’, ‘it’, ‘we’ and ‘they’ and combinations with deontic cluster ‘have to’, sector obligations of participants, and power differentials were identified. This was analysed through the synergy of the study’s CL, CTA and Metaphor Analysis, outlined in Section 6.1.

Despite misgivings on the status of *ELT AS PROFESSION*, teachers demonstrated high commitment to CPD in survey responses (Section 6.3.1), yet questioned its validity in the focus groups, particularly it was felt foisted upon them. Lack of remuneration for CPD participation diminished *ELT AS PROFESSION*, and made teachers question *ELT AS PROFESSION* in its current incarnation where CPD was concerned. This again tallied with survey findings.

The dual role played by feedback in empowering and disempowering teachers (Copland and Donaghue 2019) emerged as a CPD-tied subtheme (Section 6.3.2). When feedback was positive and used constructively, it was encouraging and empowering, yet negative feedback had potentially precarious repercussions, encapsulating and serving *ELT AS BUSINESS*. The establishment of *ELT Ireland* and *UNITE ELT Branch* (Sections 6.4 and 6.5) were seen as attempts to emulate *ELT AS PROFESSION*, and redress *ELT AS BUSINESS*. While construction metaphors generally represent strength and creativity, teachers themselves were observed to be ‘building away’ from empowerment through their own opposition to conflict with school employers, contributing to self-disempowerment.

Positive attributes of *ELT AS PROFESSION* were expressed in metaphorical allusions to *ELT AS KEY/WINDOW INTO THE WORLD*, but *ELT AS PYRAMID SCHEME* and *ELT AS CAR DEALERSHIP* countered this, highlighting short-sighted, precarity-instigating business models which contradicted *COMPLEX SYSTEMS AS BUILDINGS* references portraying stability, a consequence of ongoing sector deregulation examined thoroughly in Chapter

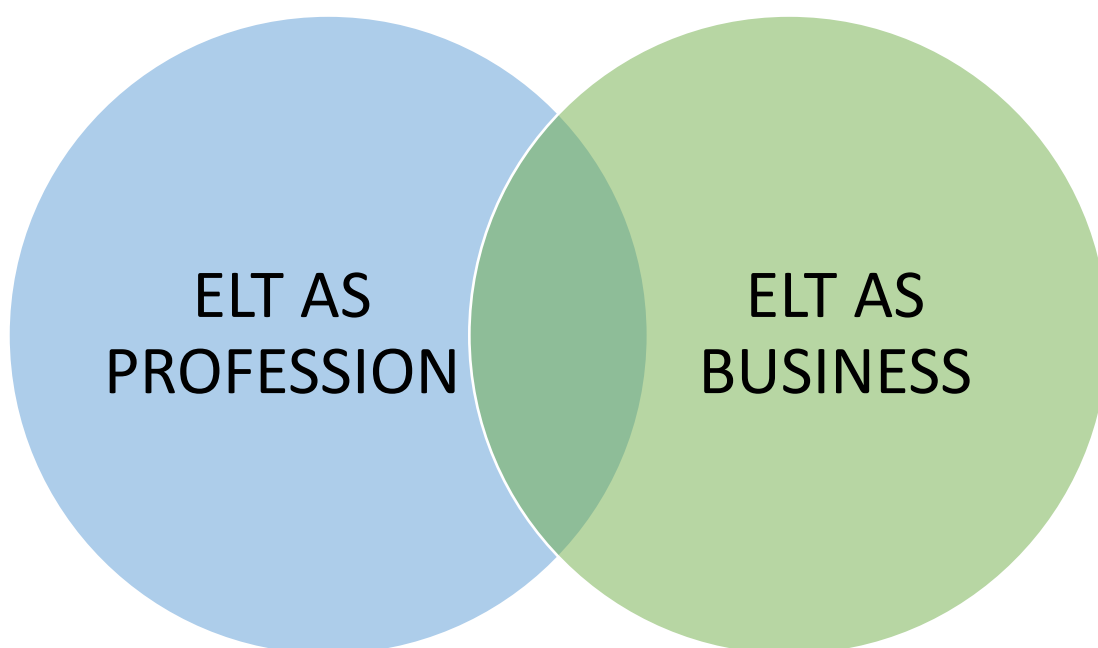
7. ELT Ireland, and UNITE ELT Branch have contributed to an emerging, empowering TEACHER AS ACTIVIST role to challenge the disempowering TEACHER AS INVISIBLE NON-ENTITY held historically, in many cases self-perpetuated by schools. Voice through activism furthered ELT AS PROFESSION, with awareness-raising of work conditions on teacher-trainer courses reflecting Gray and Block's strong recommendation that political economy be "given due consideration" in teacher education to prevent "an apolitical view of teaching" among novices (2012, pp. 142-143). Discouragement of union membership, whilst perfectly legal, has perpetuated a disempowering TEACHER AS SERVICE PROVIDER role (Gray and Block 2012) for these Irish ELT teachers at best, explored in Chapter 7, and TEACHER AS ENEMY OF THE STATE at worst, deliberately excluded from policy-shaping dialogue. In both scenarios, ELT AS BUSINESS dominated, and cancelled out, attempts by teachers to emulate ELT AS PROFESSION in this cohort, irrespective of age, gender or years of teaching experience.

This completes analysis of ELT AS PROFESSION, and exploration of related subthemes and metaphors. Having addressed the three research questions in relation to this primary theme, Chapter 7 next explores the contentious theme of ELT AS BUSINESS.

## Chapter 7 Analysis of Data Theme 3: ELT AS BUSINESS

### 7.0 Introduction

This chapter is the second exploring descriptions and evaluations of the ELT sector, as perceived by study participants, in literal and metaphorical terms. Social context and pragmatic theory divide human activity into different social spaces and institutions, with well-defined concepts of activities that occur within their parameters (Fairclough 1989, p. 146; Goatly 1997, pp. 287-309). For teachers in this study, their social spaces include buildings institutionalized as privately-run, ELT schools in the Republic of Ireland, within which distinct discourses operate (e.g., in interactions with students in a classroom, through discussions with colleagues in the staffroom, or with management and school owners). As Chapter 6 themes demonstrated, tension can arise when business concerns of school owners or ELT stakeholders, and pedagogic concerns of teachers overlap or clash. This can make it challenging for teachers to completely isolate ELT AS PROFESSION from ELT AS BUSINESS (Figure 7.1).



**Figure 7.1: The primary theme of ELT AS BUSINESS explored in this chapter, off-setting ELT AS PROFESSION.**

Metaphors distinct from ELT AS PROFESSION emerged from the focus group interviews, proving that in construing ELT AS PATH (Chapter 5, 5.3), teachers “might employ different metaphorical figures at different times under different circumstances” (Munby 1986, p.

201). This underlined the imperative for devoting a separate chapter to the second, overarching theme of ELT AS BUSINESS. It dominated descriptive representations of participants' lived experiences of working in privately-run, Irish-based ELT schools. How this metamorphosed in participants' evaluations and emergent subthemes is explored in once again addressing the study research questions. Why, and how linguistic items were selected for investigation and analysis of ELT AS BUSINESS is now presented.

## 7.1 Language focus

The dominant position of keyword 'ELT', observed in Chapter 6 (see Table 7.1, highlighted pink) was this time explored in relation to business-related keywords: 'industry', 'contract', 'salary', 'wage', 'rate' and 'hourly' (highlighted yellow).

N	Keywords for SaFGELT with LCIE	Keywords for SaFGELT with C-MELT
1.	ELT	ELT
2.	staffroom	professional
3.	participant	participant
4.	CELTA	director
5.	English-language	industry
6.	sooo	profession
7.	prep	union
8.	COVID	online
9.	QQI	country
10.	ACELS	quietly
11.	CPD	city
12.	longer-term	world
13.	IELTS	staffroom
14.	online	sector
15.	long-term	support
16.	TESOL	friend
17.	PD	qualification
18.	hourly	live
19.	admin	Dublin
20.	PhD	social
21.	sooo	goin
22.	DoS	CELTA
23.	entrepreneurial	contract
24.	undergrad	studies
25.	ESOL	English-language
26.	yeaaah	fantastic
27.	attribute	secondary
28.	Sydney	wanna
29.	childcare	training
30.	lockdown	salary
31.	wifi	email
32.	DELTA	owner
33.	Colombia	during

34. inhouse	contact
35. MEI	member
36. something	attribute
37. salary	regard
38. Brazilian	PhD
39. director	COVID
40. profession	TEFL
41. patience	Australia
42. WhatsApp	indicate
43. ILEP	culture
44. Cambridge	sooo
45. teacher	QQI
46. studies	Korea
47. grammar	primary
48. theeee	wage
49. UAE	ACELS
50. Venezuela	rate

**Table 7.1: Top 50 keywords for the SaFGELT subcorpus, measured against LCIE and C-MELT as reference corpora, respectively.**

Although ‘business’ was an absent keyword, it surfaced on the nominal frequency list, as Table 7.2 illustrates. ‘Business’ (position 29) appears almost alongside references to ‘money’ (28) and ‘industry’ (31), meriting thematic investigation in terms of lexical recurrence (Owen 1984, pp. 275-276; Chapter 4, 4.4.1). Also, ‘time’ and related references ‘hour’, ‘day’, ‘week’, ‘year’, plus the presence of ‘job’ and ‘work’, suggested a potential metaphorical, temporal link to ‘business’, ‘money’ and ‘industry’.

Raw noun frequency of SaFGELT corpus		
1. teacher	2. school	3. people
4. thing	5. student	6. time
7. kind	8. laugh	9. year
10. language	11. lot	12. job
13. teaching	14. something	15. name
16. hour	17. class	18. week
19. way	20. bit	21. course
22. day	23. work	24. ELT
25.I	26. question	27. participant
28. money	29. business	30. director
31. industry	32. Ireland	33. profession

**Table 7.2: Top 33 nominal forms from SaFGELT corpus, as generated by Sketch Engine.**

Of key importance for this chapter was the presence of the green-highlighted keyword ‘entrepreneurial’ in Table 7.1 (position 23). It linked strongly to an emergent, teacher-identity subtheme of TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR, correlating with SaFGELT nominal frequency words ‘money’, ‘hour’ and ‘business’ (Table 7.2), and is detailed in Section

7.6. Exploration of ELT AS BUSINESS, related sub-themes and metaphors was again conducted through corpus-assisted identification of subject pronouns (see Table 7.3).

	SaFGELT	C-MELT	LCIE
<i>I</i>	2,954	1,828	3,039
<i>you</i>	2,130	1,341	2,651
<i>it</i>	1,830	1,165	2,404
<i>they</i>	819	1,107	968
<i>we</i>	538	1,000	776

**Table 7.3: The frequency of occurrence of personal pronouns I, you, it, they and we across three corpora, SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE (normalised per 100,000 words).**

Similar to Chapter 6, the pronoun ‘it’ references the ELT sector, but unlike the same chapter, ‘it’ also refers to an individual school workplace, and to matters of payment and money. While Chapter 6 themes exploring ELT AS PROFESSION included first person pronouns ‘I’, and ‘we’, the pronoun use in Chapter 7 shifts slightly. There is reduced presence of ‘we’ in this chapter’s ELT AS BUSINESS thematic investigation, and greater reference to ‘they’ for ELT stakeholders, principally school operators, students, and policy-makers such as local politicians. Added to this, the pronoun ‘you’, specifically in the combination ‘you know’, was striking in its presence in initial, CTA readings of many extracts. Lead placing of two-word cluster ‘you know’ (Table 7.4) confirmed this. Despite almost-level frequency occurrences of ‘you’ noted between SaFGELT and LCIE, ‘you’ appeared with one and a half times greater frequency in SaFGELT than C-MELT (Table 7.3). It was therefore important to determine contexts in which ‘you’ appeared. This was ultimately in the combination ‘you know’, indicating the extent to which participants observed and evaluated ‘common sense’ states of affairs (van Dijk 2006, p. 116; Chapter 3, 3.8.2) within Irish ELT work practices, and converged on understanding of how their lived experiences of work conditions impacted overall sector perceptions. Therefore, the cluster ‘you know’ is a significant focal item for thematic-related examination of ELT AS BUSINESS throughout this analysis chapter.

N	2-word n-grams for SaFGELT corpus	Frequency
1.	you know	1101
2.	and I	496
3.	I think	473
4.	I was	448
5.	in the	404
6.	don't	392
7.	it was	366

8. kind of	349
9. to be	318
10. of the	318
11. I do	288
12. if you	233
13. and then	226
14. a lot	211
15. so I	206

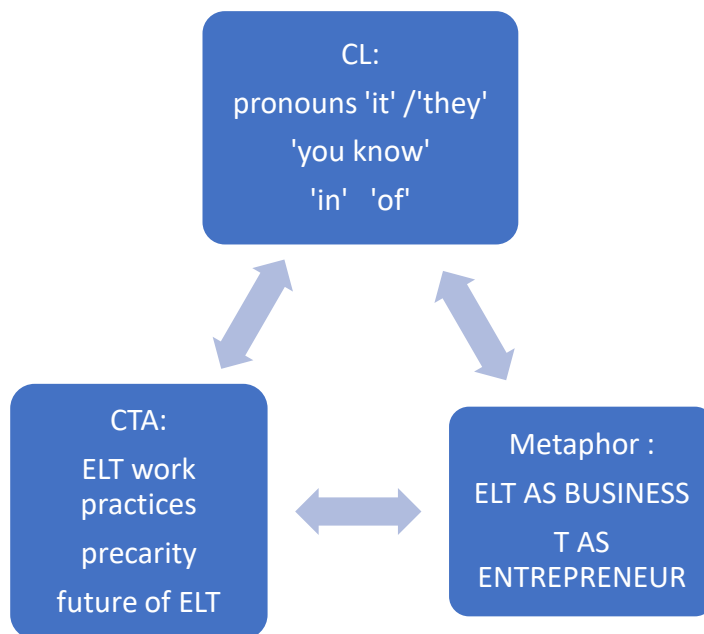
**Table 7.4: Two-word n-grams for SaFGELT illustrate dominant position of ‘you know’.**

Moreover, metaphorical references in idiomatic expressions containing prepositions ‘in’ and ‘of’ are examined, particularly with relation to subthemes of precarity, and substandard business practice. Highlighted in red in Table 7.5, for instance, are three-word clusters ‘at the end’ and ‘the end of’, which presented in the phrase ‘at the end of the day’.

N	SaFGELT	C-MELT	LCIE
1.	I don't	I don't	I don't
2.	a lot of	don't know	don't know
3.	don't know	I think that	I don't know
4.	and I was	I don't know	I didn't
5.	I think it	a lot of	a lot of
6.	I think that	I think it	isn't it
7.	do you know	a little bit	don't think
8.	you don't	at the end	I don't think
9.	at the moment	I think we	I can't
10.	one of the	I mean I	I wouldn't
11.	I don't know	don't think	you don't
12.	don't think	the end of	you know what
13.	I don't think	they have to	know what I
14.	it was a	don't have	going to be
15.	and I think	they don't	I think it
16.	I didn't	in terms of	you have to
17.	you have to	you have to	do you know
18.	English language teaching	kind of a	what I mean
19.	I was like	we don't	I think that
20.	Director of Studies	and I think	you want to

**Table 7.5: Comparative 3-word n-gram list for the three corpora SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE featuring ‘in’ and ‘of’ clusters.**

Other expressions explored in this chapter include ‘put all your eggs in one basket’, ‘bear the brunt of something’ and ‘make a hames of something’. Figure 7.2 illustrates how the corpus-assisted, CTA and Metaphor Analysis methodologies synergised in this chapter’s thematic ELT AS BUSINESS investigation.



**Figure 7.2: Synthesis of CL, CTA and Metaphor Analysis as the selected study methodologies in this chapter exploration of ELT AS BUSINESS.**

As in Chapter 6, the CTA methodology adhered to open- and closed-coding in reading of transcripts (Table 7.6). This again accounts for the presence of capitalised words within extracts throughout this chapter, indicating raised intonation of voice in delivery of participant experiences, and evaluations that were observed as forceful. However, there is omission of other transcription conventions (e.g., colour-coding) for ease of reading access.

Coding phase	Open-coding	Closed-coding
<b>Findings/interpretations</b>	What was repeated, recurrent and forceful in these interview transcriptions?	What ideologies, positions of power or status hierarchies are recurring, repeated and forceful?

**Table 7.6: Lawless and Chen’s (2019, p. 100) adaptation of Owen’s (1984) criteria for the CTA methodology of this chapter: ELT AS BUSINESS.**

Lastly, ELT AS BUSINESS off-setting and, more often than not, dominating ELT AS PROFESSION was found to consistently emerge from the same question set, adapted from

Johnston (1997) and Kennedy and Phillips (1989), which had been posed to all participants in Chapter 6 (Section 6.1):

**Question 2:** *What are your longer-term career plans? At what point in time as a teacher did you make that decision? Do you see yourself continuing in ELT? Are there opportunities to grow in ELT?*

**Question 3:** *Do you view ELT as a profession?*

This chapter analysis opens with its broad primary theme: ELT AS BUSINESS.

## **7.2 The theme of ELT AS BUSINESS**

That ‘business’ was absent from the SaFGELT keyword lists and ‘profession’ appeared on both (Table 7.1) could perhaps be interpreted as positive, in terms of teacher expression of sector description and evaluation. Nonetheless, ‘business’ presented in the SaFGELT nominal frequency-word list (Table 7.2, position 29) as did ‘industry’ (position 31), both in higher positions than ‘profession’ (33). This indicated business-related terminology, and ELT AS BUSINESS, influenced teacher perceptions. By introduction is the blurring between ELT AS PROFESSION and ELT AS BUSINESS evident in Figure 7.1, emerging in two separate focus groups, where the nominal-frequent ‘business’ in Table 7.2 prevails. In **Focus Group 3**, ELT is perceived invariably as enterprise by **Participant 6**:

### **Extract 7.1**

**FG3-6:** if you had...some money to invest, it’s a great way to turn that investment, if you were clever about it, into a more substantial amount of money, and, even if you step on a few toes to get there..... at the end of the day, they’re **BUSINESSES** so like it’s a **PRIVATE BUSINESS** each one, each and every one **IS** a **PRIVATE BUSINESS** with an owner and an investor and all that so, at the end of the day it’s they’re trying to **MAKE MONEY**, they’re tryin’ to pay the teachers, (FG3-5: yeah) it’s not in their interests a lot of the time to pay the teachers that much

This extract demonstrates clearly how, when asked to evaluate ELT AS PROFESSION, **Participant 6** leans heavily toward enterprise-like descriptions. His repetition of keyword ‘money’, along with enforcement on ‘MAKE MONEY’, and recurrence in lemmas ‘invest’, ‘investment’ and ‘investor’ reflects McWilliams’s sentiment (2024, p. 5): “Today, whether we like it or not, our entire world revolves around this strange, invented notion”. When all is said and done, ‘at the end of the day’, **Participant 6** suggests pursuit of an ELT school, money-making venture is potentially Machiavellian in a movement-related idiom, ‘step on a few toes’, implying upsetting people by encroaching upon their duties (Cambridge University Press 2024c). This is corroborated by **Participant 18** in **Focus Group 10**, a female with teaching and administrative experience:

### **Extract 7.2**

**FG10-18:** .....historically the English language teaching industry is **business**, it’s not education..(1 sec)..ahm, the first school that I worked in in Ireland, that was one of the first schools to close, it was opened by, a guy who was very well-known in the [non-education sector] world in Ireland, and who had the money to open a school, to open a **business**...not a school

It is clear from **Participant 18**’s evaluation that the primary motivation behind the establishment of this institution was, like the observation in **Extract 7.1**, one that was enterprise-driven. Despite efforts of ELT Ireland to elevate ELT AS PROFESSION publicly, and among teachers themselves (Chapter 6, 6.4), ELT AS BUSINESS consistently emerged in extracts. In such referencing, use of the pronoun ‘it’ dominated, now explored thematically.

#### 7.2.1 The pronoun ‘it’ to describe the theme of ELT AS BUSINESS

Reference to ELT was predominantly expressed through pronoun ‘it’, illustrated in Figure 7.3 collocations with ‘business’.

3	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 netimes I get like SO DISHEARTENED, it's like somebody literally..it's	it	's like a <b>business</b> that somebody started in their garage like you know
4	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 d about making a profit like if they're focused more on the <b>business</b>	it	's like 'but no, I actually love it, I wanna be, I wanna see the students
5	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 he day like I just feel like this industry is SO MUCH A <b>BUSINESS</b> like	IT	REALLY IS (3: mm) than like you could have a GREAT relationship bu
6	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 sssion? ..I DO, but..at the end of the day, they're <b>BUSINESSES</b> so like	it	's a PRIVATE BUSINESS each on each and every one IS a PRIVATE B
7	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 hool, I think they're doing their best for me, and I do still understand,	it	's a private <b>business</b> . (Deb: ok) like d'ya know they're tryin' to make r
8	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 u know?) and it's.. like he uses [Director of Studies] as like I can SEE	it	again from that <b>business</b> point of view where, he wants to be everyt
9	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 lo) they take in huge amount of money through their <b>business</b> (Deb:	it	's just another string to their bow basically as opposed to) it's just, y
10	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 oving them something to strive towards, and as new roles, like it's a,	it	's an EVOLVING <b>BUSINESS</b> as well (5: yeah) and it's been, it's, d'ya k
11	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 it's never the issue, is it?</s><s>It's how it's seen from the outside...	it	's a <b>business</b> ...and it's referred to as a business (10: it is) and I thin
12	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 it?</s><s>It's how it's seen from the outside...it's a <b>business</b> ....and	it	's referred to as a business (10: it is) and I think that puts us into a d
13	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 , the outside...it's a business...and it's referred to as a <b>business</b> (10:	it	is) and I think that puts us into a different, us as teachers, puts us in
14	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 e this is coming from (9: yes) because up until now (9: they just see	it	as a <b>business</b> ) they see it as a business, and they also see, I mean
15	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 s) because up until now (9: they just see it as a <b>business</b> ) they see	it	as a business, and they also see, I mean you know from the point of
16	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 said the door...to ah an investment, is not a <b>business</b> and economy,	it	's education, something like that he said (9: mmhuh) and it IS true bi
17	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 :ALLY!) ehmm (Deb: coming from banking!) I know sometimes when	it	's a <b>business</b> lesson...</s><s>I enjoy it, the students hate it...they.</
18	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 ing!) I know sometimes when it's a <b>business</b> lesson...</s><s>I enjoy	it	, the students hate it...they.</s><s>I find they turn off unless maybe
19	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 year, and then...in the bank, you just pick it up, because its uh, uh....	it	's <b>business</b> business, if you've meetings every week, you do a little b
20	<input type="checkbox"/> doc#0 ise they're getting' SO MUCH out of it (12:mmhuh, and that's it yeah,	IT	'S A <b>BUSINESS</b> ) it's so beneficial like 43:15.26 12: yeah, as you said

Figure 7.3: Concordance lines show 'it' referencing ELT AS BUSINESS.

Wider public recognition of the ELT sector, 'it', was stated in **Focus Group 3** by **Participant 5**, a 37-year-old male with fifteen years' teaching experience, through choice of the business-related term 'industry'. He nonetheless indicated lack of societal understanding on sectoral worth to the Irish exchequer:

### Extract 7.3

**FG3-5** ...I would say culturally, in Ireland, there's NOOO...acknowledgement of the fact that ...**it** is now probably close to a billion-euro **industry**

A novel ELT AS GARAGE BAND simile emerges in the following extract from **Focus Group 2**. **Participant 4** disparages the sector, 'it', hedged with 'like' and 'you know', suggesting a 'common sense' reality of what amounts to perceptions of its lack of professionalism:

### Extract 7.4

**FG2-4:** with this **industry** like sometimes I get like SO DISHEARTENED, **it's** like somebody literally...**it's it's** like a **business** that somebody started in their garage like you know, 'something we can make money out of'...**it** just like reminds me of a garage band or something you know, no-one really thought through...you know?

**Extracts 7.1 – 7.4** portray views which underline common-sense acceptance that privately-run schools in Ireland are, first and foremost, profit-making enterprises. Despite contributions of ELT Ireland and UNITE ELT Branch in building ELT AS PROFESSION, the ELT AS BUSINESS reality dominates all priorities, including pedagogy itself. This is made evident once more in the phrase ‘at the end of the day’ (Section 7.2), which resurfaces in the next extract. Strong, personal bonds with employers will not always ensure appreciation of teacher effort in pedagogical delivery, as observed in **Focus Group 2** by **Participant 4**, a 29-year-old female:

#### **Extract 7.5**

**FG2-4:** ...at the end of the day like I just feel like this **industry** is SO MUCH A **BUSINESS** like, **it** really is (FG2-3: mm) than like, you could have a GREAT relationship but like I think at the end of the day a lot of the time with ELT...this is completely in general but **it WILL COME DOWN TO MONEY** and not really the **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

Referencing of ‘industry’, ‘business’ and ‘money’ serve to reinforce enterprise prioritisation over pedagogical standards. Furthermore, for **Participant 18** in **Focus Group 10**, ELT AS PROFESSION and ELT AS BUSINESS are stated as indistinguishable, mirroring the overlap in Figures 6.1 and 7.1:

#### **Extract 7.6**

**FG10-18:** I mean **it’s** a €760 billion or-or million **industry** in Ireland, you can’t say that that’s not a profession

Whether hybrid or dichotomy, this duality is evident in sectoral worth. Reference to ‘industry’ and ELT economic value contrasts with the workplace reality of **Participants 7 and 8**, a couple with one child working at the same school, concerned about how deregulation causes lack of professionalism in Irish ELT, ‘it’:

### Extract 7.7

**FG4-7:** obviously **it's** a...it's not a fantastically....ehm....REGULATED or HELD TOGETHER **INDUSTRY** ...there's ah some of the issues with that, so...that's a CONCERN OBVIOUSLY...but ah I'd, happily, you know, teach English, the rest of my life if it was...ah...if **it's** financially viable for us as a family to do so

**FG4-8:** yeah, **it's** stressful that we don't have a lot of money, **it's** stressful that **it's** maybe not as secure as we would like

Wishing to remain in the sector, **Participant 7's** concerns are twice intensified using the highly affective stance adverb 'obviously' (Biber *et al.* 1999, p. 557), outlining the common-sense reality of the low payment that sector deregulation permits. Coupled with the evaluative adjective choice 'stressful' of his partner, **Extract 7.7** emphasises a disempowering reality consistent with responses later detailed in Sections 7.3-7.5. Their concerns reflect an identified "employment regime" of precarity, its roots in deregulated labour markets. Resultant, insecure work with minimal to no social protections (Walsh 2019, p. 460) has wider societal implications, "where people are trapped in uncertainty, floating and on stand-by, with all aspects of their lives...on hold" (Pembroke 2018, p. 4).

Not just simple overlap with ELT AS PROFESSION, but a full tilt towards ELT AS BUSINESS is evident thus far in these teachers' perceptions. Proof of economic inequity is offered in **Focus Group 1** by **Participant 1**, a 44-year-old female. The lived reality of poor Irish pay rates, equating low standards of professionalism, provides sharp contrast to her direct experience of ELT in Australia:

### Extract 7.8

**FG1-1:** **it's** an **industry** in Australia that's RESPECTED, when I worked in that school I was VALUED...I was paid extremely well, and everybody dressed professionally, the institution was a professional institution, and I felt very different to however I felt working in Ireland

In **Participant 1's** Australian ELT workplace experience, ELT AS BUSINESS, 'it', does not dominate, rather is perceived as congruous with ELT AS PROFESSION. Her descriptions of being treated as a professional, 'RESPECTED' and 'VALUED', evoke teacher themes of identity explored in Chapter 8.

Given the consistent evaluations of sector prioritisation of business revealed in Extracts 7.1-7.8, the theme of value and ELT teacher worth, through the subtheme of pay and work conditions in ELT AS BUSINESS, now receives investigation.

### **7.3 'It' and 'you know' in the subtheme of payment inconsistencies in ELT AS BUSINESS**

Pay and entitlements have been contentious Irish ELT issues, and were included in the survey to build upon limited, comparable data availability (Willoughby 2019, pp. 7-10; see Chapter 2, 2.1). Care must be taken while investigating "highly sensitive data", with findings communicated in a manner "considerate of the effects on the audience" (Taylor 2022, p. 609). This was an important consideration for this study throughout, assuming a readership of teachers who have perhaps themselves been impacted by precarity. It was in discussing such issues that 'you know' emerged repeatedly in descriptions of 'it', ELT.

Inconsistencies in hourly pay rates between schools and counties were highlighted by **Participant 15**, the sole interviewee in her online **Focus Group 8**. Her evaluation on return to Irish ELT after teaching abroad sees the COMPLEX SYSTEMS AS BUILDING metaphor observed in Chapter 6 resurface, in referencing instability:

#### **Extract 7.9**

**FG8-15:** ...I was in Japan and then when I came back to Ireland I realised...exactly...how.....UNSTABLE and...(2 sec)...STRANGE and like, a strange **industry**, not a very secure **industry** to be in...(0.5 sec)...ahm...**it's** fi-, but [laughs nervously], yeah [laughs nervously] ahm (1 sec) yeah from, from a, from a TEACHER'S point of view, ehm...(3 sec) better in different counties, again [laughs nervously] **y'know?**

Repetition with enforcement on ‘strange’, use of synonyms ‘unstable’ / ‘not very secure’, and statement of pay being ‘better in different counties’ corroborates survey findings of massive payment fluctuations between schools and locations. This is profiled by four sample, survey respondents in Table 7.7, which highlight the difficulty in ascertaining consistent patterns, or evidence of incremental pay-scale countrywide. **Participant 15’s** nervous laughter indicates the sensitive nature of this topic.

Respondent	gender/ age group	ACELS recognised school?	Qualifications	Experience	Hours worked	Salary
<b>A</b>	F, 41-50	Yes	BA DELTA MA	25+ years	mornings afternoons	€40,000
<b>B</b>	M, 41-50	Yes	BA CELTA MA	16-20 years	mornings afternoons	€15,000
<b>C</b>	M, 21-30	No	BA	3-4 years	mornings afternoons evenings some weekends	€35,000
<b>D</b>	F, 31-40	Yes	BA CELTA DELTA MA	11-15 years	weekends only	€35,500

**Table 7.7: Salaries recorded by four respondents, demonstrating “anarchic” discrepancies (UNITE ELT Branch 2020a, p. 7).**

Respondents **A** and **B**, employed in ACELS-recognised schools, are of similar ages, years’ experience, work similar hours and have similar qualifications, only differ in gender, yet receive vastly different incomes. Respondents **C** and **D** differ in every respect, yet their incomes are virtually identical. Table 7.7 thus illustrates earlier “anarchic diversity” identified by Maley in ELT (1992, p. 98; Chapter 2, 2.3.3-2.4), reflecting equally “anarchic pay structures” across Irish-based, school workplaces (UNITE ELT Branch 2020a, p. 7).

Pay rates are expanded upon in **Focus Group 1** by **Participant 2**, evaluating what teachers earned at a school where she had acted as DoS. Her teacher partner **Participant 2**, who had worked at a different school but in the same city, demonstrates shock and incredulity, as ‘it’ and ‘you know’ reference hourly pay rate:

### **Extract 7.10**

**FG1-2:** the hourly rate was inclusive of...holiday pay...so they were paid €13 an hour I think, but that was because

**FG1-1:** Wo-ow

**FG1-2:** that was because during their holidays, they WOULDN'T BE PAID so really I think they were paid probably €10 an hour (**FG1-1:** Wa-oww) y'know, so they, I think they were allowed four weeks off I think...yeah, so in fact, the €3 from all of those hours was to pay for their four weeks' holiday, so they'd still get paid (**FG1-1:** [whispers] oh my God) yeah...(FG1-1: unbelievable) so I think it would even have gone down to, I think I worked on it one day and it was €9 and 15 cent

**FG1-1:** scrapin' the minimum wage (**FG1-2:** €9, yeah) nine, €9.08 is the minimum wage I think (**FG1-2:** so) yeah

**FG1-2:** and I think it was, was it four weeks?

**FG1-1:** so they're the, they're the loopholes that are being exploited

An observation-comment pattern genre is evident, characterised by emphatic devices of subjective stance: evaluative adjectives ('unbelievable'), exclamations (repetition of 'wow'; 'oh my God'), and idioms ('scrapin' the minimum wage', 'loopholes that are being exploited'). In conflict discourse, these devices express affect, involvement, and solidarity (Koester 2006, pp. 140-141), clear with what **Participant 1** does in **Extract 7.10** by showing incredulity in pay revelations by **Participant 2**. €9.15 is not only under the lowest, hourly-recorded survey response of €10 and average survey, hourly rate of €20.30, but also below the National Minimum Wage for an adult worker in Ireland of

€13.50 at time of writing (Citizens Information 2024). This is shared as common-sense knowledge in ‘you know’. The school under discussion by **Participants 1** and **2** was not ACELS-affiliated, significant given one survey respondent reported increased, hourly pay following an ACELS inspection of their school.

The below-par payment stated in **Extract 7.10** extended thematically in descriptions of income inconsistencies in multiple interviews, to be detailed in Section 7.5. **Participant 1** references the countable noun, ‘loophole’. Depicting legal avoidance of an unpleasant responsibility, “usually because of a mistake in the way rules or laws have been written” (Cambridge University Press 2023), ‘loophole’ collocates strongly with the verb ‘to exploit’. It transpired this school engaged in a non-transparent practice of including holiday pay in teachers’ year-round, hourly rate, but not informing them of same, leaving them unpaid during holidays. **Participant 1** questions whether her partner had been involved in this process as DoS, which sees ‘you know’ emerge in her partner’s response:

#### **Extract 7.11**

**FG1-2:** no, like, they just submitted their hours (**FG1-1:** mm) **you know**, ahm, obviously (laughs) I told them like what we were getting inside [another school] and I was like and th- which was part of the reason why I WILL no longer work there, cos like this is HORRIFIC, **y’know** (**FG1-1:** yeah) you can’t expect people to go to college (**FG1-1:** yeah yeah) get a BA, get an MA, go to do a PhD (**FG1-1:** because you’ll get more in Aldi) get €9 an hour (**FG1-1:** you’ll get more in Aldi) **FG1-2:** exactly (**FG1-1:** you’ll get €12 an hour in Aldi)

**Participant 2** uses ‘like’ in this exchange to focus her partner’s attention on better payment offered in a competitor school in which she and **Participant 1** had been co-workers, information she volunteered to the teachers as their DoS. ‘Like’ reinforces her feelings of displeasure (Amador Moreno 2012, p. 31; Levey 2006), mitigating the lack of transparency in payment practice that she wants her partner to understand she disapproves of. Epistemic modality deals with possibility, probability or impossibility of propositions (Winiharti 2012). **Participant 2**’s use of ‘obviously’, intonated ‘WILL no longer’ and ‘HORRIFIC’, as emphatic devices of highly subjective stance, state her decisive, categoric reason for no longer wishing to remain within said school’s employment, highlighted by shared-knowledge ‘you know’. In addition, her laughter creates a bond

and invokes solidarity (Koester 2006, pp. 140-141) with **Participant 1**, as a fellow teacher and ex-colleague, who emphasises that a certain supermarket chain pays better than some Irish ELT schools. The exchanges in **Extracts 7.10-7.11** outline how **Participants 1** and **2** firmly evaluate sub-minimum-wage, hourly rates as disempowering, placing well-qualified, ELT teacher worth beneath that of retail staff. The double-standard insistence on high qualifications whilst offering low hourly payment, a practice deregulation legally permits, favours ELT AS BUSINESS.

30-year-old female **Participant 24** discusses ELT pay, 'it', comparing her lived experience of Irish work conditions with those of the UAE and UK:

### **Extract 7.12**

**FG15-24:** in terms of the private sector in Ireland, I always think of the WORKING CONDITIONS. Okay? And...I think of the PAYSCALES, I think of ALL the EXTRA WORK perhaps OUTSIDE...of...the NORMAL HOURLY PAY that you DO NOT get paid for [inhales] so that's a key difference that I see...in terms of the UAE or the UK.....we were paid via SALARY.....and **it's** a very LUCRATIVE salary and working conditions, so for example.....within this PACKAGE...you have your accommodation, so you have your rent, your health insurance, your visa, your return flights, this was both in the UK and in Ireland....ahm your return flights and your salary, so....**i- it's** a really LUCRATIVE package..... if I look...solely at the private sector, I find the private sector in Ireland currently is UNSTABLE, for MY needs

Repetition of and enforced intonation on 'LUCRATIVE' contrasts dramatically with lived experience of substandard, private ELT-sector payment in **Extracts 7.10-7.11**. Her intonated summation of Irish-based ELT as 'UNSTABLE' reiterates identical observations in **Extract 7.9**, and evokes descriptions of ELT AS BUILDING instability in Chapter 6 (6.2; 6.5). Economic systems influence how teachers perceive themselves (see Chapter 2, 2.3.3-2.4), with repeated reference to terms synonymous with unsteadiness demonstrating this among these participants. Coupled with obligations the sector imposes, this suggests remaining in Irish ELT is disempowering, a fact expanded upon by **Participant 15**. Her use of 'it' corroborates further survey findings, while 'you know'

underlines unreliability and inconsistency in payment across Irish ELT schools as common-sense, accepted practice:

### **Extract 7.13**

**FG8-15:** you're all temporary contracts, you're expected to have these high levels of qualification...and work your way up, but you don't really get that security back ...ahm, I will say that in [name of school] ahm I was quite HAPPY to...continue, in, English language teaching, for, A VERY LONG TIME, like, there, there, while the hours weren't ...SECURE I knew that that was part of **it**, **you know?** .....when I moved there I realised how little the actual teachers were being paid in comparison to what I had been paid only a month previously in [other city], quite a, quite a difference, quite an eye-opener really...same levels of expectation, ehm, even MORESO actually because it was a bigger school, but there was a lot more expected of teachers in relation to admin and all this outside of work...paid by the hour but not...(2 sec)...**it's** not, do we have to work outside of your hours, **you know?**

**Researcher:** so you were, basically there was no pay for prep

**FG8-15:** n- no, I've never worked anywhere that there was pay for prep

'Hour' surfaced in position 16 in the nominal single-word list, as did 'money' (position 28) and 'time' (number 6), but 'salary' did not (Section 7.1, Table 7.2). 'Hourly' emerged in the top 50 SaFGELT keyword list when LCIE was the reference corpus (position 18). 'Salary' appeared in both SaFGELT keyword lists, but in low positions, with 'wage' surfacing only with C-MELT as the reference corpus, in low position 48 (Section 7.1, Table 7.1). These keywords were hence salient in indicating how ELT teachers are typically paid. Hourly payment, 'it', and how confining this can be, is raised by **Participant 3**, a female in her thirties, framed in a TIME IS MONEY metaphor that enslaves teachers:

### Extract 7.14

**FG2-3:** It's HARD when you're on an hourly rate, it's hard not to think about...well MY TIME equals this MUCH MONEY..if you're SALARIED, you think about things a lot differently...so it, in a way...we're, we're SHACKLED to this hourly rate

'Shackled' is a highly emotive, subjective stance, an evaluative adjective evoking images of imprisonment and slavery, preventing you from doing what you really want (Cambridge University Press 2022b). **Participant 3** elaborates, discussing preparation time, 'it', spent on an in-house workshop presentation, remuneration for which had not been mentioned by her employer prior to its undertaking. She subsequently had to broach her employer to navigate payment, a common-sense situation punctuated with 'you know':

### Extract 7.15

**FG2-3:** ...so I did about six hours' work, now...I wasn't gonna BILL [laughs] the school for like six hours' prep and two hours' teaching...so I was like 'Jeez, how am I gonna?'...so I just, I thought ok, well what IS kind of a fair thing to, to say? What am I, **you know**, what IS fair? And I just sent them an email and I said, 'Look, we haven't discussed money, but here's what I was thinking, here's what I had in mind...two hours for the workshop and one hour prep...so I cut myself out of four hours...because it, things take a long time to do if you do them right...but then again...the four hours of prep I WASN'T TEACHING...I was at home and I had my shoes off and I, **d'ya know** what I mean? So there's that too, so I was tryin' to, you're tryin' to MANAGE all the time, WHAT AM I WORTH? WHAT'S MY VALUE?...what am I worth, **do you know?** .....I think even me getting paid for the prep work was a WIN!

Repetition of the rhetorical 'What am I worth?' and reference to one's 'value' is reminiscent of her earlier use of 'shackled': monetary binding to an hourly rate. That she was subsequently paid for this preparation time, discussion about which she had nevertheless had to instigate and negotiate, shows how she concluded with a statement of empowerment. The fact remained that she had not been paid for her actual, total, six-hour

preparation time, irrespective of working from home, nor had her employer made any attempt to initiate discussion on said payment, prior to her self-motivated action.

Non-payment for administrative duties parallels how CPD was found, in many instances, not to have been remunerated (see Chapter 6, 6.3.1). 62 survey responses to *How long do you spend on lesson preparation per week?* found an average 1.77 hours, while *How long do you spend on homework correction per week?* took a further 1.26 hours, recording a combined average of three hours' weekly preparation and correction time on top of respondents' face-to-face, contact-hour classroom teaching. However, only 6.77% of respondents recorded payment for lesson preparation and correction, and 4.69% for exam preparation and correction. No specific amounts of pay were outlined, consistent with **Participant 3's** evaluations in **Extract 7.15**. Previous findings have reported 82% of teachers being unpaid for similar work, pre- and mid-pandemic (Unite ELT Branch 2020b, p. 7), and emphasise need for contracts which honestly "reflect an employee's real hours of work" (Pembroke 2018, p. 10). UNITE ELT Branch found school operators disinclined to break down how much pay is awarded for any administrative work that teachers undertake on top of face-to-face teaching time. Such additional work is regarded as inclusive of one's hourly rate of pay, and rarely to never "logged or officially counted" (UNITE ELT Branch 2020b, pp. 11-12). This is despite school operator and ACELES/QQI recommendations that preparation and administrative duties be carried out daily, taking "at least 30-45 minutes to do correctly to industry standards" (ibid).

Referencing ELT AS BUSINESS, **Participant 3** discusses her own, proactive broaching of the issue of ongoing, lesson preparation time payment for **all** teachers at her school. 'It' references payment, and an individual school:

### **Extract 7.16**

**FG2-3:** I DID bring up ahmm the idea of...ah...a PAID hour of prep a week, so like on a Friday that teachers are given a space, and given an hour where they can prep for the following week and that that be PAID, and I was told 'Look, that's, **it IS** a good idea, **obviously you know**...this...**it**...the school is a **BUSINESS** as well (**FG2-4:** yeah) so **it** can AFFORD certain things and **it CAN'T AFFORD** other things'...and..**it** was told to me like, 'that's not some-, that's not WHERE WE ARE yet', **do you know?** But **it** was...ACKNOWLEDGED and **it** was I

thought HEARD... for the sake of an hour, per head, eh one, ONE HOUR by seven people...**do you know?** You're getting BETTER TEACHERS, **do you know?** So ahm, now, I didn't kind of spell **it** out LIKE THAT (**FG2-4**: yeah) but I did say like, 'This is what, this is what I think, and this is what I think could be really good...and like, I'm FOR the school

That many ELT school operators do not tend to prioritise teacher administrative-duty payment over other business overheads is expressed as a common-sense fact, in 'obviously you know', and repetition of 'do you know?' It resonates with the need for unionisation expressed in Chapter 6 (6.5). That her employer was at least prepared to engage with her on this matter empowered **Participant 3**, yet she is mindful of what it would cost the school. She thus navigates carefully, suggesting cost-effectiveness, 'it', in paying teachers for prep time as part of good work practice. Koester (2006, p. 128) notes how, in giving accounts, discourses of subordinate participants can often be forceful and direct, "at odds with their institutional roles". **Participant 3** nevertheless treads delicately in her subordinate position of trying to sell or pitch her idea to management, 'didn't kind of spell it out LIKE THAT '. Pragmatic use of 'now' in hedging co-occurs with 'like', 'now' occupying initial-utterance position, unlike the utterance-final position frequently identified in spoken Irish English (Clancy and Vaughan 2012, p. 237). In a nod to both ELT AS BUSINESS and TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR, a dominant metaphor and sub-theme explored in Section 7.6, **Participant 3** seeks acceptance as a credible stakeholder in the business, perceived as 'for the school'.

The importance of fair payment even extended to work experience on a CELT or CELTA course, 'it', whilst teacher training. This was expressed adamantly when discussed by **Participants 1** and **2**, females aged 44 and 27:

#### **Extract 7.17**

**FG1-1** and **FG1-2**: paid, PAID [emphatic tone]

**FG1-2**: yes yes

**Researcher**: as opposed to, yeah

**FG1-1 [to FG1-2]:** was **it** paid when ye did **it**?

**FG1-2:** no no

**FG1-1:** ok so, PAID

Koester (2006, p. 128) notes how age can influence hierarchical status in discourse, greater use of hedging noted from less powerful speakers. This is not the case in **Extract 7.17**. More senior **Participant 1** asks a very direct question about payment, IrEng ‘ye’ for plural ‘you’ reflecting the Irish-national status of both. However, younger **Participant 2** is equally direct in assertions of fair payment for work done. Despite their age difference, neither had received payment when training to become ELT teachers. Both were insistent that work experience should be paid: volunteerism, or vocational teaching of any description (see Chapter 2, 2.4) was rejected outright.

A graded pay-scale, ‘it’, outlined by Stanley (2016) in Australian schools, was the direct experience of 29-year-old **Participant 4**:

### **Extract 7.18**

**FG2-4:** it goes up like **it’s it’s** a step from 1-12, 12 is the highest, so **you know** if you’ve got a Master’s, you’ll go up a step, if you’ve got a PhD.....and every year of experience like you’ll go up a step **you know (FG2-3: yeeeah)** they go up like one and then every year, the steps go up anyway (**Researcher: right**) so like for example like I was on Step 8, then **it** was like what was **it**, \$55 (**FG2-3: mm**) just before I left they changed in June and **it** went up to \$57 ..... yeah, so even new teachers, like starting just fresh out of CELTA, they had a BA, CELTA and...they’d be getting \$40 an hour (**FG2-3: mm**) **you know (Researcher: yeah)** like which is great like, you’re a 19, 20 year-old, **it’s** like whhooo!

Upward motion in phrasal verb ‘go up’ is consistent with metaphor root analogies of this direction associated as positive and desirable in **Extract 7.18** : HAPPY/MORE/GOOD/ACHIEVEMENT/SUCCESS/POWER IS UP (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Goatly 1997; Kövecses 2010; Alejo-González 2024). Repetition of ‘go up’ demonstrates pattern-reforming that

is indicative of creativity contributing to stance, and “more radical” evaluative viewpoints (Tannen 1989). This incremental pay-scale experience, an accepted norm in Australian ELT expressed through ‘you know’, was extended even to novice teachers. It is evaluated as positive with ‘great’ and exclamation ‘whhooo!’, and contrasts starkly with lived experience of Irish schools for **Participant 4**. That such graded payscales are not apparent in Irish schools, irrespective of qualifications or experience, with no regulation to compel operators to implement any, does not go unmentioned. This time, ‘it’ references limitation, plateauing, the opposite of ‘up’:

### **Extract 7.19**

**FG2-4:** they don’t DO that here I think in general in ANY school (**FG2-3:** no) as far as I know, **it’s** just like, ‘This is what we pay’, and (**FG2-3:** yeah) **THAT’S IT**

The extracts in Section 7.3 include observations made of how instability, through low, hourly-rate pay, lack of holiday pay and non-payment for preparation time impacted teacher life. Incremental pay rates, outlined as normal, Australian ELT workplace practice, were found non-existent in an Irish context. Similar realities will be revisited in Section 7.5, examining deregulation. In the absence of regulation, the theme of fate re-emerged in dictating whether teachers experienced satisfactory work conditions, next explored.

### **7.4 ‘It’ and ‘you know’ in the subtheme of luck influencing good ELT-school business practice**

Consistent with findings in Chapter 5 (5.4) which saw chance or destiny leading to ELT AS PATH, CTA reading and re-reading found the theme of fate, rather than regulation, compelling and upholding transparent, school work-practice standards. This was not evidenced in the synonymous, nominal form ‘luck’, as its extremely low position at number 2,064 on the overall word-frequency list suggests. However, the appearance of the adjectival ‘lucky’ was observed in repeated CTA readings. Table 7.8 displays relatively low instances of the noun-form ‘luck’ and related lemma ‘luckily’, yet ‘lucky’ is observed to have higher frequency. This merited investigation to see what was being referenced as ‘lucky’, and by extension, what aspect of fate within the ELT sector it linked to.

N	Word	Frequency	Frequency per million
1.	lucky	24	135.26
2.	luckily	3	16.91
3.	luck	2	11.27

**Table 7.8: The frequency of occurrence of lemmas for ‘luck’ in SaFGELT.**

Skorczyńska and Ahrens (2015) advise how manual examination of corpus-identified concordance lines can assist in locating signalling metaphors. Of these three Table 7.8 lemmas, the adjectival ‘lucky’ may be observed in concordance lines (Figure 7.4), where its application appears to substantiate this belief of fate determining upholding of good work practice.

Doc ID	Text Snippet	Word
1	doc#0 corporated into the rate or whatever (3: yeaah) uhm.. like I've been	LUCKY
2	doc#0 re finally emailed to us over the weekend' and she went 'we're sooo	LUCKY
3	doc#0 'd' and she went 'we're sooo LUCKY'..and I went..	LUCKY
4	doc#0 ictly what...anybody in a working situation HAS..	LUCKY
5	doc#0 ster's, he has a PhD I'm like why why do you why do you think you're	LUCKY
6	doc#0 why why do you why do you think you're LUCKY?</s><s>You're not	LUCKY
7	doc#0 email him back (Deb: exactly) do you know?</s><s>(Deb: yeah) (4:	lucky
8	doc#0 3:05:00 3: WELL, YEAH (4: for the others as well) yeah well (4: you're	lucky
9	doc#0 st, definitely, (5 and 6: yeah) if you are on the list as a teacher, you're	lucky
10	doc#0 nage that stress because of the people I worked with...you're not so	lucky
11	doc#0 in CVs, they were like 'nah, not really looking', I think we just got very	lucky
12	doc#0 ne was just desperately looking for two teachers (Int: Wow!</s><s>	Lucky
13	doc#0 don't like [Teacher's name] (Int: ok) just as an example...</s><s>I'm	lucky
14	doc#0 as such (7 laughs) or viewed as such but I, I feel it!</s><s>I feel very	lucky
15	doc#0 ed as such but I, I feel it!</s><s>I feel very lucky (7: yeah!) I feel very	lucky
16	doc#0 at 1500 (9: yes) you know, you're never going to get that ...I was very	lucky
17	doc#0 interesting, ehmm...like [exhales] as a language teacher, I was very	lucky
18	doc#0 limbo situation where you're not sure of your hours and stuff, I was	lucky
19	doc#0 stry really...ahm, like, I think that...where I've worked, I've been quite	lucky

**Figure 7.4: Concordance lines showing node word ‘lucky’.**

For instance, luck was perceived as dictating how, having worked an entire year in a school, a teacher was finally offered a contract. This is related in **Focus Group 2** by **Participant 3**:

### Extract 7.20

**FG2-3:** I was working without a contract for about a year...but with an UNDERSTANDING and all of that...but sure where's that? Anyway...the day, the day our contracts were kind of emailed out, I went...ah, went into work and there was, two teachers standing having a chat, before they went into class and one teacher's quite young...eh freshly qualified, now with a MASTER'S mind,

and she was talking to another guy with a PHD [laughs] working in the school, and I think I said something like ehm, 'It's great about the contracts, **you know**, they were finally emailed to us over the weekend', and she went, 'We're soooo **LUCKY!**' and I went, 'We're NOT **LUCKY!**...That's EXACTLY what we SHOULD GET!' (FG2-4: yeah) 'And we should have had them A YEAR AGO!' This is exactly what anybody in a working situation has...WE'RE NOT **LUCKY!**...there's a lot of this INFERIORITY COMPLEX that goes on. It's WEIRD...standing there talk- she has a Master's, he has a PhD, I'm like 'Why, why do you, why do you think you're **LUCKY?** You're not **LUCKY**, you're just being treated accordingly'

Under Irish labour law, an employer must provide at least part of an employee's written terms of employment within the first five days of starting a job, with core terms outlined clearly (e.g., how pay is calculated), while remaining terms must be provided, in writing, within one month (Citizens Information 2023a). Challenging the notion that receipt of a contract one year later than legally required was solely down to good fortune, the more senior, experienced **Participant 3** uses repetition of 'not lucky' to demonstrate voice and empowerment, encouraging her junior, yet highly-qualified co-workers, to so do. Irrespective, her reiteration of 'you know' indicates lack of contract provision, or delay of same, is common practice in many schools.

How luck brought another participant away from teaching into administration, leading to a salary rather than continued, hourly-rate payment, is revealed by **Participant 15** in **Focus Group 8**. With nine years' experience as teacher and Director of Studies, she describes how this transpired:

### **Extract 7.21**

**FG8-15:** yeah, yeah, it's SALARIED, ahm..(Researcher: ok) so the \*ADoS position was, ahm, but it's all like, I'm a bad kind of example because I just kind of fall into things...**luckily** as I've gone along **you know**, like the ADoS position became a DoS , the current DoS went on maternity leave and that got extended and...**you know**, which is kind of, **fortunate** circumstances...it's ok, the the DoS money ahm, but it's all it's all Eng- it's all English language schools that are pretty much privately-owned so, what the teachers are paid and what their staff are paid

are completely not regulated or under any form of...(2.5 seconds) ..comparison between anywhere, so I've no idea if my salary is comparable to a DoS in another school...ahm..I've no idea incrementally how much I can expect in ten years' time, or, **you know**, that kind of thing

\*Assistant Director of Studies

Fate is credited by **Participant 15**, in the adverbial 'luckily', with leading her away from teaching into administrative, more regular, salaried ELT employment, once again through reference to the phrasal verb 'falling into' (Chapter 5, 5.4). 'You know' reinforces this belief of chance intervention: 'fortunate circumstances'. Nonetheless, she reveals lack of information on comparative pay structures between schools as down to sector deregulation. 'You know', and vague expression 'that kind of thing' indicate in-group, shared knowledge between **Participant 15** and the interviewer; lack of pay-structure knowledge is the norm, while luck determines sector security. Anecdote has hitherto provided evidence of substandard practice in other schools rather than legitimate transparency as she expands, 'it' referencing the sector:

### **Extract 7.22**

**FG8-15:** I've been quite **lucky** but I I've HEARD from other people, I guess that's an important thing to say, I've heard from other teachers how they've been treated in other schools...and.. (1 sec)...**it it** just isn't regulated enough **you know?**

'You know' reinforces the sense of hearsay historically prevailing on substandard work conditions (Chapter 1, 1.4 and 1.5), one of the issues prompting this study's drive for concrete data collection. Luck re-emerges thematically in **Focus Group 2**, bestowing **Participant 3**, an experienced teacher, with confidence to accept her employer's invitation to discuss potential oversights in her newly-drawn-up contract. She negotiated a less generic, more clearly-worded one tailored to her individual needs, which also benefitted other teachers in her school:

### Extract 7.23

**FG2-3:** there was a line in the contract that was talking about like Christmas pay, **you know**...and...I.. I had said, ‘Well there’s three bank holidays in that, so actually it’s not two weeks, it’s this amount of days...and as a result like now that’s CLEAR for everybody **do you know**? So...yes it was copy-pasted but it was tailored to us in the conversation that we had afterwards, it was allowed (**Researcher:** ok) we were allowed (**Researcher:** open to) if you were CONFIDENT ENOUGH to say to your director ‘Well I’ve REALLY read it and there’s a problem with this-this-this’, which I AM THANK GOD **do you know**?

**FG2-4:** Lucky you DID though...for THE OTHERS as well (**FG2-3:** yeah well) you’re **lucky** that you’ve got a good enough relationship that you CAN

**FG2-3:** from wha- but it IS delicate, like I felt that..he did ...invite us to do that... like ...HE’S new to it as well...it’s his first language school...it’s just under three years old, **do you know**? (**FG2-4:** yeah) This is the first time he’s drawing up contracts, **do you know**? So like you have to allow for that as well (**FG2-4:** yeah) that there’s a little bit of learning going on, **do you know**?

Devising contracts demands expertise that a school owner may not immediately be privy to, hence **Participant 3** is empathic. One may own a business, yet be inexperienced in this regard, underscored as understood in repeated ‘do you know?’ This demonstrates a community of practice model of mutual engagement and shared knowledge (Wenger 1998), important given this was a new school. Nevertheless, it also outlines common-sense acceptance, through ‘you know’ repetition’, that luck, divine intervention, and employer benevolence combined (‘allowed if you were confident enough’) are what permitted contract negotiation, in place of legislation.

A final instance of luck lay in its perceived role in the lived experience of sudden school closure, recounted in **Focus Group 5** by **Participant 10**. A female in her fifties, she details how proactive she was in resigning before school operators actually did close the school, ‘it’, overnight. **Participant 10** threatened legal action, receiving outstanding payment, ‘it’, attributed to luck in the form of a missent email:

## Extract 7.24

**FG5-10:** I was very **lucky**, I, left when I knew **it** was going down, at the time, when I handed in my notice, they didn't want my notice and...then they actually sent me back an email with a letter dated a week before I told them I wasn't coming...but they kind of shot themselves in the foot .....saying that they didn't want me back, but they would give me a month's salary in lieu (**FG5-9:** yeah), now I wasn't expecting any of this, BUT they were never expecting me, to pay **it**, to me, so I chased them with **it** (**FG5-9:** ah, ok!) annnd they kept ignoring me, ignoring me and my last one to, ehm [owner's name] was, 'Ok, it's ah, you said **it** was going to be in my bank account by the end of January, it is now, I think the third week in February, I'M GIVING YOU FIVE DAYS, OTHERWISE THIS WILL GO FURTHER', and obviously

**FG5-9:** You had **it** in writing!

**FG5-10:** I had **it** in writing! Yeah! I was really surprised at them! Because

**FG5-9:** Yeah I know! But you HAD **IT** IN WRITING!

**FG5-10:** They did! And I said, 'I am going to a solicitor', and within three days (**FG5-9:** yeah) I had my wages into my bank account

Low (1988, p. 128) emphasises spatial and motion metaphors as argumentative devices: 'going down' references the BUSINESS AS A SINKING SHIP analogy discussed in Chapter 6 (6.5), implying commercial disaster. Of note in this extract is repeated reference to 'they': i.e., the school operators. Chance prevailing, through receipt of an email probably unintended to have been sent from management, enabled **Participant 10** to claim her rightful payment. 'Shot themselves in the foot' enshrines an ARGUMENT IS WAR analogy (Goatly 1997, p. 75), in the form of a wound which these school operators self-inflicted. It would hence appear that luck prevailed in **Participant 10's** personal evaluation regarding back-payment from a resulting school closure, rather than regulation compelling remuneration from the operators, 'they', of that school.

That participants in Section 7.4 perceived luck as a buffer between them and payment insecurity was telling. It raised the issue of lived experience of sub-standard work practice in Irish-based ELT schools, which presented as a consistent subtheme through corpus-assisted, CTA reading. This is now given extensive examination.

### **7.5 ‘It’, ‘they’ and ‘you know’ in the subtheme of questionable ELT AS BUSINESS work practice**

Substandard work practices conducted in certain schools, and subsequent lack of social protections, emerged as prevalent, CTA-revealed themes. Some who had experienced sudden school closure disclosed being unable to access payment, or compensation, from either the school in question, or from social welfare. In this section, ‘it’ relates to a number of items. As in Chapter 6, ‘it’ relates to keyword ‘ELT’. In addition, ‘it’ references money-related terms regarding payment of different types, or an individual school. ‘They’, also examined in this section, predominantly represents stakeholders such as school operators, politicians, students or ELT course providers, while ‘you know’ relays below-par workplaces as ‘common sense’, accepted ELT practice. The section begins by examining how social welfare was often denied teachers when they found themselves in need of such.

#### **7.5.1 ‘It’, ‘they’ and ‘you know’ in lack of social welfare protections for teachers in ELT AS BUSINESS**

Lived experience of social welfare inaccessibility in the event of sudden school closure is revealed by **Participant 11** in **Focus Group 6**, a newly-qualified teacher in her forties. When her school, ‘it’, closed, there was no legal redress available to her or colleagues in accessing outstanding payment, or Jobseeker’s Benefit:

#### **Extract 7.25**

**FG6-11:** none of the local politicians really wanted to help us because **it** was such a small school and...**you know**, wasn’t like Dell or Intel or somethin’ that, you want (**FG6-12:** yeah, yeah [sympathetically]) to be standin’ at the gate helpin’..., **they** were like ‘Ohhh, do this, do that’ and, and, one or two of them sent us letters sayin’, ‘We’re really sorry we can’t help you, go to social welfare’...(FG6-12: [inhales in disbelief]) [laughs] and, eh, so I went to social welfare, he looked,

straight away said... ‘You don’t qualify for anything because...your stamps, for the year before...aren’t (**FG6-12**: contributed yeah) you didn’t pay enough

Lack of political ability, or willpower, among local, elected representatives, ‘they’, to provide concrete support reflects observations made in Chapter 6 on same (6.5), demonstrating how, in such a scenario in a democratic society, TEACHER AS ACTIVIST is crucially important (White 1978; Sachs 2003). ‘You know’ reflects shared knowledge of her disempowered state: because this ELT school is not perceived, within political circles, as contributory as would be a multinational corporation to the local economy, the political will is not there to provide support for its teacher-workers. Pollard encourages speaking out against “morally questionable” practices and policies, drawing upon professional knowledge, judgement and experiences, through teaching councils and unions, to ensure more than simply having a hearing in directly influencing policy (2019, p. 86). This concurs with Chapter 6 descriptions (6.4-6.5) of the need for both ELT Ireland and UNITE ELT Branch in active representation of teacher voice at policymaking level.

Ultimately, inaccessibility to payment in the event of school closure, either from a school itself or from social welfare, presented as disempowering for many interviewees. Having left a private school for the public sector, **Participant 10** illustrates the difficulty of low-income, ELT earning. ‘You know’ outlines how even in public-sector ELT, part-time workers will often not be paid for the summer months when classes cease. During such time, the safety net of state-provided, fiscal protection, ‘it’, can be denied. Her experience of not having enough voluntary contributions, in the form of social welfare stamps, mirrored **Participant 11’s** in **Extract 7.25**:

#### **Extract 7.26**

**FG5-10:** **you know** we’re part-time, so we don’t get paid during the holidays when they do close...BUT....**it’s** a rolling thing...with social, **you know**, you can, **you know** claim your stamps...and the first year I did that...and they said, ‘Oh no, you don’t have enough stamps up’, and I said, ‘What do you mean? I’ve been working...all these years!’ .....and ‘Should we go back in...?’ and she said, ‘Well, we will be going back to 2017’ and I was like, ‘Yeah, I was working’...and she said, ‘No, you have to have up [sic] 300, you have to have been earning €300 a week to be able to claim your stamps’....and like this was totally, I’d never

needed this before (**FG5-9**: yeah) and I was sitting there going, ‘Yeah, and what we were earning was €270’

‘Have to’ underlines needing to earn a minimum €300 per week to qualify for Jobseeker’s Benefit, the maximum Irish, social welfare entitlement (Jobs Guide Ireland 2023). This would necessitate receiving a minimum €15 per hour for a twenty-hour teaching week, or €20 for a fifteen-hour one. The survey, however, demonstrated many schools paying below this (Section 7.3), with the impact of this reality not fully realised until social welfare is required. **Participant 10** expresses relief that she exited private-sector ELT, despite still not being paid for summer holidays as a public-sector, ESOL tutor. ‘You know’ denotes the low hourly rates certain schools offer, ‘it’:

### **Extract 7.27**

**FG5-10**: and that’s when it came home to me...that I made the right move and, and there’s, how many more out there...IN private schools teaching English, and they have no idea of this, cos you’re paying stamps aren’t you? [(indicates to **FG5-9**): **FG5-9**: mmm] you’ve no reason to claim that or anything

**FG5-9**: yeah

**FG5-10**: sooo, in that, I kind of thought to myself, ‘Is this going to come back and haunt people when they go to try and claim their pension?’

**FG5-9**: Well I guess so

**FG5-10**: you only start to REALLY think about **it**...yeah, and **it** was like **you know**, and and I mean and there ARE schools paying like 15 quid, in DUBLIN!

**FG5-9**: **they** pay whatever **they** get away with

Home is where people should feel comfortable, safe, and secure. Metaphorically, ‘to come home to someone’ expresses thoughts and ideas, the full realisation of a situation (McCarthy and O’Dell 2002, p. 90). The prospect of sharing a home with a spectre, ‘haunted’, would not appeal to many. Such lived experience of substandard payrates that

deregulatory practices enable has become a central, accepted tenet of neoliberal ideology (Holborow 2012, pp. 42-46). Underpayment by school operators, ‘they’, leaves many highly-qualified, professional teachers vulnerable when unemployed. The phrasal verb ‘get away with’ conveys **Participant 9’s** evaluative stance of such operators: escape from punishment of a crime or misdemeanour (Flower 2002, p. 118).

A suggestion that third-level, ELT master’s course providers, ‘they’, have an obligation towards honesty about sector precarity is next made by **Participant 11**, albeit jokingly. The onus appears entirely on trainee teachers to investigate ELT viability, only to discover insecurity once installed within ‘it’:

### **Extract 7.28**

**FG6-11:** ...I suppose, I never asked, I never searched, but.. you do a master’s, the bank paid that money but somebody else paid €4600 and whatever it was to do **it**...to get a job and you’ve no job security, you’ve no health cover, you’ve no pension

**FG6-12:** absolutely, there’s nothin’ yeah

**FG6-11:** ABSOLUTELY NOTHIN’! (**FG6-12:** yeah) like **they** should really put like a warning on the course..... ‘Just to be aware, before you do this course...’and maybe that’s my fault! for not, RESEARCHING the industry

Unlike many teachers who had paid for their own postgraduate courses (Chapter 5, 5.3.3) **Participant 11** had had hers fully funded by a previous employer. Nevertheless, her closing statement evokes self-blame for mistreatment suffered within the sector: her use of the keyword ‘industry’ references an ELT AS BUSINESS akin to the asymmetrical employer-employee relationships discussed in Chapter 6 (6.5). The lack of pension provision she mentions is furthered by **Participant 15** in **Focus Group 8**. Concerning benefits for both teachers and administrators, “salaried and unsalaried”, she explains the attitude towards pension provision by ‘they’, school operators:

### Extract 7.29

**FG8-15:** no, pension no...pension has been talked about quite a lot, ahm , not just for teachers, like wh- what I will say about the language school is that **they** do treat...in relation to stuff like that **you know**, things like pensions and stuff, all their staff are treated the same...so, salaried and unsalaried, if, the second wee.....(1 sec) as, as a 39-hour-a-week person, get, a pension, so will the teachers as well, **they** are very across the board fair that way...ahm, but **it** hasn't come to be, we've had convers- like, we've been told, that people fr- banks would come in and talk to us, and explain things to us, **it's** never, never happened

Of note in **Extract 7.29** is that teachers, paid by the hour, are not regarded as distinct from other administrative, salaried workers in the school, grouped together under the generic 'staff'. Vague rather than precise language is used in her descriptions of benefit entitlements: 'stuff like that', 'and stuff'. Despite assurances that all staff members would be given pension access, 'it' did not materialise. What is perceived as 'fair', therefore, is in fact lack of pension access 'across the board': equal lack of opportunity extended to all staff members, teachers included in a rare yet collective 'we' reference. This, nevertheless, switches back to more distancing 'they'. As she discusses holiday and sick pay, 'they' references both what teachers are entitled to, and what school operators provide:

### Extract 7.30

**FG8-15:** but **they** do get holiday pay...ehm...**they**...sick pay, I think is kind of at the discretion of the employer, ahm, it's kind of taken as, **you know**, if **they** know that **they**'re sick and if **they**, if **they** want a medical cert provided, generally **they**'ll get, **they**'ll get sick pay but that, it depends, **d'ya know**, if it's...if it's..th' fourth occasion in the last two weeks then that won't happen it's ahm...**you know**...people do generally though, **they**'re **they** do get...(1 sec)... **they**'re KIND in that way, **d'ya know**?

Multiple uses of 'you know' reinforce the sense of teachers, 'they' being at the mercy of benevolent, 'kind' employers, also 'they', rather than protected statutorily. A further example reinforces the indiscriminate reality of lack of sick pay, described in 'it' use by

**Participant 10 in Focus Group 5.** Common-sense acceptance of the fact that years of service are no guarantee of incremental pay, sick-pay, or compassionate leave entitlement is underscored with ‘you know’:

**Extract 7.31**

**FG5-10:** there was a teacher in there.....[name] was there for years...and ah her wa- **it** was €18 an hour...and she was there I think for about twelve years and when she left **it** was €18 an hour...**you know**...and then there’s no pay for sick, there’s no pay (**FG5-9:** mmhuh) if you need to take time off

This corroborates with survey findings on entitlements. While nearly 74% of 61 respondents recorded receipt of holiday payment, more than half of 60 respondents, 52%, did not receive sick pay, and only 26 out of 61 recorded entitlement to *force majeure* (compassionate leave in the event of personal crisis). As of 01 January 2023, pandemic-instigated legislation ensured three days’ statutory sick pay (70% of normal pay) per year for all Irish employees, increasing to five days in January 2024 (Citizens Information 2023b), ELT teachers included. In spite of government regulation resolving the issue of mandatory sick pay for all Irish workers, standardisation of ELT teacher payrates has yet to be addressed, regardless of repeated calls for same (King 2019; UNITE ELT Branch 2020a; 2020b). Moreover, of 62 recorded answers only eight respondents had made any private provision for a pension plan, just three of whom had had contributions added by their school employer. 80.65% had no pension plan whatsoever, more than one and a half times the national average of 48% of Irish working adults, firmly situating Irish ELT schools among the 75% of national employers who do not provide company pensions for employees (Zurich Life 2020; Daly 2020). Medical insurance was somewhat better, with 23 out of 62 holding their own private healthcare plan, yet only two benefitted from employer contribution to same, while 37 respondents, nearly 60%, stated they had no form of medical insurance. Whether these teachers had access to a public medical card was not ascertained.

The empowerment brought by superannuation is outlined by **Participant 19**, the most senior interviewee at 69, who enjoyed the type of pension security denied most ELT teachers (Chapter 2, 2.3.2). Passion exploitation has been observed in ELT schools to

justify overwork and underpayment of teachers (Willoughby 2019). **Participant 19** compared ELT work practices and those within his previous, media career:

### **Extract 7.32**

**FG11-19:** EXPLOITATION of, of action, is ah is is RAMPANT and ah, this was another example of of **you know** from my personal point that I because I, I enjoyed it, I did **it**, and because I enjoyed the teaching, I did **it**, albeit at a fairly..ah, ah, small..ah, ah..salary **you know** ...and the point I made is that I, at least I have ah the the safety net of, my [previous media company] ah, pension but...but young people do not have that

**Participant 19** exudes empowerment in choosing to remain in ELT, 'it', adamant that his metaphorical pension 'safety net' permitted such agency. Emphasis with 'you know' indicates his full acceptance that this remains a luxury denied many younger teachers. He was not obliged to remain, no 'have to' or similar, deontic expression presents in this extract. His enforcement of 'exploitation' and 'rampant' underlines awareness of his fortunate position compared with younger peers, and that low, ELT pay has not placed him in a state of precarity by virtue of his superannuation. Irish workplaces are not under legal obligation to provide pensions, leading his partner, **Participant 20**, to believe lack of similar social protections critically deprives teachers of voice, 'it', hence empowerment:

### **Extract 7.33**

**FG11-20:** ...like if ELT teachers had the proper protections...and were treated as actual...REAL VALUABLE PROFESSIONALS (**FG11-19:** mm) then maybe more people would be, SPEAKING OUT, the way that you do, and I know kind of, maybe as you said earlier maybe you feel a little bit more SECURE because you f-, you DO have a pension **to FALL BACK** on

**FG11-19:** yeah, that's the point

**FG11-20:** but, the fact is, you should be able to go to your workplace, and raise valid concerns without FEAR of being sacked and in ELT, that is exactly what happens, and that's why people don't do **it**

Choice of the modal stance adjective 'valuable' reflects how in social systems, "perceptions of value are essentially a function of language" (Graham 2001, p. 764). If one does not have voice, 'it' in this instance, or perceives oneself as powerless, it is difficult to determine one's professional self-worth. The phrasal verb 'fall back on' embodies ACTIVITY = MOVEMENT (Goatly 1997, p. 49) and is undeniably metaphorical in use of preposition 'on' (Lindstromberg 1997; Alejo-González 2024, p. 127). It describes something used when other supports have failed, particularly support of a financial nature (Cambridge Dictionary 2024d). The pension security enjoyed by **Participant 19** contrasts insecurity, and owes purely to having worked in a different, private-sector position prior to choosing ELT AS PATH.

**Extracts 7.25-7.31** indicate the precarity that participants had had lived experience of through lack of access to a range of social welfare payments, from Jobseeker's Benefit, to sick pay, *force majeure* and redundancy, while **Participant 19** clearly demonstrated the contrary, owing to empowerment that a pension provided him. This was admittedly not from the ELT sector. At this point, the theme of ELT workload was observed in 'it' references in four extracts, next examined.

#### 7.5.2 'It', 'they' and 'you know' describing workplace demand and related teacher impact in ELT AS BUSINESS

Irish ELT schools typically run on a twelve-month teaching calendar, with a brief closure in December for Christmas. The subsequent ELT workload, 'it', emerged in **Focus Group 1**, with **Participant 1** describing the related impact of such year-round demand on well-being, emphasised in 'you know':

#### **Extract 7.34**

**FG1-1:** it's not an academic year...it's **you know**, it's twelve months of the year, so you're, you're teaching twelve months of the year, and as a result of that then, **you know**.....you would do 23, 24 hours a week if you were doing your

15 in the morning, if you were doing full afternoons and if you were doing two to four evenings, and there was nooo...there was nothing there, even in the, **you know**, by the time I left, to, to, just check-in with the teachers, ‘How ya’ doin’? (FG1-2: mm) How ya’ findin’ your workload?’ There was a constant focus on how are the STUDENTS doing, how are the STUDENTS feeling, STUDENT feedback...there was NEVER a wellness check of the teachers, eh, ah **you know**, just a check-in with the staff

Compounding precarity, Maslach and Jackson (1986) highlight burnout as a syndrome prevalent amongst those engaged in direct work with people. Of acute concern for teachers in an intensely demanding profession, burnout creates a sense of depersonalization, reducing capacity for personal achievement (ibid). Roberts (2020, pp. 7-8) links burnout to overwhelming stress: emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion, resulting in ineffective employee productivity, risk of psychological distress, work dissatisfaction, and physical illness (Pennington 1990, p. 60). This evaluation of constant, school prioritization of student well-being over that of teachers reflects survey results. Fewer than 30% of respondents believed their school to be concerned with teacher wellness, and only 21% felt schools prioritized their mental health. Such findings contrast sharply with those of Riordan and Curry (2021), in which social media posts of professional organisations outside Ireland (e.g., TESOL International, IATEFL) demonstrated genuine concern for the mental health of practitioners in their pedagogy during COVID-19. **Participant 1** perceives heavy workload in ELT, ‘it’, with little time off and no psychological supports, indicated in ‘check-in’, as equally detrimental to well-being as the financial precarity outlined in Section 7.5.1 extracts.

Irrespective, not all felt overwhelmed by workload. Asked about opportunities for growth within ELT, ‘it’, **Participants 7** and **8** found the economic reality of being a couple working for the same school of greater concern, seeing re-emergence of the idiomatic ‘to have all your eggs in one basket’:

### **Extract 7.35**

**FG4-8:** I think the only challenge is **all our eggs are in one basket**....so it’s, that’s more of I sup’, **it’s** not a challenge in the day-to-day but, **all our eggs are in the one basket**, and then that makes you more... vulnerable (FG4-7: yeah,

[unclear] yeah] yeah, **all our eggs are in the one basket**...but, I don't think, I don't find like, work in general is NOT STRESSFUL...for for me, it's NOT STRESSFUL, **it's** not stressful for [indicates to **Participant 7**]

Despite the couple's positivity toward their chosen ELT AS PATH, and stated lack of workload burden, potential precarity for this household is embodied in the expression 'to have all your eggs in one basket'. As seen in Chapter 5 (5.3.2), it serves as a caveat against risk-taking that could ultimately lead to one's economic demise. The idiom is reiterated three times, outlining how the joint income of a couple in one and the same workplace funds their shared life. This is their sole, perceived risk in an otherwise stress-free, ELT work environment.

Potential fall-out shouldered by many teachers for the administrative shortcomings of management, 'they', was focused upon in **Focus Group 11. Participants 19 and 20** evaluate how, in one case, workplace demand placed upon a DoS and teachers contributed to precarity. This was instigated through school loss of lucrative Interim List of Eligible Programmes (ILEP) accreditation, 'it', which allows visa students to attend a school for longer than 90 days (Department of Justice and Equality 2021):

### **Extract 7.36**

**FG11-19:** yeah ILEP, **they** lost that and and the st- the teachers rowed in with a typical enthusiasm

**FG11-20:** and always DO!

**FG11-19:** helping school GET the reputation, obeying the rules... [unclear] and then, stop campaign, so, ah there was a whammy there because **they, they, they, they** weren't able to take advance bookings because of the l- losing the ILEP

**FG11-20:** is NEVER EVER the fault of the teachers EVER

**FG11-19:** true! That's **it**, yeah!

**FG11-20:** I've had conversations with, ahm, inspectors, where the owner of the school is standing behind me, and I am expected to LIE...and (**FG11-19:** yeah!) say, 'Oh, such a teacher did THIS!' It's like, 'No, **they** didn't, YOU don't keep these records!' or, **you know**, you didn't, PAY WHATEVER FEE, and it's NOT the teachers, are, **it** SHOULDN'T BE THEIR RESPONSIBILITY and **it** SHOULDN'T BE THEIR JOB, but **they're** the ones who bear the brunt

In **Extract 7.36**, 'they' first references school operators, evaluated as falling short of duties leading to consequential ILEP loss, impacting business through declining student numbers. **Participant 20** elaborates, switching 'they' use to reference teachers. Having worked as both teacher and manager, she describes the detailed process administrative staff like herself are obliged to undertake in securing ILEP, a workplace demand she estimates as unjust. The idiom 'to bear the brunt' means to endure or suffer maximum force of something unpleasant (Gairns and Redman 2011, p.75), "brunt" originally meaning a sharp, physical blow (The Idioms 2022). In this instance, managerial incompetence, shared knowledge of which is expressed in 'you know', is borne by teachers, 'they', who are, in effect, scapegoated.

The precarity caused by workplace demands placed on teachers, outlined in these three extracts and particularly in **Extract 7.36**, revisits the theme of questionable business models discussed in Chapter 6 (6.5). These were embodied in novel, pejorative metaphors ELT AS PYRAMID SCHEME and ELT AS CAR DEALERSHIP. How participants perceived the economic models of their Irish ELT school workplaces is elaborated upon in this next, final section exploring questionable ELT workplace practices, and the specific part deregulation plays in this state of affairs.

### 7.5.3 'It', 'they' and 'you know' referencing how deregulation impacts ELT AS BUSINESS models and practices

The pandemic exacerbated Irish ELT-teacher precarity. Furloughed during the first lockdown when the Department of Education and Skills ordered the closure of all ACELS/QQI regulated schools (detailed in Chapter 9, 9.2), **Participants 11 and 12** expressed gratitude for the government-sanctioned, Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), 'it', of €350 for all adult workers. They wanted to remain in ELT, also 'it' in this

extract, despite zero financial support from their individual school, or the sector itself during this period:

### **Extract 7.37**

**FG6-11:** I just didn't realise how...when I did the master's, I did not realise HOW UNREGULATED IT WAS, I never checked that (**FG6-12:** yeah) I didn't realise HOW.....(2 sec)...there's NO SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS (**FG6-12:** mm) that, **you know?** There's nothing there...cos when the last school closed...(1 sec)...no LOCAL POLITICIANS wanted to help us, the union tried to help us, they couldn't, so there was NO HELP for us, this time, the fact that I'm gettin'...PAID...is unbelievable, that I'm getting' COVID payment...**it's HUGE**

**FG6-12:** **it's** GREAT yeah that we have been recognised under the thing, that's a big step, **it IS**, a HUGE step

'Step' is often used in conjunction with 'path' to indicate one of a number of actions required to reach a particular goal (Deignan 1995, p. 194). 'Big step' and enforcement on 'HUGE step' outline how crucially important this PUP payment was for both participants, in the absence of any ELT sector, 'it', supports. The self-blame apportioned in repetition of 'I did not realise' and 'I never checked' for choosing ELT AS PATH, exacerbated by pandemic-enhanced precarity, underlines the importance of regulation, and how government-led intervention kept both participants financially buoyant whilst furloughed.

Precarity through lack of teacher stakeholder status is examined in **Focus Group 2**, by **Participant 3**. The highly-evaluative adjective 'risky' is repeated in descriptions of 'it', ELT, with sobering consequences revealed in descriptions of ELT AS BUSINESS:

### **Extract 7.38**

**FG2-3:** **It IS risky**...I think working in any PRIVATE sector is **risky**, and that's what **it is**, **it's** somebody who has a business, (**FG2-4:** yeah) like tomorrow [name of Director] could say 'Well, we wanna retire to Jamaica [snaps fingers], we're just gonna set off!' And because we're kind of INVISIBLE in that sense...we're

not VERY PROTECTED, and that IS the SHAMEFUL thing, if you're not in a good school...you're being EXPLOITED...and that's the truth, **you know?**

Social, political and cultural, neoliberal changes wrought on language teaching have reduced ELT to a tradable skill in job markets (Block 2017, p. 44). This erodes teacher rights in school workplaces (Jenks 2019; Jordan and Long 2022; Wiczonoch 2025). Including herself in a rarer 'we' instance in this chapter, **Participant 3** acknowledges the disempowering 'invisible' teacher status raised in Chapter 6 (6.4) and her evaluation of 'shameful', unprotected worker status. 'We' is simultaneously used to describe school operators, and decision-making that is exclusive of teachers, should a school be closed: 'we wanna retire to Jamaica'. In this respect, she indicates that teachers are not considered to be stakeholders when crucial business decisions are undertaken. Enforcement on 'EXPLOITED' reflects evaluations of passion exploitation raised earlier in **Extract 7.32**. While her shift in stance to 'you' distances her, suggesting she evaluates herself as based in a good school and hence safe from exploitation, 'you know' and 'that's the truth' reinforce lack of legal protection as common-sense practice.

ELT AS BUSINESS, 'it', is placed on a par with tourism rather than education, a model expanded upon by **Participant 18** in **Focus Group 10**, a female with teaching and administrative experience:

### **Extract 7.39**

**FG10-18:** It is PURPORTED to be for the joy and and experience and learning of the students but really **it's an educational tourism business...**and as long as the money is coming in, and, the, statistics in the detractor scores are correct, then everything is fine

**Participant 18** here alludes to the term "language edutourism" coined by Yarymowich (2005):

...tourism for the purpose of appropriating authentic linguistic resources or of longer-term forms of language learning-related migration that stem from class-related strategies for the building of multilingual repertoires for access to global markets as well as to local ones affected by globalization.

(in Heller 2010, p. 109)

In political economy, the market itself acts as a metaphor, assuming transparency in spaces of activity whereby participants are free to act and prosper equally. In reality, marketisation erodes community and institution building, framing both in terms of economic exchange. This reduces individuals and collectives to competing providers and consumers (Williams 2013, p. 11), in a “profit over people mindset” (Wiczonoch 2025). Neoliberalism “normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life” (Brown 2005, p. 43), which encourages individualism and competition for resources over a collective, societal interest, measuring every life choice in cost and benefit terms (Becker 1993; Block 2017, pp. 40-41). For Ireland, this is profound given the massive impact of the 2008 crisis on its economy, and consequently many of this study’s participants (Chapter 5, 5.3.2). Holborrow (2012b; 2015, p. 72) notes proliferation of societally-engrained, neoliberal keywords in education: ‘the market’, ‘deregulation’, ‘human capital’ and ‘entrepreneur’, entrepreneurship actively promoted throughout Ireland as a road to economic recovery among highly-qualified, young people (Block 2017, p. 41; Holborrow 2012b). How attitudes to this reality played out thematically among this cohort is detailed in Section 7.6.

More often than not, entrepreneurship contributes to precarity (Wickham 2015). In an ELT context, this impacts the entire sector, “not just a minority within” (Walsh 2019, p. 461), and compromises ELT AS PROFESSION. Language education has become dominated by policy makers and powerful others, such as corporate CEOs (Hasan 2003). In Irish-based ELT, entrepreneurial school owners, through Marketing English in Ireland (MEI), fetishize languages as marketable, money-making commodities packaged as lessons (Simpson 2020; Duchêne and Heller 2012). Many school operators regard financial regulation, state-provided services and unionised workplaces as undesirable, “restrictive practices” (Holborrow 2015; Wiczonoch 2025; Chapter 2, 2.3.2). **Participant 18’s** allusion to ‘edutourism’, on the part of her entrepreneurial school owner is disempowering and representative of such attitudes, while the keyword ‘money’ favours ELT AS BUSINESS.

Criticism is levelled at the Irish sector model, ‘it’, in its current, deregulated incarnation by **Participant 20**:

#### Extract 7.40

**FG11-20:** like in New Zealand, the ELT sector is government regulated (FG11-19: mm, mm) and in Australia, **it's** not fully government regulated in Australia but **it** is VERY HEAVILY regulated in Australia in terms of (FG11-19: yeah) minimum pay rates, working hours, conditions, teaching contact hours, admin hours, ALL of that, like THERE ARE countries who manage to do **it** VERY WELL....and we've just **made a hames of it**

To 'make a hames of something' is a uniquely IrEng expression referencing the Middle-Dutch word 'hame', a curved iron or wood attachment on a draft horse's collar which held traces. Incorrectly connected, the horse could not pull or do work efficiently (Loftus 2017). The phrase encompasses "clumsiness or ineptitude" (Mullaly 2017). As a comment on contemporary, Irish-based ELT, as both teacher and administrator **Participant 20** is less than complimentary of entrepreneurial school operators and stakeholders in control of the sector, mitigating her harsh delivery with 'like'. Nonetheless, a more objective stance was voiced by another participant. Reflecting on pandemic impact, **Participant 15 in Focus Group 8**, an ex-teacher now-administrator, is sympathetic to her employer. On one hand condemning the total absence of communication with teachers demonstrated by some operators during the first lockdown, recorded and highly criticised by UNITE ELT Branch (2020a), she empathises with school owners, 'they', and pandemic-induced anxiety, 'it':

#### Extract 7.41

**FG8-15:** just from being on the other side of **it**..(1 sec)..from, our, the owner of the company, like ...**it's**...**they're** worried about their WHOLE LIVELIHOOD crashing down around them, **d'jya know?** ...Like obviously there's no excuse for no contact for months and months and months! [laughs incredulously] but, **they're** kind of ...(2 sec pause)..**they're** strugglin' as well like, **d'jya know?**

Although **Participant 15** uses 'like' and 'kind of' as hedging devices in appealing to her interviewer-listener to sympathise with school employers, evaluation becomes stronger, switching from more inclusive 'our' to detached 'the owner of the company', finally 'they'. This is coupled with use of strong, subjective stance markers: 'obviously' / 'no

excuse’, expletive ‘God!’, and paralinguistic laugh of incredulity. Repetition of ‘d’jya know’ evokes shared knowledge of the COVID-caused challenges employers must have faced. Such insights query whether certain owners, exposed to a stark ELT AS BUSINESS pandemic reality, may finally have realised what many of their teachers had been living for decades. This forms part of a wider, ELT narrative of precarity linked to the “We’re All In This Together” pandemic utterance: everyone weathering the same storm, yet in vastly different vessels. Regardless of her empathy, evaluation of how deregulated reality impacts business decision-making, leaving teachers at the mercy of employer benevolence, ‘it’, is also offered by **Participant 15**. Within her comments, ‘they’ overwhelmingly references employers, while ‘you know’ underscores sector, common-sense acceptance of impact of said realities:

#### **Extract 7.42**

**FG8-15:** kinda what I’ve heard from most people, ahm, not in the school that I’m in necessarily, but...in other ones, that it’s ...[breathes out] **they’ve** all the, **y’know**, there’s no regulation on **it**, **they they** own the company..(1 sec)..**they’re** TOO CLOSE, **they’re** the director of a company, making the decisions with the employees, **they’re** TOO CLOSE TO EVERYTHING ...ahm cos it’s such a small company **they** can- it CAN BE...if the person themselves is not necessarily..(1 sec)..that nice of a person **it it** can affect their staff really badly, **you know?**

Vague expressions such as ‘kind of’ act as tuning devices to hedge, thus “mitigate the risk of choosing inappropriate metaphors” (Cameron 2003, p. 270). Additionally, pauses and inhalation act as idiomatic markers, indicating speakers consider the information they are conveying may be perceived as unbelievable (Strässler 1982, p. 98). This is a sensitive subject. **Participant 15** treads carefully rather than being directly critical of her school employers, and school employers in general. Orientating such operators as ‘too close’ invokes INTEREST = PROXIMITY (Goatly 1997, pp. 48-49), negative and disempowering, leaving teachers vulnerable to employer subjectivity rather than impartial legislation on interpretation of legal entitlements, reinforced with shared knowledge ‘you know’.

‘Deregulation’ does not imply absence of regulation. It is a more selective type, “according to certain principles” (e.g., a decision or policy ascribed to an EU directive

which can be decried as outside the control of the Irish government). This perpetuates a free-market myth “which is very much freer for some than others” (Holborow 2012b, p. 43). Competitive advantages become stacked towards dominant, global corporate players (ibid, pp. 44-45). Romer (in Fortson 2022, p. 21) extrapolates: “It became an ideology: regulation is bad. But regulation is just another word for law, and law is what protects people”. Why such common-sense acceptance of deregulation prevails in Irish ELT is debated by **Participants 19 and 20**. Their comments, with repeated reference to ‘business’, reflect similar operational models in an Australian context (Stanley 2016). These are influenced primarily by ELT AS COMMODITY (Simpson and O’Regan 2018; Simpson 2018; 2020), whereby senior, expert teachers, rather than being offered ongoing, incremental pay scales, are regarded too costly in ELT AS BUSINESS, ‘it’, hence regularly dismissed from Irish schools:

#### **Extract 7.43**

**FG11-20:** ...it all goes with the **BUSINESS MODEL**, the **business** model DOESN’T WANT highly-qualified teachers who are demanding proper salaries, this is the problem

**FG11-19:** .....it appears that...schools...far from ENCOURAGING progression and therefore paying more salary, will, **get rid of** their more experienced teachers to bring in, newer teachers at a lower pay rate...ah and so, so therefore, ah I’ve heard **it** that, **you know**, the more experienced teachers **GET TARGETED** [upward intonation]

**FG11-20:** ...because of the DEMANDS of the **business** I wanted teachers who could walk in off the street and deliver QUALITY and you can’t guarantee that with, (**FG11-19:** no) newly-qualified teachers, so the problem is, for schools who have very low payrates...they HAVE TO target newly-qualified teachers ‘cos of cost (**FG11-19:** yeah yeah) and just hope, that they’re not DREADFUL

**Extract 7.43** confirms lived experience of the fact that the sector at large does not encourage the type of “reflective theorising practitioners” which more experienced teachers embody, preferring novice-teacher “service providers, capable of delivering language skills to fee-paying customers”, for reduced payment (Gray and Block 2012, p.

141). Bamforth (1993, p. 4) likens senior, experienced practitioners in the commercial ELT school apparatus to “drops of water in oil for the running of an engine”: expensive and problematic, hence undesirable. This impacted hiring practices for **Participant 20**, an ex-DoS, creating a juxtaposed, ELT AS PROFESSION-led, pedagogical need for expertise, versus ELT AS BUSINESS-driven recruiting reality, with potentially substandard lesson delivery. Use of the enhanced stance adjective ‘DREADFUL’ is reminiscent of claims made in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.1) of wanting ‘everybody to be a good teacher’, with below-par performance a perceived ‘NIGHTMARE’. It challenges neoliberal claims of initial teacher-training courses being non-essential (Furlong *et al.* 2000, p. 10), and stresses need for high-standard training and ongoing CPD for novice teachers. Irrespective, resurface of the business-related term ‘deliver’, observed in evaluations of feedback (see Chapter 6, 6.3.2), presents further blurring of ELT AS PROFESSION and ELT AS BUSINESS which has consistently dominated these two analysis chapters.

As a concrete example of substandard practice, **Participant 19** outlines lived experience of sudden redundancy during the first lockdown. Learning of his school’s liquidation two weeks into the first lockdown via social media, he accuses operators, ‘they’, of lack of real commitment to its upkeep:

#### **Extract 7.44**

**FG11-19:** **they** made a decision after two, two weeks into it that **they** that the group was going to liquidate, the school was closed permanently (**Researcher:** ok) and the state, the STATE, gave us, redundancy, I mean the school, there was no fund to pay, normal redundancy, backpay, ah holiday pay, but the state have a fund there and the state has had to compensate us... it was all part of the Kinley group (**FG11-20:** yeah), USIT was the was the big company in that group...and once **they** got into trouble I think the group got into trouble (**Researcher:** right, right) ahnd **they** didn’t, what annoyed us I think was that **they** didn’t even try to avail of the, of the government subsidy (**FG11-20:** yeah) to keep ticking over...ahm but ahm the whole I mean at that stage in those days we didn’t know how long...face-to-face ahm ah teaching would be gone for and (**FG11-20:** yeah) and and so [breathes in] **they, you know**, for good or for bad decided to, to get out of of the thing, but I mean ..I could go on for hours but you know it was bought as a **BUSINESS**

Clear in this extract is the knock-on effect of a language school being part of a conglomerate. Pandemic fallout left teachers like himself in precarity, obliging state intervention on this school's behalf to honour payment of redundancy, an all-too-common feature of neoliberal economies in crisis scenarios (Holborow 2012a, p. 18). That ELT AS BUSINESS enshrined the primary motive behind this establishment was undeniable in concluding '...you know it was bought as a BUSINESS'. No longer imminently profitable, operators demonstrated no commitment to providing students with education, or teachers with employment, evidenced in 'get out of the thing': ELT itself.

**Participant 10** details equally questionable practice: an employer's decision not to deduct tax, 'it', from her wages. What she had wondered earlier (**Extract 7.27**), on whether the practice of hourly underpayment would 'come back and haunt', actually **did** return to trouble her, in the guise of tax underpayment:

#### **Extract 7.45**

**FG5-10:** every wage slip I got, I HAD PAID NO TAX and I kept saying to him, 'I HAVE TO PAY TAX!' And he went, 'No, no! The accountant has said that you don't need to!' And I was like, 'No! This is what I should...in TAX, this is what should be, PRSI, this is, should be in (**FG5-9:** USC) USC yeah, and I literally had **it** down to the fine, **you know**...and he was, you know, literally turned and said to me, 'You have NO IDEA, you're TALKING NONSENSE and you don't know what you're talking about!' and I was like, "Well I clearly DO.....so that January, I'd left in December, I, I went down to Revenue here in [city] annnd, I said to her 'Look, this is **it**....ahm...I never got my P60, actually I never got my P45'... but they rolled up the P45, and I actually said to her, I said, 'I owe you if I'm right, I said, I think, I said **it's** about €610...and she went through **it** all and she went, 'Oh my God' she said, she came back to me and she said, 'You actually owe me €604.' ....I was €6 out.

**FG5-9:** and did you, did you PAY **it**?

**FG5-10:** Oh I DID! sure I HAD TO! You know? 'cos **it** worried me for the year...and I said no, I didn't want any tax being owed, 'cos at some point, **it** was gonna come back at you.....you know, **they're** just, were

**FG5-9: They were chancers!**

**FG5-10: oh CHANCERS GALORE! you know**

Enforcement on ‘HAD TO’, a reference to the deontic necessity so prevalent in Chapter 6, outlines **Participant 10’s** obligation to rectify her own tax affairs, initially discomfoting, but ultimately empowering. It nonetheless demonstrated how, in her opinion, these school operators fell short of their employer duty, irrespective of motive, by denying her the fulfilment of her legal obligation as an employee of the Irish state, and not deducting her rightful proportion of tax. This loomed over her, evident in choice of idiomatic expression ‘come back at you’. In evaluating the operators of this school, their choice of the derogatory term ‘chancers’, IrEng to describe disingenuity in people who ‘chance their arm’ i.e., pretend to be someone they are not (Meehan 2015), should have no place in descriptions of any legitimate enterprise, especially one offering education. It is intensified by ‘galore’ from the Irish *go leor* (a lot / very much), and parallels survey descriptions of ELT in the highly-critical, evaluative noun, ‘racket’, reiterated by Jordan: “...it’s important to expose the current ELT industry as a commercial racket that defrauds students and impoverishes millions of teachers and support staff” (in TaWSIG 2022). The culture of tax non-compliance demonstrated by this school typifies neoliberal “philosophy of individualism”, which would see individual teachers responsible for, and expected to do, many things traditionally undertaken by employers and government for employees (Block 2012, pp. 70-71).

A further, questionable practice was overdependence on one nationality, raised in Chapter 6 (6.5). **Participant 20** uses the preferred term ‘ELT’ over the “degraded term” ‘TEFL’ (Vaughan 2009) as she evaluates this mono-demographic market model, ‘it’, and its untenability:

**Extract 7.46**

**FG11-20:** a HUGE PART OF THE PROBLEM, with the TEFL indus- I HATE saying TEFL, the ELT industry in Ireland.....it was, I remember at ONE stage it was 50% Brazil/Venezuela, when Venezuela essentially shut itself off from the world, most schools lost about 40-50% of their students automatically and **they**

had no backup plan...and a lot of SCHOOL OWNERS and a lot of SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, ARE BRAZILIAN! In this country (**FG11-19**: yes, yeah) **it** is NOT, a...[laughs] **it's** not a VIABLE **business** plan! [Brazil's] a developing country economically but it is, NOT ON THE SAME STANDARDS as European countries, the expectations, for QUALITY are EXTREMELY HIGH, but they also expect REALLY LOW COSTS...HOW CAN YOU RUN...HUNDREDS of SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS on that business model? You CAN'T! **It** MAKES NO SENSE! I'm not a, I'm not a businessperson, but even when I was a manager I was goin', 'This LITERALLY makes no sense!'

Metaphorical reference to NATION AS PERSON (Musolff 2020), shifting from Venezuela to Brazil, embodies **Participant 20's** evaluations as to why this business approach is unsustainable in the post-pandemic, Irish-based ELT world. She uses multiple signalling markers of metaphoricity in intensifiers and Extreme Case Formulation (Pomerantz 1986; Çopur, Atar and Walsh 2021; Alejo-González 2024, pp. 19-20) in phrases like 'extremely high', 'really low costs', 'hundreds', and 'LITERALLY'. These items voice a sequence of complaints, with raised intonation, of substandard business acumen applicable to 'most' or 'all' schools that rely on one, sole student nationality pool; when the market invariably dries up, schools close. It mirrors poor business models observed in Chapter 6 (6.5) which impact students, and inevitably, teachers.

A final comment ends this section. **Participant 16** in **Focus Group 9** observes how the prioritisation of ELT school operators seems limited to profit. 'It' encapsulates ELT AS BUSINESS, leaving a question mark over how Irish ELT is perceived at large:

#### **Extract 7.47**

**FG9-16**: yeah...and somewhat of a bad reputation, like everything, for the people who are in **it**, just, for, for the money, or for something that they consider is an easy job for example, but I mean that **dogs** almost, almost everything

The statement 'bad reputation', which surfaced in Chapter 6 (Section 6.5), re-emerges. Animals are often referenced idiomatically. Dogs are generally considered affectionate, loyal creatures. Metaphorically, however, their association is almost always pejorative when verbalised; to be 'dogged' implies being impacted by something unpleasant and

recurring (Deignan 1995, pp. 38-40). The monetary prioritisation that ‘dogs’ ELT AS BUSINESS has led to relentless self-branding in the online market, lending credence to Curran and Jenks’s caveat that teachers who embrace such practices “are poised to outperform their more pedagogically qualified peers” (2022, p. 16). Given the lack of teacher funding for postgraduate study and CPD unearthed in Chapters 5 (5.3.3) and 6 (6.3.1), it may be that teachers will no longer engage in costly upskilling, and opt simply to fine-tune self-branding strategies as social influencers, leading to greater numbers of underqualified ELT teachers.

Testimonies of participants in this section did not, in the main, paint positive images of ELT AS BUSINESS in their disclosures of lived-experience, questionable work practices. As a counter-reaction to perceived consequences of sector deregulation, a dominant metaphor emerged thematically which reflected a newer, more contemporary teacher identity requiring being enterprising, embodied in TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR.

## **7.6 The theme of TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR**

The presence of the item ‘entrepreneurial’ in the SaFGELT/LCIE keyword list (Section 7.1, Table 7.1) confirmed CTA findings in relation to the theme of teacher-driven entrepreneurship, with related corporate terminology. In response to substandard practices reported in Section 7.5, many younger teachers felt compelled to employ a particular strategy: being entrepreneurial. TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR emerges, for example, in **Focus Group 3** on several occasions, with need for business-mindedness repeated with conviction. These two males in their early thirties discuss opportunities that the sector, ‘it’, affords in fulfilling business ambitions. Multiple, direct references to the item ‘entrepreneurial’ occur:

### **Extract 7.48**

**FG3-6:** IN this business...HOWEVER, if you’re slightly **entrepreneurial...it**, like what I I, what I DO LIKE about **it** is...I have a set wage...or my hour- I have my set hours, and I get X amount per week...so THAT, I know, pays my rent

**Researcher:** ok

**FG3-6:** then on top of that I'm that type of, like, so's...so's [**Participant 5**] here beside me, ahh, like **ENTREPRENEURIAL**, and I- , like as long as I've like, even since I was a teenager, it's I'm always trying to, **d'ya know**, swing a few bob here, swing a few bob there, wouldn't it be great to make a million somehow...Rodney and Del-Boy<sup>5</sup> kind of situation, but **i- it** allows me to do that... on the flip side you can say 'Oh, I just don't get enough, and I don't have enough hours' ...well you've other hours to do other things...**d'ya know?** Go, go get another job (**FG3-5:** mm) if you REALLY want to work 40 hours a week, or else **GET ENTREPRENEURIAL**

Common knowledge expressed by 'you know' demonstrates **Participant 6's** insistence upon other teachers exploring their entrepreneurial side, and using their limited contact hours to their advantage, repetition and reinforcement used on 'entrepreneurial'. He positively evaluates the leverage that negotiating in an entrepreneurial way, 'it', with his school employer afforded him, as a trade-off in the absence of company benefits:

#### **Extract 7.49**

**FG3-6:** I wish you'd get medical and dental and these things, but you can't, but sure even in big companies sometimes that's not provided either...but I asked just for a couple of things that would make it EASI-er for me, for example I teach privates...around town, so I find a spot and I'll teach privates and even, ah, last year I had like eight or nine students on my books, we'll call **it**, so then I said to him, I said 'I'm runnin' around town, here this classroom's free from 1 o'clock, can I bring my students here?' He was like, 'Absolutely, go for **it!**' So like, those two things...and I like when it comes to **it** too like.. if you if you're...if like, a bit of praise, and then...financial reward...I'm very happy with that and then when I asked for, 'Can I teach here?' **it** gives me a chance to be **entrepreneurial** within a space...on top of **it**

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<sup>5</sup> Two working-class, sibling characters in the British sitcom *Only Fools and Horses*, street traders who also engage in questionable, get-rich-quick schemes, often buying and selling illegal goods. 'A few bob' references old British currency, i.e., a few shillings.

**Participant 6** navigates use of workplace facilities, and thinks like the entrepreneur he accepts his school employer as being, in his choice of terms ‘on my books’ and ‘financial reward’. He thus appeals to this shared, entrepreneurial ethos in a way that he believes is mutually beneficial. Neoliberalism has been described “an economic doctrine that valorizes individual entrepreneurial freedom and marketization of society” (Shin and Park 2016, pp. 443-444). De Costa *et al.* (2016, p. 695) observe contemporary identities to be viewed through an entrepreneurial lens, transforming self-perception through encouraging self-responsibility. It redefines motivations for learning English, and traditional, moral imperatives behind ELT (De Costa *et al* 2016; 2021). Arguably, this applies to many school operators, who feel no obligation to extend certain social protections to teachers, in turn causing practitioners to re-evaluate what motivates them to remain in ELT. Executing entrepreneurial skills is clearly empowering for **Participant 6**, in the absence of the benefits his school owner chooses not to provide. Holborow (2012a, pp. 25-26) notes that prevailing “there is no society, only individuals” neoliberal mantras cannot “be hegemonic without a degree of consent”. Regardless, teachers’ embracing of entrepreneurship appears less to do with having “imbibed the truth of the market” (Holborow, *ibid*), and more to do with powerful interests that dominate neoliberal ideology, and ELT.

Further TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR evidence was provided by **Participant 16**, a 34-year-old female who had originally had no intention of teaching during her lockdown-extended, Central American stay. This was her response to the question of whether she was actively teaching at time of interview, referencing nominal frequency word ‘money’:

#### **Extract 7.50**

**FG9-16:** I decided as well to **make a bit of money** because every everybody’s very uncertain about what’s going on...I I started ehmm giving i-, classes here informally to, to people that I know..soo...(Researcher: ok, ok) yeah, but, not much at the moment, ahh, people, for different reasons, they, for financial and, other things, a lot of people have backed out...so at the moment I’ve got ONE **PAYING CUSTOMER** [laughs]

The phrases ‘make a bit of money’ and ‘paying customer’ correlate with STUDENT AS CLIENT and ENGLISH AS COMMODITY, the English language assuming “commodified

authenticity”, a direct product of the language worker embodied by the ELT teacher (Heller 2010, p. 105). Teachers, “factors of this service”, have their value created through the sale and purchase of such commodified instruction (Jenks 2019, p. 519). Jenks observes elevated use-value of ELT instruction, its discourses and ideologies (2019, p. 520). These are shaped by stakeholders, policymakers, cultural practices and societal forces, proving that commodifying ELT instruction “has real consequences for language teachers” (ibid, pp. 520-524). The pandemic compounded precarity for **Participant 16**, locked down in a foreign country with an uncertain means of income, necessitating TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR.

A term like ‘human capital’ quantifies, prices and commodifies labour; this reconfigures society and education “as a market state of economic actors” (Holborow 2012b, p. 48; Lynch 2006). ‘Entrepreneur’ has been noted as an “official glibspeak”, managerial term in universities which is often disfavoured among academics themselves (Hasan 2003). However, the opposite appeared the case in many of these focus groups, especially among younger participants. Both males and females in the 20-30 age cohort readily aligned themselves to TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR. This could be perceived as borne out of necessity. For instance, terminology relating to the corporate environment assists **Participant 16’s** synopsis of perceived growth opportunities in ELT, albeit with uncertain income:

### **Extract 7.51**

**FG9-16:** I guess in traditional schools, thee.. the main thing would be either to become a director, or to, to **take over** your own school for example...ahm...eh, in terms of career growth in cer- in terms of **climbing the ladder**..... and you can teach classes for, for, for whoever around the world so I know that, there are a lot of options out there...but, I don’t know about the reliability of pay, for example, or, ah, how much you’re really gonna earn

ELT AS BUSINESS is clear in the phrasal verb ‘take over’: “to gain control of a company” (Flower 2002, p. 126). In addition is a positive UPWARD MOTION IS GOOD corporate-world evaluation in ‘climb the career ladder’, implying aspiration towards top position in a work-based hierarchy (McCarthy and O’Dell 2002, p. 58). This perceived empowerment, nonetheless, contrasts starkly with her acceptance of the accompanying

financial insecurity of such venture, and self- and societal perceptions of ELT teachers, to be examined in Chapter 8.

Many native-speaker teachers living abroad choose online teaching over the face-to-face classroom experience, allowing them to pursue “an ostensibly cosmopolitan lifestyle, unfettered by a 9-5 job” (Curran and Jenks 2022, p. 13). In contrast, non-native teachers are more likely to be based in their home country, or engaged in longer-term employment if abroad (ibid). The pandemic-accelerated, global trend of online teaching (Moorhouse, Li and Walsh 2021) has created a gig economy that drives down earnings, contributes to job insecurity, and a “restructuring [of] the language teaching market toward repetitive, one-off and short-term engagements”, forcing teachers into competing against one another (Curran and Jenks 2022, p. 16). Exploitation observed in private academies has extended to the online environment (Codó 2018, p. 441), reducing teachers to ‘companies of one’ (Curran and Jenks, ibid), as illustrated in **Extracts 7.50-7.51**. This encourages the kind of self-branding needed to create “a distinctive public image for commercial gain and/or cultural capital” for selected student, target audiences (Khamis and Welling 2017, p. 191). Examples include ‘self-editing’, in which teachers profile themselves on online tutoring platform (OTP) websites (Curran and Jenks 2022, pp. 7-8). This is observed as **Participant 24**, a 33-year-old female and business graduate, evaluates online teaching, ‘it’, as the only viable way forward for many ELT practitioners, especially in a post-pandemic ELT world:

#### **Extract 7.52**

**FG15-24:** ...it it’s really impacted us whereby a lot of my professional colleagues...have now looked towards promoting THEMSELVES and creating their OWN business of teaching online...and I see up and coming markets like the Chinese market for example.... ....whereby a teacher can now **market themselves**, they can create a blog, they can create a post, they can **MARKET themselves** ...and **build a business** from there, so you become more like an **ENTREPRENEUR**

Self-promotion is clearly evident in this extract, in ‘promoting themselves’ and repetition of ‘market themselves’, with emphasis on ‘business’ creation. Notable is how STUDENT AS CLIENT focuses on the same mono-national overdependence that schools have

demonstrated time and again as a business model (Section 7.5.3), repeatedly leading to collapse.

Advice given by Kris Amerikos, an ELT teacher entrepreneur, is offered by **Participant 16**. Amerikos embodies a contemporary description of the sector, ‘it’, held by increasing numbers of ELT practitioners: “an entrepreneurial culture, offering plentiful opportunities for self-realisation and, even, fame” (Thornbury 2010). **Participant 16** is nevertheless realistic about the downside to entrepreneurship, common-sense acceptance in ‘you know’ referencing the precarity the sector is universally associated with, and ‘they’ referencing online operators and their hiring strategies:

### **Extract 7.53**

**FG9-16:** ...he claims that you can, if you get into **it** yourself and you really put the work in, that can really, really earn big..... **it** can be very hard to **make money**, that **they**, what they tend to do, **they** give you a lot of hours at the beginning to get you excited and get you into **it**, and then afterwards because for them obviously it’s better to have a lot of different options, a lot of different people...then afterwards gets fewer and fewer, so what...MOST people do this dooo...apparently, will be working for a few different companies, and when one starts picking up the hours they’ll go with them, and the other one...so I get like, almost everything in the ESL industry, not guaranteed! **Y’know?** No job security! **D’ya know?**...In [sic] a tightrope!..... there are people who **set up** their own channels, their own websites, and if you **take it into your own hands** like that, I guess you could, potentially, make something very big, y-you’d be taking more risks on yourself, but, like any **business**

**Participant 16’s** outline of online opportunities, enabling teachers to advertise themselves as products within ELT, concurs with how Curran and Jenks note marketing of teaching on OTPs as “highly entrepreneurial” (2022, p. 4). Metaphorical instability displayed by the terms ‘risks’, ‘not guaranteed’ and ‘tightrope’ aligns with observations of a “constant turnover of teachers” on one such OTP (Curran and Jenks 2022, p. 6). TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR offers online opportunities in a rapidly-changing, technology-driven, ELT delivery mode, but is not risk-free. Teacher proactivity demonstrated in phrasal verb chunks ‘set up their own’ and ‘take into their own hands’ is

empowering in countering the types of precarity many schools have instigated; nonetheless, risk remains a reality.

An antidote to such ELT AS BUSINESS instability is offered by **Participant 6**, who empathises with school operators ‘they’, and their school business, ‘it’:

#### **Extract 7.54**

**FG3-6:** it’s a private business...like **d’ya know they’re** tryin’ to make money too (FG3-5: yeah) sometimes **they** make losses and that, and I understand that, and you’re dealing with people all the time, and it’s hard to keep everybody happy...but if you just, **they, they build a school around the teachers...**and **they** said **they** came down from [name of city] and **they** were teaching up there, and we’ve always said it, we’ve had this conversation, myself and you together, **THAT SCHOOLS SHOULD BE BUILT AROUND THE TEACHERS**

In this reference to the COMPLEX SYSTEMS AS BUILDINGS root analogy, **Participant 6** evaluates the importance of teachers being positioned as pivotal, sectoral stakeholders, with the school constructed around them in a fair partnership that creates mutual understanding and a core acceptance of its business nature. Unlike previous references made in Chapter 6 (6.5), such a model is perceived by Participant 6 as providing inherent stability, and reflects UNITE ELT survey findings in which a respondent majority strongly identified as being not only stakeholders in their school, but stakeholders in Irish ELT (2020, p. 14). However, the difficulty in trying to emulate a stakeholder identity is highlighted by **Participant 16** in **Focus Group 9**, a 34-year-old female. She describes the daily challenges for teachers, ‘they’, in fulfilling TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR:

#### **Extract 7.55**

**FG9-16:** ...the problem for most teachers is that **they** get so caught up in the everyday grind of teaching, teaching, teaching and the pressures and the stress like that, that **they** never quite make it past anything but a basic level teacher earning a basic salary...Ah you you get kinda, wrapped up in all of that ahm...you don’t, you don’t think of **entrepreneurial** ideas

**Participant 16** alludes to the workplace demands expressed in Section 7.5.2 in expressions ‘the everyday grind of teaching, teaching teaching’, ‘pressures’, and ‘stress’, with the phrasal verbs ‘caught up in’ and ‘wrapped up in’ embodying entrapment. This suggests that, particularly in the face-to-face teaching environment, daily demands are incompatible with both teacher stakeholdership and entrepreneurialism. In contrast, TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR is described as eminently attainable in this final section extract, and once again aligned to the GOOD IS UPWARD MOTION metaphor by both male participants in **Focus Group 3**. They support non-teaching ventures which they themselves and teacher colleagues have initiated outside class-contact hours, as an income-supplementing strategy:

### **Extract 7.56**

**FG3-5:** I, I’ve worked (**FG3-6:** it’s on, it’s **on the rise**) with a few people who’ve worked in there

**FG3-6:** [name of school] is most definitely **on the up**, yeah... they are...good, yeah, **it works, it’s** ah a [number of people] doin’ **it** from [location], **they’re** really nice people, **they** are

**FG3-5:** and **they** let, [teacher name] does, like **they’re** supporting [**Participant 6**] with his privates, [other teacher] does [other venture] out of there, **you know they** give [this teacher] the space

**FG3-6:** mmhuh

**FG3-5:** **they’re** really supportive around [another venture **Participant 5** is involved in] which is, you know, are there opportunities to grow in ELT?...not if you open, not unless you open a school...or you do something like myself and [**Participant 6**] did is, that was to try and make a **business**...that will...work symbiotically or work in (**FG3-6:** mm) tandem...with that, so [name of venture] is a response to the fact that there are NO OPPORTUNITIES to grow in ELT

‘On the rise’ / ‘on the up’ equates increase with improvement (Gairns and Redman 2011, p. 77), and positively evaluates their perceived trajectory of this new school, ‘it’. They

reference its operators, and how ‘they’ enable entrepreneurship, also referenced by ‘it’, among teaching staff, permitting access to their premises and students in a spirit of mutual, entrepreneurial endeavour.

In an Irish context, post-2008 toxicity ascribed to ‘entrepreneur’ has seen a recent preference for the phrase ‘social entrepreneur’, with focus on “practical, innovative and market-oriented approaches” to benefit those marginalised from society (Holborow 2012b, pp. 52-54). Regardless, entrepreneurship continues to be aspirational, especially among the young, as a means to Irish economic recovery (ibid). This reality correlated strongly with younger, interviewee perceptions. Self-promotion in TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR and TEACHER AS PRODUCT consistently emerged as a solution to precarity among this cohort, as opposed to the self-alignment to ELT Ireland, collective activism, or union membership that were offered as ELT AS PROFESSION antidotes to ELT AS BUSINESS by more senior, experienced teacher interviewees in Chapter 6.

This chapter’s final subtheme is how participants viewed the direction Irish ELT should take in the post-pandemic scenario. ‘COVID’ surfaced as a keyword on both SaFGELT lists (Section 7.1, Table 7.1), reflecting the timeframe within which the study was conducted. Taking into account the references to instability many participants have voiced thus far, it was felt essential to finish this chapter analysis with a brief focus upon concerns teachers raised of the sector itself, going forward.

## **7.7 Perceptions regarding the future of ELT AS BUSINESS**

A prescient exchange in early March 2020, two weeks before the first lockdown, saw the potential, future impact of technology on ELT AS BUSINESS debated in **Focus Group 5**. Two senior female teachers reference ELT consistently as ‘industry’:

### **Extract 7.57**

**FG5-9:** ....I wouldn’t like to be coming into this **industry** now.....I see as a young person coming into this **industry** because I think technology...is going to change this **industry**...in ways we can’t even imagine...yet...because even already, the..abil- the...y’know the facilities or the functions that they have on their iPads and iPhones....I wonder how many people in the future will be

prepared to spend thousands and thousands and spend months away from home...when you don't have to?

Graddol's prediction (2006, p. 11) of a post-modern world where "English will take off in a very new direction" emerges, the pandemic subsequently proving same (Moorhouse, Li and Walsh 2021). **Participant 9** indicates online access will free learners of obligation to travel to inner circle countries for immersion-type instruction. Exponential growth of language teaching within a digital landscape has transformed traditional notions of the teaching-learning dynamic into a new "linguistic entrepreneurship" (Curran and Jenks 2022, p. 4; Panaglian and Curran 2022). A doubling in gig economy worth in 2023 to \$455 billion has been projected (Statista 2021), with consequential "drastic changes for language teachers" (Curran and Jenks 2022, p. 2); the predictions in **Extract 7.57** suggest this will greatly impact novice ones. While Online Tutoring Platforms offer learners a greater range of ELT teachers who fulfil specific needs, they function within "regulatory gray areas", many of which do not adhere to traditional labour laws (Prassl 2018). Potential for teacher exploitation in such a virtual ELT environment, 'it', is evaluated by both participants in **Focus Group 5**:

#### **Extract 7.58**

**FG5-10:** I think it's it's weeding out the, uhm, scammers on it?...If that makes sense, there's a lot of...ahm, companies looking for online teachers and they're only like, you, like, 'Oh, we'll pay you \$30'

**FG5-9:** ah yeah, but you'll, you get those in every walk of life

**FG5-10:** you do (**FG5-9:** sometimes) you do, uhm, but there's a lot of teachers then won't do online 'cos they've been literally...burnt by them

Discourse participants will often pick up on one another's metaphors to further their own argument (Koester 2006, p. 133). **Participant 9** is not convinced that substandard employers, 'scammers', are unique to ELT. The gardening metaphor 'weeding out', when applied to people from an organisation, means removing workers who are bad for company advancement (Deignan 1995, p. 138). Despite her partner's claims that rogue operators are found 'in every walk of life', **Participant 10** persists. Her reference to

'burnt' implies suffering badly from financial loss (McCarthy and O'Dell 2002, p. 98), proving fire to be at once a life-enhancing, integral energy source, but potentially destructive (Deignan 1995, pp. 165-166). The intensifier 'literally' does not diminish its power, shifting evidence of the disempowering theme of economic precarity discussed in Sections 7.3-7.5 from the real to the virtual ELT world, "leaving teachers with little to no protection from exploitation and unethical workplace practices" (Prassl 2018; Curran and Jenks 2022, p. 17).

Another factor influenced rejection of online lesson delivery, 'it', on a much more human level: desire to be in the physical presence of others. **Participant 21**, a male teacher in his early forties with 18 years' experience, equates in-house classroom teaching to being 'on the other side' during his Zoom-conducted interview:

#### **Extract 7.59**

**FG12-21:** I enjoy the face-to-face classroom...ahm...and I don't like teaching online [laughs] and I know that's a, a topic of DEBATE, there are some people who PREFER it, I DON'T, I'm on the other side at the moment.... I took a lot of...comfort in the growing, new um ELT Twitterati group, **you know**, there were a lot of people just getting on Twitter so you share ideas around the world, and **it's** very exciting.....you were meeting people, and talking about ideas and books and, and uh school structures, payment structures and, the future of the industry and what was gonna happen, with machine translation, Google translate, all that stuff was being discussed every day, and that was that was a very vibrant staffroom

Despite misgivings about online teaching, **Participant 21** stressed the advantage of the social media platform Twitter (now 'X') in maintaining a vital connection to other ELT teachers. An empowering TECHNOLOGY AS SERVANT indicates that, used on his terms, online activity enabled a route to a positively-evaluated, 'vibrant' virtual staffroom in the absence of his real one, where work conditions and teaching resources could be equally assessed. This newfound empowerment is shared in 'you know'. Similarly, **Participant 22** in **Focus Group 13** made use of online applications to mobilise workers in precarious employment and encourage activism abroad, transferable skills he applied to the ELT world on return to Ireland:

### Extract 7.60

**FG13-22:** where people can't come into the streets and meet each other but **they**, **you know**, can do still remotely, ah so...through surveys and technology, we're able to focus attention and create data which ah senior servants and government officials can take...seriously...so it's NOT JUST OPINIONS, and feelings, it's HARD DATA...I I'd studied Mother Jones, what she did after the fire of Chicago...and I just realised that it's times of uncertainty when.....**you know** it's, people need ah to come together and realise **they're** not isolated

'You know' demonstrates how **Participant 22** embraces and embodies the empowerment brought about by activism (Stenhouse 1975; Woodward 1991; Wiczonoch 2025). His emphasising of ELT-teacher driven research (Walsh and Mann 2015) in 'they' addresses workplace issues that are supported by concrete factual evidence (Mann and Walsh 2013), 'data', to be debated at policy-making level (see Sections 1.4-1.5). Collective action in a rare 'we' use, 'come into the streets', 'meet each other' and 'come together' supports the need for union representation voiced in Chapter 6 (6.5; Wiczonoch 2025), contradicting and challenging the mantra of individualism and TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR demonstrated in Section 7.6.

The current state of Irish ELT, 'it', and its future, are summarised forebodingly as the **Focus Group 5** participants conclude their interview. They evaluate the post-pandemic direction of the Irish-based, ELT world:

### Extract 7.61

**FG5-9:** there are BIG QUESTIONS AHEAD, though (**FG5-10:** yeah there are) there are big questions ahead, and it'll be interesting to see ah what direction the POWERS THAT BE ARE GOING TO TAKE IT

There is a sense of disenfranchisement in this final utterance. Aside from exactly who those 'powers that be' are, and whether ELT, 'it', is inclusive or exclusive of teacher representation, the real question, ultimately, must be whether these spokespersons lean towards ELT AS PROFESSION, or ELT AS BUSINESS.

This chapter concludes with **Participants 19 and 20** identifying the practice of deregulation (Section 7.5.3), their perceived, root cause of Irish-based ELT difficulties, as requiring urgent attention. Repetition of strong, deontic modality witnessed in Chapter 6 resurfaces with ‘have to’, as does health-related metaphor. As expressed at the conclusion of Chapter 6, there is a hopeful evaluation of the sector, ‘it’, referencing the pandemic as ‘an ill wind’: a bad situation that nonetheless must bring some good results (Cambridge Dictionary Press 2024b):

### **Extract 7.62**

**FG11-19:** 19: ...it may BE that, ah **it’s it’s an ill wind** that maybe the whole sector would be, have to re- , **it WILL** have to be readapted

**FG11-20:** **it WILL** have to!

**FG11-19:** and **it it MAY** emerge from the ashes i- in a **HEALTHIER STATE**

As in Chapter 6 (Section 6.5), an unhealthy, neoliberal ECONOMIC MODEL AS DISEASE metaphor afflicts the Irish ELT sector in this final exchange. It is once more perceived as being in need of treatment if it is to aspire to higher, workplace standards, and emerge, phoenix-like, as a transformed, ‘HEALTHIER’ entity.

A chapter synopsis now follows.

## **7.8 Summary and Conclusions**

The findings from the primary theme of this chapter, ELT AS BUSINESS, lend credence to claims of substandard work practices within many privately-run, Irish ELT schools which have circulated in an anecdotal capacity for decades (see Chapter 1, 1.2-1.3), with empirical survey evidence and corpus-assisted, thematic analysis of the focus group data supporting teacher-participant, lived experiences.

Examination of the pronoun ‘it’ principally referenced ELT as a sector, or an individual school, with additional use of ‘it’ quantifying money and business-related issues, especially in terms of payment. ‘They’ largely referred to those in sectoral power, such

as school operators or policy makers, yet sometimes alluded to students, or teachers themselves, as interviewees commented on the impact of work conditions. ‘We’ appeared in a far more diminished capacity than ‘they’ in this chapter, suggesting distancing and less solidarity than was observed in Chapter 6. The pronoun ‘you’, in combinations with the cluster ‘you know’, highlighted shared knowledge of accepted, ‘common-sense’, sector work practices that participants identified throughout, with opinions and evaluations expressed through metaphors and idiomatic phrases consistently evoking ELT AS BUSINESS.

Older, more experienced teachers expressed greater empowerment in negotiating better work conditions with school employers, many stressing the demands teaching placed upon them. Irrespective, absence of union representation, as discussed in Chapter 6 (6.5), coupled with deregulatory practices, meant limited leverage in this regard. To counter, younger teachers favoured supplementing ELT work with other income streams in a dominant TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR metaphor, choosing individualism over collective action. TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR was particularly acute among male and female teachers in their twenties and thirties, empowering and disempowering in equal measure owing to the precarity of “the largely deregulated global commercial [ELT] sector” (Gray and Block 2012, p. 133).

Work conditions experienced abroad were identified as better, and more empowering for the teachers throughout this chapter. Similar to the thematic exploration of fate influencing ELT AS PATH in Chapter 5, when Irish work conditions were favourable, it was perceived as due to good fortune, especially among younger, less experienced male and female teachers, rather than an entitlement as a highly-qualified professional in a regulated profession. On long-term plans, many wanted to remain in ELT, but precarity-related issues raised concern, in particular regarding hourly pay rates, lack of pension, lack of sick pay prior to pandemic-instigated legislation enshrining same, and sudden school closure. Use of ‘like’ as a hedging device was noted in mitigating directness on these issues, particularly among younger, less experienced male and female teachers irrespective of nationality, when criticizing the sector. ‘Like’ appeared to function as a bonding device among interview participants when discussing sensitive topics such as pay-rates, coinciding with empowering, metaphorical references to GOOD IS UP.

From the perspective of political economy, the “language edutourism” (Yarymowich 2005; Heller 2010, p. 109) model embraced by ELT AS BUSINESS in Ireland has aligned itself strongly to dominant, neoliberal ideology, incorporating practices which strongly favour school owners, but potentially disempower teachers. This disregards them as true stakeholders (UNITE ELT Branch 2020b). Subscribing to such has created a culture which markets English as a commodity to prioritised student customers, yet, in many instances, reduces Irish ELT teachers to mere service providers, undermining their academic and pedagogical credentials, and heavy teacher workload. This diminished ELT AS PROFESSION, and proved disempowering for many participants, especially middle-aged ones, the majority of whom were career ELT teachers by choice.

Lastly, many of these teachers expressed paying the price of precarity for administrative incompetence on the part of their school operators. This materialised in ELT SCHOOL AS SINKING SHIP and building-related metaphors, implying instability in short-sighted business models. Teachers perceived these as instigated by school owners to suit their own financial ends in the promotion and pursuit of LANGUAGE AS COMMODITY, leading to high levels of teacher precarity in the event of school closure. Evaluations of rigid adherence to neoliberal ideology were given, resulting in disempowering, below-par workplace practices as lived experience by many among this cohort, with entitlements left to employer benevolence, a consequence of ongoing, sector deregulation. Identified substandard practices included lack of redundancy or holiday payment, non-payment for preparatory work, non-compliance with tax payment, and over-reliance on single-nationality student markets. Whilst many of these practices are perfectly legal in an Irish context, they have compounded a disempowering TEACHER AS SERVICE PROVIDER role (Gray and Block 2012) for these ELT practitioners, deliberately excluded from policy-making dialogue (see Chapter 6, 6.5). This has disadvantaged many teachers as ELT AS BUSINESS cancels out all attempts to emulate ELT AS PROFESSION, irrespective of age, gender or years’ experience, consistent with summary findings in Chapter 6.

The final, primary theme of this study centred around how teachers described themselves and fellow ELT teachers, as well as what views they felt wider society held of them. This revealed unexpected themes of teacher identity in the final analysis Chapter 8, with exploration of related perceptions and evaluations.

## **Chapter 8 Analysis of Data Theme 4:**

### **Themes of Identity: Self- and societal perceptions of ELT teachers**

#### **8.0 Introduction**

Given the considerable and extensive prior inquiry into the theme of teacher identity (Chapter 2, 2.0), it had not been this study's original intention to investigate this area. Irrespective, Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA) reveals surprises. Lawless and Chen (2019, p. 102) acknowledge how recurring themes will often present contradictions. They hence encourage "leaning into" anomalies as a helpful means of gaining insight into how dominant ideologies, often realised metaphorically, "reinforce and reinscribe one another" (ibid; Deignan 2005, pp. 23-24). Examples lay in how teachers were observed to be "quite cognizant" of the manner in which ideologies negatively impacted their work conditions, while others "wilfully submitted to inequitable systems that influenced their daily lives" (Lawless and Chen 2019, p. 103). The revelation of TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR in Chapter 7 (7.6) was a clear case of this, an unexpected, yet dominant teacher identity to which the younger participant cohort subscribed, over activism, as a preferred antidote to substandard ELT work practices.

Experiences revealed in interview settings can identify not only commonality, but marginalisation among participants, underlining the need for a critical approach in data analysis. However, CTA aims less to identify individuals who may be unaware of recognizing their own disadvantaged positions, and more to reveal broader ideologies influencing communication, developing "a critical consciousness of the everyday social practices that can be improved" (Lawless and Chen 2019, pp. 103-104). This aligns with the key aim not only of this chapter, but of the entire study: exploring teacher positionalities within Irish-based ELT workplaces. In examining the perceptions that participants held of other teachers, as well as those held by members of society towards ELT teachers, the corpus-assisted, CTA and Metaphor Analysis revealed unanticipated examples of teacher identity of both a conventional and novel nature, warranting their own distinct, chapter focus. The chapter's principle, linguistic items of investigation are now given more comprehensive outline.

## 8.1 Language focus

This final analysis chapter conducts its investigation primarily through pronouns ‘I’ in the cluster ‘I think’, and ‘you’ in the cluster ‘you know’. In addition, the quantifier ‘a lot of’ will be explored.

Personal pronouns are integral to how speakers create identity of ‘self’ and ‘other’ for hearers and/or other third parties (Clancy 2016, pp. 101-102). The pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’ rank highly in spoken data as indicators of overall orientation to the speaker-listener world (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, pp. 32-39). In both intimate and workplace discourse, however, speakers also use personal pronouns to “primarily orientate themselves” to key discourse stakeholders who may not be physically present, but invoked (Clancy 2016, pp. 103-104). This accounted for uses of ‘they’, for example, in Chapters 6 and 7 to describe school operators, policy makers, students, and sometimes when teachers referred to peers. In this chapter, ‘I’ and ‘you’ are the primary foci (see Table 8.1), with occasional reference to ‘we’ in certain extracts. Although ‘I’ and ‘you’ commonly feature across different spoken corpora at different frequencies, a “ubiquitous” pattern of greater, first-person pronoun ‘I’ frequency may be observed (Clancy 2016, p. 102). Table 8.1 demonstrates ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘we’ frequencies across the corpora used in this study. For this chapter, the primary ‘I’ focus lies in the two-word, *Sketch Engine* identified ‘I think’.

	SaFGELT	C-MELT	LCIE
<i>I</i>	2,954	1,828	3,039
<i>you</i>	2,130	1,341	2,651
<i>we</i>	538	1,000	776

**Table 8.1:** The frequency of occurrence of personal pronouns ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘we’ across three corpora, SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE (normalised per 100,000 words).

### 8.1.1 The cluster ‘I think’

Responses throughout this chapter see themes relating to self, and societal perceptions of ELT teachers emerge principally, but not exclusively, through application of the cluster, or n-gram, ‘I think’. For variation, both terms are applied. In representations of workplace talk (e.g., the 2006 ABOT corpus by Koester), the epistemic modal item ‘think’ lies among the most frequent of lexico-grammatical markers (Koester 2006, p. 77). Table 8.2 sees this replicated in SaFGELT, ‘I think’ being its third most frequent, two-word n-gram (highlighted yellow).

N	2-word n-grams for SaFGELT corpus	Frequency
1.	you know	1101
2.	and I	496
3.	I think	473
4.	I was	448
5.	in the	404
6.	don't	392
7.	it was	366
8.	kind of	349
9.	to be	318
10.	of the	318
11.	I do	288
12.	if you	233
13.	and then	226
14.	a lot	211
15.	so I	206
16.	but I	201
17.	as a	198
18.	and it	197
19.	at the	186
20.	as well	184
21.	have to	183
22.	I I	182
23.	to do	174
24.	I know	174
25.	I have	173

**Table 8.2: Two-word n-grams for SaFGELT.**

‘I think’ is not essential to communicate a speaker’s message, but downtones utterances when employed (Koester 2006, pp. 59-65). Similar hedging includes prefacing a response with ‘actually’ (Brown and Levinson 1987), the use of epistemic modals (e.g., ‘could’) and use of the past tense (‘I thought’, ‘I was thinking’, ‘I was wondering’; ‘I just wanted to tell you...’). Such past application of ‘want’ for hedging was not observed in SaFGELT. Chapter 5 uncovered ‘I want/wanted’ expressing themes relating to desiderative function: desire to do something oneself or, as seen in incidents of ‘you want’, what was desired of another, in reference to the pursuit of teaching.

Lexical status aside, ‘think’ most frequently performs ‘true’ epistemic, modal functions (Lyons 1977, p. 797), expressing degrees of certainty in how speakers commit to, or detach themselves from propositions (e.g., I don’t think she’s here). While ‘think’ often frequents collaborative genres, it also demonstrates subjective orientation in relational

expression of solidarity and affect (Koester 2006, pp. 80-83). ‘Think’ can operate on a deontic level, concerned with “necessity or possibility of acts performed” (Lyons 1977, p. 823). In such instances, ‘think’ allows speakers to express what they believe to be desirable, especially where judgements are called upon (Koester 2006, pp. 78-84). In expression of stance, using ‘I think’ to preface appraisals acts as a hedging, face-saving, pragmatic marker, downtoning utterance forcefulness (Lakoff 1973; Brown and Levinson 1987; Çopur, Atar and Walsh 2021, p. 289). Carter and McCarthy (2006, p. 223) note the care speakers take in trying not to sound “too blunt or assertive”. This study actively encouraged teacher responses to set questions seeking honest evaluations about their status within Irish-based ELT, accounting for high position of references to ‘think’ in SaFGELT. More is at stake in some contexts than others, thus “some situations demand more hedging” (O’Keeffe *et al.* 2007, p. 174).

In this chapter, ‘I think’ frames how teachers perceived themselves and believed how society perceived them, i.e., how sector outsiders positioned them within the wider, teaching profession. Of significance is how ‘I think’ co-occurs with *that*-clauses (Biber, Conrad and Reppen 1998, p. 11), visible in the SaFGELT three-word n-gram list, where ‘I think that’ lies in position 6 (Table 8.3). The ubiquity of ‘I think’ combinations across corpora is evident (Table 8.3, highlighted yellow), presenting no fewer than five times in the SaFGELT list (‘I think it’/ ‘I think that’ / ‘don’t think’ / ‘I don’t think’ / ‘and I think’).

3-word n-grams			
N	SaFGELT	C-MELT	LCIE
1.	I don't	I don't	I don't
2.	a lot of	don't know	don't know
3.	don't know	<b>I think that</b>	I don't know
4.	and I was	I don't know	I didn't
5.	<b>I think it</b>	a lot of	a lot of
6.	<b>I think that</b>	<b>I think it</b>	isn't it
7.	do you know	a little bit	<b>don't think</b>
8.	you don't	at the end	<b>I don't think</b>
9.	at the moment	<b>I think we</b>	I can't
10.	one of the	I mean I	I wouldn't
11.	I don't know	<b>don't think</b>	you don't
12.	<b>don't think</b>	the end of	you know what
13.	<b>I don't think</b>	they have to	know what I
14.	it was a	don't have	going to be
15.	<b>and I think</b>	they don't	<b>I think it</b>

16. I didn't	in terms of	you have to
17. you have to	you have to	do you know
18. English language teaching	kind of a	what I mean
19. I was like	we don't	I think that
20. Director of Studies	and I think	you want to
21. they don't	have to do	you know the
22. laughs out loud	going to be	one of the
23. a little bit	have to pay	know what I
24. I can't	you want to	and I was
25. you know what	I didn't	n't know what

**Table 8.3: Comparative 3-word n-gram list for the three corpora SaFGELT, C-MELT and LCIE.**

Because 'think' straddles two modal spheres, its high position in the SaFGELT two and three-word n-gram lists in Tables 8.2 and 8.3 prompted investigation into how teachers used it. Replies meant likelihood of evaluative adjectives presenting in combinations with 'think'. This was critical in examining demonstrations of affective stance (Biber and Finegan 1989), particularly when participants gave self-descriptions, expressed evaluations of fellow teachers, and societal perceptions of them.

### 8.1.2 The cluster 'you know'

In addition and as in previous chapters, 'you' receives examination in this chapter specifically in the two-word n-gram 'you know' (position number 1, highlighted green in Table 8.4), indicating shared, 'common sense' knowledge of ELT features under discussion. 'We' features in certain extracts, serving a similar, shared understanding function (Clancy 2016, p. 104).

N	2-word n-grams for SaFGELT corpus	Frequency
1.	you know	1101
2.	and I	496
3.	I think	473
4.	I was	448
5.	in the	404
6.	don't	392
7.	it was	366
8.	kind of	349
9.	to be	318
10.	of the	318

11. I do	288
12. if you	233
13. and then	226
14. a lot	211
15. so I	206
16. but I	201
17. as a	198
18. and it	197
19. at the	186
20. as well	184
21. have to	183
22. I I	182
23. to do	174
24. I know	174
25. I have	173

**Table 8.4: Two-word n-grams for SaFGELT demonstrating number one position of ‘you know’.**

Added to this are approximators such as ‘a bit’ or ‘sort of’ (Prince *et al.* 1982, pp. 85-86). In particular, the combination ‘a lot of ’ receives close discussion in how it presented in SaFGELT (Section 8.1.3). Use of approximation means speakers become less precise and more approximate (or vague) in their communication, through adverb and preposition use: e.g., ‘around 6pm’, ‘in roughly seven hours’, ‘about two minutes ago’, ‘a couple of’, or through [conjunction + noun phrase] vague category marker combinations (VCMs) in clause-final positions: ‘and that sort/kind of thing’, ‘and so on and so forth’ (Carter and McCarthy 2006, pp. 203-205; Walsh, O’Keeffe and McCarthy 2008). Adopting such linguistic devices assumes a shared knowledge of events with their hearers, thus helps speakers seem less pedantic in discourse delivery (Carter and McCarthy, *ibid.*). VCMs serve relational functions in reinforcing close personal bonds, as speakers hold certain expectations of what interlocutors already know about topics. These markers create short cuts (Evison *et al.* 2007), reflecting common terminology teachers recognise as a cohesive, workplace community (Vaughan 2009). However, whether VCM use diverted uncomfortable conversations, tricky topics, and ‘common-sense’, oft-unspoken situations required investigation.

### 8.1.3 The cluster ‘a lot of people’

Added to CL identification of ‘I think’ and ‘you know’ as significant linguistic items was the two-word ‘a lot’, appearing in Table 8.4 in position 14, and re-appearing in the three-

word ‘a lot of ’ (position 2 in Table 8.3). As a four-word cluster or n-gram, ‘a lot of people’ presents in position 17 (Table 8.5, highlighted red). Investigation of such longer cluster-combinations is recommended to allow in-depth, colligative and collocative pattern exploration (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, p. 45).

N	4-5 word n-gram clusters for SaFGELT	Frequency
1.	I do n't know	53
2.	I do n't think	52
3.	know what I mean	28
4.	at the end of	23
5.	you know what I	22
6.	you know what I mean	21
7.	and I was like	17
8.	an English language teacher	17
9.	a lot of the	17
10.	the end of the	16
11.	in English language teaching	16
12.	did you decide to	16
13.	decide to work in	15
14.	to be able to	15
15.	you have to be	14
16.	it as a profession	14
17.	a lot of people	14
18.	at the end of the	14
19.	can I ask you	14
20.	don't want to	14
21.	for a long time	13
22.	yourself as a professional	13
23.	your longer-term career plans	13
24.	do you know what	13
25.	it was it was	13

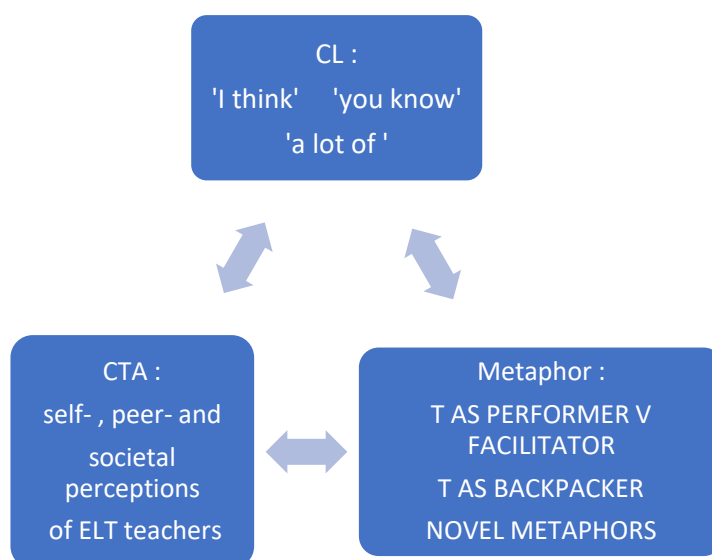
**Table 8.5: Frequency list of 4-5 word, n-gram clusters for SaFGELT.**

Concordance lines from SaFGELT demonstrate the same combination ‘a lot of people’ in Figure 8.1:

44	☐	🔍	doc#0	) you know?</s><s>(6: but t- to be honest, I'm there as well, like I said	a lot of	good things about the school and that, but THE SCHOOL IS NOT THE
45	☐	🔍	doc#0	:e some money well it seems to be open up a school, but even at that,	a lot of	the schools are struggling (5: yeah) 1:39:00.15.5. but if like if you DO t
46	☐	🔍	doc#0	eah) but you make good money in a place like Sydney, you will spend	a lot of	money as well 10:07.73.8: it's like Dublin, you make €25 an hour...but
47	☐	🔍	doc#0	s tests, and get into the courses they want, it's very rewarding, there's	a lot of	...and I think there are very few jobs that you can really see THAT YOU
48	☐	🔍	doc#0	can say that...it's not stressful... yeah, it's stressful that we don't have	a lot of	money, it's stressful that it's maybe not as secure as we would like, bu
49	☐	🔍	doc#0	of parents and intrinsic motivation of adulthood so don't care, but have	a lot of	energy and are a lot of fun; a mixed-nationality group of smart teens cr
50	☐	🔍	doc#0	motivation of adulthood so don't care, but have a lot of energy and are	a lot of	fun; a mixed-nationality group of smart teens can be a joy, there's a ter
51	☐	🔍	doc#0	at was fun</s><s>([laughs]) that was fun but I (int: right) to be honest	a lot of	them were just there, put there after they'd gone through C1 and that v
52	☐	🔍	doc#0	a professional, I'm not sure that (8: the world sees you as such) I think	a lot of	people still see...there are people see the job as something that peopl
53	☐	🔍	doc#0	ah, they're like 'Oh yeah, Int: in your experience, yeah?) 1:01:25.51.7:	a lot of	people, I think their exper- their exposure to...ehm...</s><s>TEFL teac
54	☐	🔍	doc#0	:><s>[laughs] and a drinking problem</s><s>Here I am!) so yes, so a	a lot of	people ehm not that they haven't heard of it but like when you mention
55	☐	🔍	doc#0	:>never met anyone who [unclear] but ahm I think yeah maybe people	a lot of	people in the...the industry itself...probably feel that way...think we're €
56	☐	🔍	doc#0	I</s><s>It's their PROFESSIONI) well most schools you go to you get	a lot of	people who have NO INTENTION of their being there (8: in six months
57	☐	🔍	doc#0	think then you know...if you're any bit of a daycent teacher you've put	a lot of	time and energy in, you try to stay up-to-date on what you're doing y
58	☐	🔍	doc#0	nd then they know it...they've learned something whereas I would say	a lot of	teaching is just telling people to memorise that...which is (8: NOT what
59	☐	🔍	doc#0	lways been interested in it, you know, and I say that when we were, at	a lot of	the schools in London, we had a lot of children there from who didn't I
60	☐	🔍	doc#0	nd I say that when we were, at a lot of the schools in London, we had	a lot of	children there from who didn't have English coming in to us, they migh
61	☐	🔍	doc#0	mm) you know, background, so they didn't have English, so we spent	a lot of	time not, hadn't really any training that, you know, putting words up an

**Figure 8.1: Concordance lines for the phrase ‘a lot of’ show clear examples of combinations with ‘a lot of people’, outlining perceptions of teachers held by themselves and others.**

With ‘I think’, ‘you know’ and ‘a lot of people’ as corpus-assisted entry items, a breakdown of this chapter’s thematic and metaphorical findings can thus be CTA mapped in Figure 8.2.



**Figure 8.2: Synthesis of CL, CTA and Metaphor Analysis as the three study methodologies in this chapter exploration of themes of ELT teacher identity.**

Analysis of responses regarding teacher attributes saw re-emergence of the theme of travel detailed in Chapter 5 (5.3.2), references to passion for ELT, consistent with Chapter 5 revelations of wanting to teach (5.3.1), and personability; all are detailed in Section 8.2. Further responses saw three, broad subthemes emerge that tied directly to teacher identity. The first, on self-perceptions, saw a TEACHER AS PERFORMER versus TEACHER AS FACILITATOR distinction, dividing teachers by age, gender and level of experience, explored in Section 8.3.2. The second subtheme surrounded perceptions and evaluations

participants held of fellow ELT teachers, in which, among others, TEACHER AS BACKPACKER re-emerged, examined in Section 8.4. The final subtheme focused on how teachers believed society perceived them and ELT as a sector, revealing pejorative evaluations which Section 8.5 investigates.

In this final analysis chapter, therefore, examination of the items ‘I think’, ‘you know’, and ‘a lot of’ synergised the study methodologies in Figure 8.2. As in the previous three analysis chapters, survey data complement findings throughout. First examined are what participants considered common-denominator attributes displayed by a professional ELT teacher.

## 8.2 ‘I think’ to describe perceived attributes of a professional ELT teacher

Participants were observed to have used ‘I think’ in prefacing expressions of stance in responses to the question *What, in your opinion, are the typical attributes of a professional ELT teacher?* The extent to which ‘I think’ was used to mitigate directness, act as a face-saving device, express uncertainty, and diminish assertion offered indication as to how empowered or disempowered participants felt, and was noted in multiple responses. In acts of mitigation, ‘I think’ was more prevalent among younger, and more novice teachers, as in 28-year-old **Participant 23**’s response to the question of typical, ELT teacher attributes. A male with just four years’ teaching experience, he offered this tentative reply when considering his professional status:

### Extract 8.1

**FG14-23:** ahh, I would, [laughs] ahmm [laughs nervously] ....**I think** that, **I think** that ahmm.....**I think** that ahhh you know having that innate kind of...(1.5 sec)..ahm SOCIAL skill, perhaps? Ah of knowing knowing who is who and being able to understand your students very well, is something that I would say that I’m very good at...ahm it’s something that’s very hard as well.....you can’t please everyone....every lesson...sooo ah I would I would view myself as a professional...in...in..what I have, the attributes that I extend, ahm but you know, that’s my perspective! [laughs]

**Participant 23** regards social intelligence as a typical teacher-trait, yet prefaces responses with repeated use of ‘I think’ and ‘I would say’, finishing with ‘you know, that’s my perspective’. By downtoning his directness, there is an almost apologetic tone to his statement of professionalism, an insecurity of identity which Section 8.5 explores, and offers reasons for. **Participant 8**, a middle-aged, more experienced female teacher in **Focus Group 4**, extends this theme of social intelligence being a key attribute. She applies ‘I think’ to evaluate it as the most essential teacher asset for effective ELT delivery:

### **Extract 8.2**

**FG4-8:** if you’re...SOCIALLY sort of intelligent you invest in them and you care that they improve... so **I really think** it, it keeps ya honest, it keeps you on the ball and it keeps you tryin’ all every time...(FG4-7: mm-huh) not just tryin’ for a while or tryin’ on the day that you’re being observed... it keeps you trying to make the effort to make it, to make things...ehm....GOOD for them, cos you actually give quite [unclear] you know, being interested in them....just seeing how they’re getting on **I think**.....but you can’t teach that **I think**

Alongside commitment to one’s students (‘they/them’), the suggestion that concern for student welfare is innate highlights the authenticity and earnest effort which the ELT teacher role requires, apparent in repetition of ‘tryin’, and the expression ‘on the ball’, a sport-related idiom meaning “quick to understand and react” (McCarthy and O’Dell 2002, p. 78). Of note is proliferation of **Participant 8’s** pronoun choice ‘you’. Explicit language used in an account (i.e., report of an experience) exemplifies more direct type of exchange, the opposite of vague language, which characteristically delivers stance neutrality (Thomas 1984; Firth 1995; Koester 2006, pp. 125-128). This offers more direct address, which she chooses to mitigate with repeated use of ‘I think’. It also demonstrates her previous, teacher-trainer role, in which ‘you’ would most likely have been used to give trainees immediate feedback and guidance (Clancy 2016, p. 102), and where she would have learned that social intelligence cannot be taught. Personability, and the commitment level discussed in **Extract 8.1** are reiterated, shared knowledge of which is reflected in ‘you know’. This mirrors Rogers and Frelberg’s (1994) and Scrivener’s (2011, p. 17) identification of respect, empathy and authenticity as three core, humanistic teacher characteristics that create effective learning environments. Combined, they

compose rapport, “you and your moment-by-moment relationship” with others (Scrivener 2011, p. 15). For **Participant 8**, sincerity cannot be book-taught.

The innate social intelligence expressed in **Extracts 8.1 and 8.2** is next deemed abundant in the Irish as a race. In giving accounts, speakers who perceive themselves to be in less powerful roles may often be forceful (Koester 2006, p. 128). This can be visible in the use of direct, metapragmatic comments (Thomas 1984, p. 227). In **Focus Group 13**, **Participant 22** uses ‘I think’ in evaluations of the Irish, ‘we’, as a people gifted not only with social intelligence, but a considerable language-acquisition aptitude which transfers to ELT teachers located here, himself included:

### **Extract 8.3**

**FG13-22:** ...you often, say, hear people saying that we’re very bad at languages but **I think** this is based on our experience with the Irish language and...ah, trauma there...but **I actually think** that Irish people have all of the necessary prerequisites that it takes to be good with language, we’re emotionally intelligent, we’re musical, we’re observant, we’re ehm and we’re we’re quite good listeners, and we are ah community-oriented, so, I mean **I think** from n-, seeing how I absorbed Spanish so quickly in Latin America in a, in an environment where I didn’t feel the pressure of having to learn, and where a sense of humour was was, was always, appreciated

**Participant 22’s** use of ‘we’ builds a sense of solidarity among the Irish as a language-learning race, while mention of humour acknowledges the role this feature plays not only in building solidarity, but in resisting power (Vaughan 2009). This is power of a kind that prescriptive, traditional approaches to ‘having to learn’ languages can impose. ‘We’ combines with his ‘I think’ use to downtone assertions, in this case, against dominant, ‘common sense’ beliefs that the Irish, now a predominantly, native-English speaking race (see Chapter 1, 1.1) have poor language-learning skills (e.g., McCabe 2013; Lanvers 2023).

**Participant 10**, a senior, experienced female teacher, makes a single use of ‘I think’ to downtown her more direct evaluations of typical teacher attributes. Describing the student-teacher relationship in **Focus Group 5**, she evokes shared knowledge, through

‘you know’, of the fact that every effective teacher must also be a learner, with commitment to prioritising the teacher-student bond:

#### **Extract 8.4**

**FG5-10: I think** one of the things that they have to have...is...an affinity with different cultures.....annnd.....be willing....to learn as well as teach...you know, you learn about each other individually personally...it’s a confidential thing, it stays in the classroom

Native and non-native teachers alike stress authenticity, self-identifying through friendliness, and their own nationality (Curran and Jenks 2022, p. 13). In combining identities as diverse as being a learner, a cultural bridge, and a student confidante, **Participant 10**’s use of ‘I think’ and ‘you know’ demonstrate a confluence of all three as conducive to creating the environment, and enthusiasm, for what positive outcomes are produced in her classroom.

A final example of what participants considered typical, ELT teacher attributes included acquired expertise, specifically in helping students to decipher language systems. Whilst ‘I don’t think’ displayed far lower frequency than ‘I think’ in SaFGELT, (position 13 in the three-word cluster list, Section 8.1, Table 8.3), it nonetheless surfaced in certain extracts. For example, male **Participants 5** and **6** in **Focus Group 5**, in their thirties, discussed an ELT grammar lesson, from which an emergent, engineering metaphor for teaching concurred with Pollard’s (2019, pp. 12-13). Their pedagogic strengths in facilitating student grammar acquisition are measured in ‘I don’t think’/‘I think’ use, their adopted modality expressing personal conviction of evolving professionalism (Stubbs 1986, p. 1):

#### **Extract 8.5**

**FG3-5:** I loved English in school and...it was right up my street to be working in English language, and I liked as well that I was learning on the job, so....I was not a grammarian when I started, ah, teaching English

**FG3-6:** NOBODY is **I don’t think**

**FG3-5:** and I would say now, big time I'm into the **engineering** of the language (**FG3-6: SAME**) I'm very interested in the **nuts and bolts** of it, yeah.....And it's, it's... like my [family member]'s an **engineer**, and I find now, my English language work is very much...**engineering** in terms of grammar.....it took, took me a long time to get there, I wouldn't say...I would say it took me about eight or nine years to really...stamp out the idea that you can, or not stamp out but to oppose the idea that you can just pick up English by goin' to movies and chatting with your friends and goin' to the pubs and, ah, that's an idea that teachers do, spread around as well, as students, and **I, I think**....I might have caught myself sayin' it a few times in my earlier years cos I didn't want to be bothered getting into, what I thought was the boring **nuts and bolts** of the language

**FG3-6:** Grammar is FUN, when, when youuu

**FG3-5:** when you dig it

**Participant 5** employs 'I think' and 'I would say' to hedge revelations of liking grammar, something that perhaps not all people readily admit to. His focus group partner, **Participant 6**, offers a direct evaluation in support of **Participant 5's** admission of not having had an in-depth knowledge of grammar prior to coming to ELT: 'NOBODY is I don't think'. **Participant 5** perceives this imparting of the mechanics of English as an integral part of his unique, ELT-teacher expertise, perfected over years in the same way as an engineer acquires their skill-base, transforming his previously negative attitude towards grammar. His focus group partner appreciates that teacher mastery of 'the nuts and bolts' of language is a destination reached over time, yet enjoyable and empowering. This shared TEACHER AS ENGINEER identity (Pollard 2019) is one that both relate to, nevertheless mitigated with 'I think'.

In brief, when asked about typical, ELT-teacher characteristics, participant responses containing the corpus-identified term 'I think' revealed specific themes, and mitigated direct evaluations of core traits of personability and commitment to students. Two younger males applied 'I think' as they identified strongly with an active TEACHER AS ENGINEER role in imparting knowledge on English grammar. In addition, two-word n-gram 'you know' was used by one teacher-trainer and a more senior teacher for similar



This enabled broader outline descriptions of typical teacher traits, whereby participants used ‘I think’ in offering self-perceptions of their day-to-day, active, ELT-professional contribution. In these accounts, the noun-form ‘people’ played a part, either as a single-noun item, or in combinations with the corpus-identified, three-word cluster ‘a lot of’ (Section 8.1.3). It permitted self-evaluation and self-examination of teachers’ professional status, next explored.

### 8.3 Perceptions held by ELT teachers of their professional status

‘I think’, ‘a lot of’ and the single-item ‘people’ were significant linguistic items in emergent themes of professional identity, and tallied with 59 survey responses to the question *Do you regard yourself as a professional?* (Figure 8.4). In total, 47 teachers (79.66%) recorded ‘Definitely yes’, and 6 (10.17%) ‘Probably yes’, meaning 53 out of 59 teacher respondents self-identified as professionals within Irish ELT. 4 (6.78%) were undecided, responding ‘Might or might not’, while 2 (3.9%) replied ‘Probably not’; not a single respondent replied ‘Definitely not’.

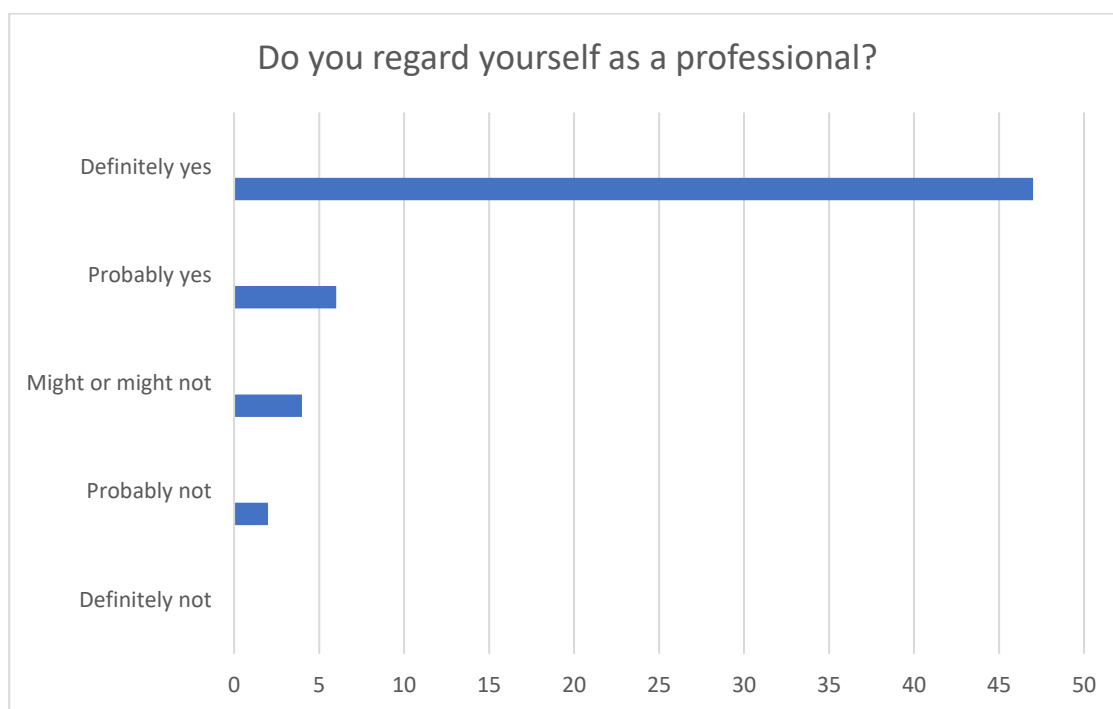


Figure 8.4: Survey response breakdown to the question ‘Do you regard yourself as a professional?’

That 90% of respondents replied in the affirmative demonstrated self-assuredness in their professional identity, reservations expressed by relatively few. Irrespective of age, gender or experience level, these teachers overwhelmingly self-identified as professionals,

implying they shared the same sets of concerns in their day-to-day experiences, were dedicated to their work, and took it seriously (Farrell 2011, pp. 58-61). How this played out linguistically through use of ‘I think’, ‘a lot of’ and ‘people’ in related CTA and metaphor themes, is thus next examined.

### 8.3.1 How teachers perceived the contribution they make to ELT

The impact of ELT teacher professional input, and its positive contribution on the lives of others, was once more represented in clusters ‘I think’, ‘a lot of’ and the single word ‘people’. In cases, all three presented in the same extract. In **Focus Group 4**, these items emphasised the student-centred focus displayed in Section 8.2. **Participant 8** underlines commitment to students, equated with ‘people’, and their success through recurrence of ‘helping’, repetition of and enforcement on ‘rewarding’, and enforcement on the idiomatic ‘make an impact on’:

#### **Extract 8.6**

**FG4-8:** you’re helping **people**, there’s job satisfaction, you know, you’re not doing something and thinking, ‘This is futile’..... IT’S REALLY REWARDING ... and of course you’re not responsible for ALL of, that, but you’re responsible for a LITTLE BIT OF IT...and that’s...or when you see them pass tests, and get into the courses they want, it’s very rewarding, there’s **a lot of**...and **I think** there are very few jobs that you can really see THAT YOU’VE MADE AN IMPACT...on somebody’s life, in quite a short time

**Participant 8** mitigates the directness of her assertions on the direct and unique role played by ELT teachers in multiple ways. This is indicated by ‘a lot of’ in clause-final position, with ‘I think’ linked by conjunction ‘and’ to hedge her conviction of positive ELT teacher contribution to students’ lives. Her views lie in stark contrast to societal perceptions portrayed of ELT teachers in Section 8.5, and may account for **Participant 8**’s feeling a need to downtone her claims. Similarly, **Participant 16** in **Focus Group 9**, uses ‘I think’, ‘a lot of’ and ‘people’ to outline how this student contact extends beyond classroom boundaries, making a valuable, social contribution, particularly in Central America:

### Extract 8.7

**FG9-16:** the majority of **people I think** want to learn English because it's a, it's for career prospects, the reality of it is, if you have English in the majority of Third World countries especially, your, your earning, your chances of earning money, are exponentially higher.....if you want to work in the ESL industry, now that is not everywhere, but in the majority of places, ahhm you have to be highly-trained, and the majority of places expect at least a degree, if not a Master's, ahm, so yeah, from that point of view definitely, you can't just, just anybody, any person can do it, but as well as that, it's ahm...a you you invest **a lot of** yourself in it because, ah ahm because you want to see other **people** improve ..ah if you if you're a good teacher, you actually care about your job, you're.. it's it's something that you, you invest ahm **a lot of** personal energy in and it's something that, that also helps other **people** to improve their lives

In use of 'I think', **Participant 16** raises the uncomfortable reality of the LANGUAGE AS COMMODITY status of English examined throughout Chapters 6 and 7, where mastery of English is viewed as a powerful asset in her developing-world location. Imparting of ELT knowledge, through the teacher's expertise and labour, is expressed in terms of the verb 'invest'. 'A lot of' combinations with 'yourself' / 'personal energy' intensify LANGUAGE AS COMMODITY. Qualifications are required, plus willingness to give of oneself in a committed role, displaying the student-focused attributes discussed in Section 8.2. In addition, the certainty **Participant 16** offers of the professionalism required of and displayed by ELT teachers in **Extract 8.7** correlates closely with Chapter 5 survey findings (Section 5.3.3) of almost 70% of respondents holding postgraduate-level qualifications. Regardless, commitment to professionalism among teachers appeared inconsistent in one further extract. **Participants 7** and **8** in **Focus Group 4** describe how varying teacher attitudes to professionalism from school to school impact whether practitioners see themselves as career ELT teachers, particularly where greater teacher turnover happens:

## Extract 8.8

**FG4-7:** ...now, in our, our school, most...**I think** pretty much everyone there now is...treats it as a long-term thing

**FG4-8:** as a CAREER! It's their PROFESSION!

**FG4-7:** well most schools you go to you get **a lot of people** who have NO INTENTION of their being there (**FG4-8:** in six months' time) whether they have the intention or not, won't be, **people** will be doing something else completely in a year

'I think' mitigates the certainty of **Participant 7's** conviction that all of his teacher co-workers see their committed, ELT role as unwavering. Added to 'I think' is the item 'everyone', one which Pomerantz (1986, p. 220) identifies as an Extreme Case Formulation. This is a term speakers use in descriptions to convince hearers that "A state of affairs is...believable, obvious, compelling" (ibid). Synonymous with 'people', 'everyone' is mitigated by **Participant 7** with the vague expression 'pretty much', to describe prevalence of a practice, particularly what he, as the speaker, perceives as its correctness: "What 'everyone does' is the right way to behave" (Pomerantz 1986, p. 225). This is contrasted with what he perceives as the non-committal behaviour displayed in other schools by 'a lot of people', referencing other teachers, suggesting this is unprofessional, and undesirable.

In short, focus group responses in this section mirrored the positive affirmations of professionalism in survey responses to the question *Do you regard yourself as a professional?* (Figure 8.4). Justifications included holding relevant qualifications, again validated by survey responses in Chapter 5 (5.3.3). In addition, possessing skill-sets mastered over time, and prioritising the student in the ELT experience, meant teachers perceived their professionalism as helping to make a valuable contribution and difference to learners' lives. One male and one female teacher, both experienced, were emphatic in self-affirmation of professionalism, combining 'I think' with strong evaluative adverbs and adjectives, whilst a younger female teacher evoked a TEACHER AS EXPERT PRACTITIONER identity (e.g. Sfarid 1998; Pollard 2019, p. 66), in a LANGUAGE AS COMMODITY exchange demanding energy and commitment investment.

Further identities emerged from two separate focus groups, creating two distinct, overarching subthemes: a performance role, and a contrasting, more facilitatory one. Both focus groups differed in terms of gender, age profile and experience level, with what was disclosed about these teacher identities appearing to be in tension. How these discrete roles presented in ‘I think’ clusters, contributed to the process of student attainment of learning, and were evaluated by these two focus groups, is now explored.

### 8.3.2 TEACHER AS PERFORMER versus TEACHER AS FACILITATOR

Performance has been identified as a pivotal ELT role (Crouch 1989, p.107; Harmer 2007). Not all teachers perform in the same way, exercising “many different performance styles” as situations demand (Harmer 2007, pp. 112-113). A current ELT trend towards “fun and games” (Gray 2012, p. 107) is linked to marketisation, which insists students need lesson material that constantly entertains (ibid). While consistent with STUDENT AS CUSTOMER and LANGUAGE AS COMMODITY (Chapter 6, 6.3.2), disdain has nonetheless been levelled at the ‘entertainer’ role many ELT teachers aspire to in meeting ‘customer’ needs (Scrivener 2011, p. 16). Scrivener, for example, is critical of the “monologue” style of teachers who provide a “diverting hour...Being jokey, chatty and easy-going...”, concealing the fact that precious little learning has happened (2005, p. 24). Gray (2012) advocates for more traditional, transmission-based teaching where ‘jug and mug’ conduit metaphors prevail (see Chapter 3, 3.10). This accepts that despite active teacher effort and input, learning will not always happen, and defines the ELT teacher’s primary role as facilitatory, creating conditions which enable effective instruction (Walsh 2002, p. 5; Scrivener 2011, pp. 16-19). Crucial to fulfilling such roles is the quality of the teacher-student rapport (ibid, p.23). Good rapport requires an authenticity on the part of the practitioner (Houston 1990; Rogers and Frelberg 1994; Scrivener 2011, p. 15), a theme highlighted in multiple Section 8.2 extracts.

**Participant 6** conveyed a detailed TEACHER AS ENTERTAINER metaphor, identifying strongly with TEACHER AS PERFORMER. Tellingly, this ties in with descriptions of feedback forms (6.3.2), and outlines how being evaluated by students necessitated fulfilment of this role, as Chapter 6 cluster ‘have to’ re-emerged. Using ‘I think’ in unison with ‘have to’, he offers strong, evaluative stance in favour of the entertainer:

### Extract 8.9

**FG3-6:** Over time, you develop your own script, so like this is my third time in [level]...I know what my script is tomorrow, it's NOT WRITTEN DOWN anywhere, but I know exactly (**FG3-5:** oh it's SO TRUE!) yeah, I know exactly the jokes I'm gonna crack..... between the old style and the new style... and **I think**, we, we need to be...ahh... like the classes HAVE to be **ENTERTAINING**. The students have to come in and say at the end.. like ah, even today like I put a bit of effort into the class I did today...and when they left one, one of them, [student's name],...lovely...goes, 'That was a good one, like, [**FG3-5** laughs] that was a good class today!'

**Participant 6** embraces TEACHER AS PERFORMER. He likens himself to an actor, his 'lines' the various lesson phases. He alludes to both the Communicative Approach, 'the new style', and good planning, 'put a bit of effort into', crediting each with feeding into his pre-requisite, entertainer role. This he describes with conviction, in 'I know exactly'. 'I think' serves to mitigate the directness of modal verbs 'need to' and 'HAVE to', both underlining the strong obligation he feels to perform. Of interest is his switch from shared-understanding 'we'(Clancy 2016, p. 104), inclusive of fellow teachers, to a more distancing focus on 'the classes' in emphasising need for performance. For **Participant 6**, it is clear that being entertaining equates to his being professional. This performance role, nonetheless, has its hazards. It is subject to student scrutiny, as students are the ultimate judge of whether a lesson was satisfactory or not, like audience members at a show.

Acceptance of the performance role was also acknowledged by **Participant 15** in **Focus Group 8**, a female in her early thirties, whose repeated use of 'have to' stressed need for adherence to it. She admitted it was not one she personally aspired to, opting for an administrative position to escape performance. She evaluates with 'I think', distancing herself from active pursuit of the role in more detached, pronoun choices 'you':

### Extract 8.10

**FG8-15:** you have to be...**I think**...ahmm...(1 sec)...which is hard because maybe I'm, I'm not and maybe that's why I'm trying to veer away from that, you

have to be, comfortable..(1 sec)...putting on a show, all all the time..ahmm..which is what I found anyway, you kind of...you're trying to...(1 sec)...you're you're teaching but you're also **performing**, at the same time

**Participant 15** hedges her dislike of this perceived balancing act between active teaching and the performance role, 'putting on a show all the time', with 'kind of' and 'trying to'. Metaphors offer simplicity in more tacit frameworks of understanding, "conceptual osmosis" between every-day and more technical discourses (Sfard 1998, p. 4). To contrast TEACHER AS PERFORMER, Underhill (in Scrivener 2011, pp. 17-19) outlines three broad, teaching styles: the first entails explaining, the second requires involving and enabling, with the third more facilitatory. While many learning theories have proved transient, two have prevailed: learning as acquisition, and learning as participation. Learning as acquisition, a foundation metaphor on which national education systems rest (Pollard 2019, p. 66), sees emergence of TEACHER AS FACILITATOR OF KNOWLEDGE. This embodies the conduit metaphor, as knowledge is transferred to, and contained by learners (Sfard 1998, p. 5; Chapter 3, 3.10).

However, Harmer points out that "the aim of all committed teachers is to facilitate learning" (2007, p. 108-109), hence more apt examples under TEACHER AS FACILITATOR may better define this knowledge-transmission role. For instance, in many contexts TEACHER AS CONTROLLER is the role practitioners "are most comfortable with", i.e., giving explanations, lecturing, giving instructions, and making announcements (ibid). Harmer adds TEACHER AS PROMPTER, where students are 'nudged' forward "in a discreet and supportive way" (e.g., in role play), TEACHER AS PARTICIPANT where an active, non-domineering part is played in discussions, TEACHER AS RESOURCE who helps, but does not 'spoon-feed', and TEACHER AS TUTOR, for small group projects (ibid). Learning as active participation is a more contemporary construct (e.g., Wenger 1998), especially using new technologies and the "exponential" networking opportunities these provide, seeing TEACHER AS EXPERT PRACTITIONER (Sfard 1998; Pollard 2019, p. 66).

The enthusiasm shown for TEACHER AS PERFORMER by the younger males in **Focus Group 3** was again challenged in **Focus Group 5**. Two senior, female teachers, in their fifties and sixties respectively, acknowledged ELT requires certain unique personality types, yet not necessarily entertainers. **Participants 9** and **10** outline, through decisive

use of ‘I really believe’, and ‘I know’ added to ‘I think’, a preference for what is a clear TEACHER AS FACILITATOR identity distinction. This is co-built with ‘we’:

### **Extract 8.11**

**FG5-9:** I really believe this style of teaching does not suit every personality (**FG5-10:** no) it DOESN’T...I know as years ago, well [Director of School] said to me, you get the entertainers...you get the people who lead from the front... he said that you get the very popular teachers, great craic...but he said they’re not always the best teachers (**FG5-10:** no)

**FG5-10:** we have our books, we have our games, and I mean I use a lot of games in the classroom because...**I think** it’s, it’s great you know and as you say **we-we** believe in getting them to do it, **we** become the **facilitator** to guide

**FG5-9:** exactly yes, **I think** that’s probably the KEY WORD that **we** finally arrived at!

**FG5-10:** **facilitator**, yeah...and I LOVE IT!

‘Great craic’, an IrEng phrase meaning ‘a good time’ (Meehan 2015), alludes to the “fun and games” repertoire emulating TEACHER AS PERFORMER, yet disdained by Gray (2012, p. 107). **Participants 9** and **10** co-build a preferred, facilitatory ELT-teacher capacity. In **Extract 8.12**, through use of ‘we’ and mitigating ‘I think’, this identity accommodates unexpected, ‘ad hoc’ lesson tangents: “strategic decisions in the moment-by-moment unfolding of a lesson” (Walsh 2006, p. 133). TEACHER AS EXPERT PRACTITIONER permits discarding original lesson templates, and navigating unplanned discussion on the tricky topic of religion, allowing for a spontaneity that rigid planning confines do not always lend themselves to:

### **Extract 8.12**

**FG5-10:** sometimes there’s an **ad hoc** (**FG5-9:** yes!) thing, you’ve got something planned

**FG5-9:** it doesn't matter!

**FG5-10:** and it sits over there, we came up even the other day, God what was it we uhm, ended up discussing and it was it was just about we weren't expecting this...ahm but it was it was all to do with this, you know, different cultures...and they, somebody mentioned something...ahm and it started off and and then it it just, it just snowballed! (**FG5-9:** yes) and I was like 'You know what? I am NOT letting this go!' they're the, oh they're ABSOLUTELY FANTASTIC! (**FG5-9:** yeah yeah!) you know it was **I think** it was it was all a, I-I mean it, bordering all the TABOO subjects (**FG5-9:** yes yes yes)...and I was just like, 'Do you know what? I'm getting my coffee! [laughs out loud] I'm listening to this!'

**FG5-9:** THIS IS LANGUAGE, this is language! (**FG5-10:** yeah! and this is) used in the way that it SHOULD BE USED! (**FG5-10:** yeah) yeah, absolutely

**FG5-10:** and you as you say, you can't prepare those lessons (**FG5-9:** no, no no, no absolutely) and as you said it IS different teaching because (**FG5-9:** yeah yeah) if you're teaching something else, RARELY would you come up with any of those...**AD HOC** lessons

Diversion from the lesson-plan brief ultimately empowers these experienced teachers. 'I think' hedges the fact that strongly intonated 'TABOO subjects' are sometimes unexpectedly encountered in their lessons. Their shared enthusiasm is conveyed in repetition of 'as you say' and 'as you said', as well as in high degrees of overlap, use of extreme, evaluative adverb 'absolutely', and adjective 'fantastic'. Added to this is repeated use of 'you know', as the 'ad hoc' nature of certain classes is shared and celebrated. TEACHER AS FACILITATOR is clear in this exchange, with a confidence and expertise required to navigate such discursive tangents that is not to be underestimated. It is greatly significant given the seniority of these two participants, and testimony to their ELT-teacher craft, fine-tuned over years, meriting TEACHER AS EXPERT PRACTITIONER (Sfard 1998).

That a distinct TEACHER AS PERFORMER and TEACHER AS FACILITATOR dichotomy emerged in two separate focus groups was significant. One, comprising of two younger males in their thirties, identified with the former, the younger of these embracing the role

completely. In contrast, both middle-aged, female teachers in the other focus group rejected the performance role outright for a more facilitatory one, which for them was empowering. A third interview, comprising of a single, younger female, saw her acknowledge the performer role in **Extract 8.10**, but not align herself to it. However, the younger, male focus group acknowledged the extent to which STUDENT AS CUSTOMER influenced and impacted TEACHER AS PERFORMER, suggesting disempowerment, and being at student mercy.

Observations of these two, discrete ELT teacher identities, how the participants in this section evaluated each one, and revelations of whether they felt an affinity toward one or the other, opened a door to additional themes and attitudes. How participants perceived and evaluated professional, and unprofessional behaviours of fellow ELT practitioners, in both established and novel metaphors, merited examination.

#### 8.4 Perceptions teachers had of other ELT teachers

The noun ‘teacher’ presented as the number one most frequent nominal term (Table 8.7 below, highlighted pink). When investigated in combinations with the corpus-identified items ‘I think’ and ‘people’ (highlighted blue as the third most frequent noun), it emerged that ‘teacher’ was connected with a range of themes that presented, in perceptions teachers held of ELT peers. These were both positive and negative in evaluation.

Raw noun frequency of SaFGELT corpus					
1. teacher	655	2. school	605	3. people	433
4. thing	342	5. student	330	6. time	299
7. kind	277	8. laugh	260	9. year	257
10. language	239	11. lot	234	12. job	218
13. teaching	217	14. something	217	15. name	193
16. hour	170	17. class	170	18. week	156
19. way	154	20. bit	144	21. course	139
22. day	137	23. work	129	24. ELT	128
25. I	124	26. question	116	27. participant	116
28. money	108	29. business	106	30. director	98

**Table 8.7: Top 30 noun forms from SaFGELT corpus, with frequency counts provided, demonstrate ‘teacher’ as the most frequent noun.**

For example, **Participant 20**, a 33-year-old female, had ten years’ experience as both a teacher and Director of Studies. She describes what, in her DoS capacity, she sought when recruiting new teaching staff. An honest depiction of her “platonic ideal of a professional

ELT teacher” sees extension of ‘I’ to ‘you’. The theme of desire to teach dominates, as she hypothesises using ‘I don’t think’, ‘I think’ and ‘people’:

### Extract 8.13

**FG11-20:** ...in some teachers you can see it, there’s some **people, I don’t think** should be **ALLOWED** to call themselves **teachers!** But that’s just me being...very polemical (**FG11-19:** yeah yeah) but, you know? And as you said, you still want to teach, this is....that (**FG11-19:** yeah) **I think** that is, that’s absolutely **CORE**, to this ideal, you **WANT TO TEACH, YOU’RE A TEACHER!** In your heart, you’re a **teacher!**

In prefacing strong evaluations with ‘I don’t think/I think’, **Participant 20** hedges harsh criticisms, and raises the issue of perceptions of substandard teaching performance. ‘Some people’ quantifies teachers who fit this description, mirroring observations of the potential, “nightmare”, subperforming teacher scenario that arose in Chapter 5 (5.3.1). Behavioural expectations others impose in a workplace remind us “*there is more to a role than just doing a job!*” (Wright 1987, pp. 3-9; italics Wright’s). Roles not only involve characteristics such as *work done* and *job-related activities*, but also *relationships* and *communications*, as well as *beliefs* and *attitudes: conflict* and *pressures* may arise when roles overlap (all italics Wright’s, *ibid*). As DoS, **Participant 20** uses ‘I think’ to mitigate the urgency of a need for the desire to teach. Equally mitigating is application of ‘I don’t think’, in stressing her negative evaluation of those who, in her view, do not come up to standard. In using ‘I think’, she downtones strong assertions, through her repetition and clear enforcement of ‘you WANT to teach’, in expectations she held of candidates. This reflects Chapter 5 thematic observations of same (5.3.1). Her prioritisation of educational delivery quality over school operational needs contrasts strongly with Pennington (1990) and Stanley’s (2016) findings of other Directors of Studies, who considered the ideal ELT teacher to be one who purely serves as a cog in the school-company machinery (Chapter 2, 2.2). **Participant 20** also employs hypothetical ‘you’, unsurprising as she had transitioned to university-based, ELT-teacher-training from private-sector ELT. ‘You’ indexes her identity in this capacity, with her ELT student-teacher trainees the centre around which her lecturer discourse would be orientated (Clancy 2016, pp. 102-103).

**Focus Group 3** saw **Participant 6** as equally vocal, with comments revisiting TEACHER AS PERFORMER. A male in his thirties, his use of ‘I think’ mitigates criticism of what he views as ‘a lot of’ teachers who impart misinformation:

#### **Extract 8.14**

**FG3-6: I think a lot of teachers,** I have some private students from [name of school], and I often correct some of the work and stuff from the **teachers**, RE-CORRECT some of the work...and it’s WRONG!!...and I, I ask them what was the class today like in as much detail as you can tell me the class, and it sounds like a SNOOZEFEST...and it’s OLDSCHOOL, old-style teaching where you’re sitting there with a book

There is strong recurrence in the intonated, critical ‘SNOOZEFEST’ and ‘OLDSCHOOL’, added to ‘old-style’, denouncing lack of creativity. ‘I think’ prefaces his dismissal of ELT teachers who possess neither sufficient knowledge of their subject matter, nor interest in varying their teaching style. That **Participant 6** mentions ‘private students’ is telling, and again evokes STUDENT AS CUSTOMER, with client satisfaction in **Extract 8.14** at the forefront of pedagogical delivery. This TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR is mindful that students are paying for a quality English service.

Particularly striking was the re-emergence of TEACHER AS BACKPACKER. Alluded to in Chapter 5 (5.3.2) as teachers individually disclosed a propensity towards travel, this identity was accepted as highly positive. However, in perceptions teachers held of their peers, evaluations of TEACHER AS BACKPACKER were not so complimentary. Referenced through the “pejorative” term ‘TEFL’ (Vaughan 2009), TEACHER AS BACKPACKER was regarded as contributing to negative, contemporary, societal perceptions by **Participant 24**. She suggests this metaphor compromises those who have committed to becoming career ELT teachers, feeding into ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TEACHING AS GIG ECONOMY (Curran and Jenks 2022):

#### **Extract 8.15**

**FG15-24:** like for many TEFL **teachers**...English-language teaching is this fleeting gig, it’s a way to travel around the world, to make friends, new

experiences, and maybe a little bit of money on the side so I see that very much with the novice **teachers** coming out....but **I do think** there are great opportunities there within

This contrasts somewhat with the positive views of travel in Chapter 5. **Participant 24** mentions prevailing, ‘fleeting’ gig-economy-type employment in modern industry: temporary, piecemeal, separately-paid jobs, substituting steady work with a single employer. This is promoted as allowing flexibility to work freelance, earn ‘a little bit of money on the side’, and appeals specifically to TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR. In reality, it means exclusion from the kinds of benefits permanent employees enjoy, like holiday or sick pay (Burke-Kennedy 2020; Chapter 7, 7.5.1). Gig-economy work contributes to precarity (Chapter 7, 7.3-7.5), and strongly characterises contemporary ELT AS BUSINESS. Despite her initial criticism, **Participant 24** concedes that ELT can offer upcoming teachers ‘great opportunities’. Nonetheless, she prefaces with ‘I do think’, emphatic yet hedging in her conviction.

**Participant 20** in **Focus Group 11** is equally disdainful of TEACHER AS BACKPACKER. Her use of ‘I don’t think’ and ‘I think’ poses a pertinent question regarding teacher commitment to partaking in regular CPD upskilling given its non-obligatory status, and suggests ELT regulators are at fault for the kind of ‘people’ and ‘teacher’ the current model attracts:

### **Extract 8.16**

**FG11-20:** ...In terms of ahm, like teachers kind of...the freewheeling **backpacker teacher**, you know ..IF..ELT was RIGOROUS...would we have that many of THOSE **PEOPLE**? **I don’t think** we would...you know? **I think** it would change the shape of the...the industry... **I think** we’ve ALL BEEN THERE.....but you know the **people** who rock up to class at, one minute to nine, with New English File, open to page 7, and literally nothing else done? That IS NOT a PROFESSIONAL **teacher**. That is a person who could be working in Dunnes<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> An Irish-based department store and supermarket chain that pays its retail staff minimum-wage.

In outright rejection of TEACHER AS BACKPACKER, she acknowledges ELT AS BUSINESS with reference to ‘industry’. The dismissiveness shown by **Participant 20** towards the ‘backpacker’ teacher is through enforced intonation on the derogatory ‘THOSE PEOPLE’. She makes explicit the shared-knowledge experience of ‘THOSE PEOPLE’ with repetition of ‘you know’, and mitigating ‘I think’ before ‘we’ve ALL BEEN THERE’. In addition, ‘I think/I don’t think’ downtone her strong conviction that greater rigour within the sector would eliminate ‘THOSE PEOPLE’. Her distinction between ‘people’ and ‘teacher’ is marked, delineating who she considers a true ‘teacher’ from whom she does not. Jenks observes market forces to operate largely “according to societal belief systems” (2019, pp. 534-535): employers make decisions based on wider, societal perceptions and expectations. The same could perhaps be said of broader, societal perceptions of ELT practitioners not being ‘real’ teachers, compounded by frames of globetrotting, ‘TEFL tourism’ (Stainton 2018; Codó 2018). This, in all probability, is why ELT teachers are not perceived as on a par with state-sector teachers, justifying lack of government regulation compelling employers to adhere to higher, workplace standards. Whether such state intervention would encourage more career-type, committed professionals into the sector is a chicken-and-egg scenario upon which one can only speculate. **Participant 20** is adamant in how she uses ‘I don’t think’ and ‘I think’ to evaluate a bona fide, professional ELT teacher. For **Participant 20**, to truly call oneself a professional requires aspiration to the “platonic ideal” she described so passionately in **Extract 8.13**: somebody with a core desire to teach, which twenty percent of this cohort had, in fact, revealed (Chapter 5, 5.3.1).

The student prioritisation outlined in Section 8.2 is revisited in the next extract. Speaking practice is an integral part of adult ELT. **Participant 8** makes use of emphatic ‘I do think’ to mitigate strong criticism of fellow ELT teachers reluctant to divulge private details in discussions, despite insistence that students do so, to promote fluency:

#### **Extract 8.17**

**FG4-8: I do think**, one of the things I feel really strongly about with being a **teacher** is that you can’t sit up there at the front of the class and ask people, you know, to tell you about their lives and their hopes and their dreams, ‘cos we do it every day... and GIVE NOTHING BACK...sit there **like a vault** and say, ‘Tell me your WISH, tell me your hope for the future, tell me your MOST

IMPORTANT CHILDHOOD MEMORY’, and then stay **like a vault**, it’s NOT FAIR

Teachers will encourage idiom use among their learners in relating personal experiences (Bergstrom 1979). Alejo-González (2024, p. 7) notes a heuristic function of metaphors when used in new and original ways. Novel metaphor TEACHER AS VAULT describes disrespect of what **Participant 8** holds to be the true nature of the teacher-student partnership: a confidante, in the absence of friends and family, in a verbal give and take. It breaches the unwritten contract to which both sign up, by virtue of this shared, classroom experience, a conviction she hedges with ‘I do think’. Nonetheless, Brumfit (1981, p. 64) reminds us that given the asymmetry of the teacher-student relationship, it is a learner’s prerogative to act as a vault should they so wish: “the learner has less liberty to reject overtures than the teacher has, and the teacher should not presume upon the relationship: the learners must be free to decide how deeply to participate.”

The level of commitment to lesson planning discussed by **Participant 20** is again questioned by **Participant 8**, distinguishing between teachers merely going through the motions, from ones who act as true professionals:

#### **Extract 8.18**

**FG4-8:** and **I think** sort of as well when you were asking about being a professional **teacher**, the difference between somebody I suppose who is COASTING and who’s trying to do...s-, you know s-, THERE IS a difference between somebody who goes in and does two pages of the book...just pulls out the book and does those two pages...and, sure they’re tickin’ the boxes and they’re teaching something, they ARE...but that’s NOT a professional **teacher**. ANY MONKEY COULD DO THAT.

A vehicle ‘coasts’ with no powered assistance, often downhill (Cambridge University Press (2022d). Metaphorically, it implies something done without application, and better achieved with greater effort (Deignan 1995 p. 85). Moreover, enforced intonation on reference to ‘monkey’ layers lazy, incompetent qualities of this animal onto people (Wall 2022). Both metaphors embody pejorative evaluations which are dismissive of teachers who make minimal effort. Owing to the harshness of her criticisms, **Participant 8** uses

not only ‘I think’, but ‘sort of’ and ‘I suppose’ to mitigate. In addition, ‘you know’ emphasises the shared knowledge understanding of below-par input made by certain teachers in lesson delivery, mirroring **Participant 20** in **Extract 8.13**.

In evaluating fellow ELT teachers, identity themes in this section saw re-emergence of TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR, in disdain shown towards teachers who did not provide quality, English-lesson delivery (**Extract 8.14**). The critical metaphor TEACHER AS VAULT saw students expected to reveal intimate details during speaking activities, with non-reciprocation on the teacher’s part. Despite Chapter 5 findings highlighting a strong desire in wanting to teach, participants in this section noted professional attitude lacking among some of their peers. However, it was accepted that a percentage will always remain uncommitted, with the majority continuously aspiring towards professionalism. Observations identified over a three-decade period of perceived lack of professionalism (Chapter 2, 2.4) mirror **Participant 20**’s personal experience as an Irish-based, teacher-recruiter in **Extract 8.13**. While pursuit of travel had made a positive contribution in leading participants to ELT AS PATH in Chapter 5, the TEACHER AS BACKPACKER identity and role was viewed, in contrast, as suspect in this section. It was dismissed as embodying a teacher who prioritises travel experience over professionalism, evoking the pejorative ‘TEFL tourism’ moniker (Stainton 2018). There was, nonetheless, acceptance that lack of rigour in the current ELT CPD model contributes directly to this teacher status. The extent to which such factors contributed to societal perceptions of ELT teachers is finally investigated.

### **8.5 Societal perceptions of ELT teachers**

Goffman (1953, p. 67) defined a ‘relayer’ as someone who does not speak for themselves, instead ‘relays’ views of others, including those of unspecified others who might subscribe to stereotypical beliefs (Cameron 2001, p. 149). Thematically and consistently, participants used ‘I think’ in reporting, perceiving and evaluating views held by certain societal members towards them, and their ELT teacher role. This is evident in how two senior, female teachers in **Focus Group 5** voice assertion about how public perceptions are what maintain ELT AS BUSINESS over ELT AS PROFESSION, diminishing teacher effort:

### Extract 8.18

**FG5-9:** It's how it's seen from the outside...it's a business....and it's referred to as a business (**FG5-10:** it is) and **I think** that puts us into a different, us as teachers, puts us into a different sort of category...which is then reflected as well in the Department.... you know?.....so it's their perception

'I think' mitigates shared 'you know' knowledge of perceptions of ELT teachers as 'different', which **Participant 9** observes is not confined to the general public, 'the outside'. It is equally evident at official level, in the Department of Education. 'I think' downtones this direct, harsh reality.

**Participant 18** in **Focus Group 10**, a female in her thirties, uses 'I think' in perceiving the exploitative nature of ELT, despite the calibre of teaching individual to be found within sector ranks. 'I think' mitigates Chapter 7 substandard work-practice observations in Irish-based ELT schools (Section 7.5):

### Extract 8.19

**FG10-18:** **I think, I, I think** in Ireland in particular, I, I know the UK is not.....hugely better, but it IS better, there are better schools and and...operators there but...HERE...(1.5 sec)..the reality is that...when you look outside of Ireland...you know that you are more respected as a professional.....than you are within your own country.....(**FG10-17:** true) that you are within the country that you're working....and it's, it's, it's VERY DEGRADING

'DEGRADING' is a highly emotive, subjective-stance adjective. It reflects disempowerment in an end-utterance evaluation, which she reveals with strong intonation after her initial hedging and hesitation, in repetition of 'I' in 'I think', and 'I know'. 'I think' downtones her perception of diminished, ELT teacher status. **Participant 1**, in the next extract, reinforces such disempowerment, using 'I think' to relay stereotypically-held, societal perceptions of ELT teachers. A 44-year-old female with twenty-one years' teaching experience, she states the disadvantage of choosing ELT AS PATH over secondary school teaching, 'I think' bleakly evaluating consequent, societal viewpoints:

### Extract 8.20

**FG1-1:** it's just, you're the LOWEST BAR of...and it's a perception, it's a social perception, you're actually the lowest bar, the lowest rung of the teaching ladder, you really are...the SNAs<sup>7</sup> are probably just below you, or might be the same as you, but you're definitely SNA, that kind of level **you know**, regardless of your MA, regardless of your years of experience....**I think** it's back down to cultural and social thinking again, it's this old school attitude that unless...you are, **you know** a B.Ed. student, or **you know** unless you've gotten into a Department job, you're not worth tuppence

Gray (2012, p. 110) notes how societal attitudes towards private-sector ELT against public-sector, 'department' teachers serve little more than to "divorce language teaching from education more generally". This leaves practitioners demoralised and disrespected (ibid), is acute in **Participant 1's** repetition and enforcement of 'lowest bar', and sees re-emphasis of ELT AS BUSINESS. Whereby in Chapter 7 (7.6), 'climb the career ladder' implied aspiration towards a top position in a work hierarchy (McCarthy and O'Dell 2002, p. 58), and embodied a corporate-world UPWARD MOTION IS GOOD, this trajectory is denied ELT teachers in **Extract 8.20**. 'Not worth tuppence' (i.e., a mere two pence in old Irish currency) reinforces this diminished, societal regard, a common-sense reality emphasised by 'you know'.

In addition to 'I think', participants once more referenced 'a lot of' and 'people', as well as reference to 'teacher'. This was significant in SaFGELT given that its interview environment sought a frank exchange of viewpoints on public perceptions of ELT teachers. Added to 'I think' and noted in certain extracts was mitigating 'like' application (Biber *et al.* 1999, p. 557). Features of contemporary IrEng speech include "robust" presence of 'like' in various sentence positions: initial as a focusing device, mid-sentence in hesitation, and sentence-end as a mitigator (Amador Moreno 2012, p. 34), particularly in aged mid-thirty and younger generations (Schweinberger 2012). Moreover, Biber and Finegan (1989) note how relational function of affective stance or evaluation is encoded

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<sup>7</sup> Special Needs Assistants, who provide valuable, one-to-one assistance to pupils with Special Needs at primary and secondary school level, but are background and paid less than classroom teachers (National Council for Special Education 2015).

lexically through evaluative adjective use (e.g., ‘great’, ‘excellent’) which typically presents as “non-minimal response tokens”, demonstrating social bonding (McCarthy and Carter 2000). Furthermore, idioms (Moon 1997) and hyperbole (e.g., ‘there’s millions of them’, McCarthy and Carter 2004) frequently serve evaluative functions.

When an actor is incapacitated in choosing courses of action, agency becomes “attenuated or weakened” and prevents achievement of set goals, creating “frustration and disempowerment” (Copland and Garton 2011, p. 250). Hedged with ‘like’, **Participant 4** in **Focus Group 2**, a female in her late twenties, estimates it is not only societal perceptions of an ‘easy’ occupation that impact her. ‘I think’ describes lack of acknowledgement for teacher effort on the part of school operators, equally demotivating:

### **Extract 8.21**

**FG2-4:** obviously **like** if you LOVE YOUR JOB you’re gonna give students **like** the BEST QUALITY but, at the same time, you know, **I think** teachers WILL GET **FED UP**, they’ll be **like** ‘Well, like do the owners like really care about me? **Like** do management really care that much? Why should I be passionate then?’ (**FG2-3:** mm) **Like** true teachers really well **like** go in and do their stuff.....but it CAN just it can get VERY very disheartening **I think** when you DON’T FEEL that **like** you are APPRECIATED AT ALL..... it’s not even all about money, it’s just even **like** (**FG2-3:** I know) asking your opinion about something

‘I think’ accompanies multiple applications of ‘like’ in this extract. The fact is that **Participant 4** is younger and less experienced than her partner, **Participant 3**. While not all instances of her ‘like’ use are in the act of mitigation, what is evident is how she hedges strong, recurring and enforced, negative evaluations ‘FED UP’, ‘disheartening’ and ‘APPRECIATED AT ALL’. ‘I think’ downtones her stated reality: that teacher professionalism is taken for granted by school operators, and devalued. This requires lexical navigation, provided by ‘like’. However, when the theme of societal dismissal surfaces in the same focus group, **Participant 3** directs a question at her younger, less experienced partner **Participant 4**:

### Extract 8.22

**FG2-3:** Do you feel that **other people** don't take you seriously as you, you know with your

**FG2-4:** yeah, I don't

**FG2-3:** Do you, yeah?

**FG2-4:** yeah, **I don't think people think** it's, they're **like**, "Oh, you're not a real teacher"...**you know**, if you're not primary or secondary you're **NOT a REAL TEACHER (FG2-3: mm)** say it in a LAUGHING WAY but **you know** kind of...I dunno if you've experienced...that **like**, but I get that a lot

While agency in **Extract 8.22** is self-related through application of 'I think', repetition and enforcement of 'not a real teacher', and 'you know' in this shared-knowledge reality, **Participant 4** nonetheless hedges her reply with 'like', 'kind of' and 'I dunno if you've experienced that'. 'I don't know', an identified, distancing device, can be used in similar ways to laughter in replies to problematic questions, before demonstration of a 'relayer' role (Goffman 1953; Cameron 2001, p. 149). Stereotypical attitudes are often deflected, as in incidents where speakers contrast their stance with that of others, or interviewees expressing certain views apologetically, e.g., 'I don't know if I'm allowed to say this, but...' (Condor 2000, p. 189). This marks their opinion as "a generalization...which might not be universally valid" (Cameron 2001, p. 149). Condor (2000), for example, found interview participants resisted discourse that equated national pride with being racist; responses reflected empowerment in shaping their discourses through a range of interactional resources ('I don't know if/but...') to prevent being directly, negatively perceived. Calculated use of 'I don't know' has been identified among participants concerned that they may be *categorized* by an interviewer; they may pre-empt such stigmatization, hence design responses accordingly (Cameron 2001, p. 151, italics Cameron's; Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995).

Perceiving her ELT position in a far more direct, empowered manner, the more senior **Participant 3** describes her own contrasting, lived experience. Notable is complete absence of mitigating 'like':

### Extract 8.23

**FG2-3:** I think a lot of teachers themselves project that out (**FG2-4:** yeah) and it was something I used to do a little bit (**FG2-4:** mm) but I've stopped myself...from doing that, **you know**, because I DO see what I do as a...REAL...JOB (**FG2-4:** JOB, yeah) and really, ehm...on the same level as anybody else's, JOB (**FG2-4:** mm) **do you know?** Ehm...particularly since getting my master's (**FG2-4:** mm-huh) in this area and continuing on in third level, to understand actually 'th- no, this IS', so I talk about my job a little bit differently (**FG2-4:** yeah) **do you know?** ....**People** might ask me like 'What do you do?' and I say 'Well, I TEACH LINGUISTICS' (**FG2-4:** mm-huh) because it IS Linguistics, **do you know?** Instead of 'Oh, I teach English.' I DON'T TEACH ENGLISH. I teach... ...LINGUISTICS.

**Participant 3** considers her postgraduate qualification an asset in terms of how she views herself, unequivocally, on a par with others in professions outside ELT. Placing herself in the subject position in most of her clauses, she credits this successful outcome for being professionally equal to other workers, and worthy of such, consistent with self-agency demonstrated by students in Copland and Garton's study (2011, pp. 248-249). It emphasises the importance of ELT-teacher-specific, postgraduate, qualification attainment revealed in Chapter 5 (5.3.3). Despite absence of mitigating 'like' in this extract, noteworthy is the approximator 'a little bit', suggesting that in spite of her seeming conviction, there is still need to be indirect in challenging her partner's perceived, identity insecurity. That she prefaces her extract with 'I think' demonstrates similar sensitivity, mitigating her belief that diminished, professional self-worth is something she has noticed in others like **Participant 4**. However, she herself no longer subscribes to such disempowered status: 'I DO see what I do as a... REAL...JOB'. Her words are carefully selected, and delivered in a slow and deliberate manner. Use of 'you know' and 'do you know' implies she wants this self-realisation to be part of shared knowledge that she is trying to impart to **Participant 4**. Self-detachment from the phrase 'English language teaching' reflects the degradation associated with other ELT-related terms, such as 'TEFL' (Vaughan 2009).

In **Focus Group 5, Participants 9 and 10**, two female, senior teachers in their sixties and fifties respectively, extend this. In evaluations with ‘I think’ and ‘I don’t think’, they explore not only societal perceptions, but plumb the depths of their own self-perceptions:

#### **Extract 8.24**

**FG5-9:** first of all I never say, ‘I’m an English language teacher’ (**Researcher:** ok) I always say, ‘I’m a language teacher’, then they if, if they ask me I say, ‘I work in [name of school]’. (**Researcher:** ok) I say that and actually we have teachers there who teach other languages as well....and then I said to myself, ‘Now WHY do I say that?’ ....Because there’s something kind of....I dunno what it is, it’s, an attitude?

**FG5-10: I think** it is not

**FG5-9:** there’s something about an attitude to teaching English that comes from the past? And it’s like

**FG5-10: I don’t think** it’s seen always as teaching

**FG5-10:** I always say I teach ESOL....(**FG5-9:** mmm)...ahm, I don’t use ‘English language’

**FG5-9:** yeah, and why do we do that?...**You know?**

**FG5-10:** I don’t know! It just, I, I suppose because I do teach ESOL but uhm...yeah... ..uhm...and I do sometimes find it depends on the person I’m speaking to (**FG5-9:** yes, that too, yes) annd, it actually **I think** there’s a certain amount of....discrimination...there, because we, as I said, we relate an awful lot to **people** that have come to live in this country that have either been refugees at some point

That neither would use the term ‘English language teaching’ to describe their profession, preferring ‘ESOL’ or ‘language teacher’ suggests that despite ‘ELT’ being the number one keyword against two reference corpora (Table 8.8, highlighted yellow), the same term

resonates negatively, contrary to Vaughan’s (2009) observation of this phrase being a more contemporary, preferred acronym.

N	Keywords for SaFGELT with LCIE	Keywords for SaFGELT with C-MELT
1.	ELT	ELT
2.	staffroom	professional
3.	participant	participant
4.	CELTA	director
5.	English-language	industry
6.	sooo	profession
7.	prep	union
8.	COVID	online
9.	QQI	country
10.	ACELS	quietly

**Table 8.8: Top 10 keywords for the SaFGELT subcorpus, measured against LCIE and C-MELT as reference corpora, show ‘ELT’ as the number one keyword.**

‘I think’ and ‘I don’t think’ mitigate the reality of discrimination they have both experienced, reflected in shared-knowledge ‘you know’, through resorting to rejection of the term ‘ELT’ in their sector descriptions. By **Participant 3** stating she teaches ‘Linguistics’ as opposed to ELT, **Participant 9** identifying as a ‘language’, not ‘ELT’ teacher, and **Participant 10** affirming she teaches ‘ESOL’, all three position themselves as primary agents in these representations, demonstrating empowerment and attributing success to self. This elevates their social position in these respective roles, rather than as ‘ELT’ teachers, transferring Copland and Garton’s findings on the self-agency demonstrated by ELT students to teachers (2011, p. 248).

Wright (1987, pp. 11-13) observes how, in most societies, teachers and learners “are accorded high and low status respectively”, yet concedes: “status depends on the amount of esteem, admiration and approval we get from our immediate social group, as well as society in general.” Primary and secondary teachers have traditionally held powerful positions, ascribed socially by parents, and others (Pollard 2019, p.177). In ELT, the prestige automatically afforded state-sector teachers appears to become inverted, whereby STUDENT AS CUSTOMER gains higher prestige, the ELT teacher role diminished in the LANGUAGE AS COMMODITY transaction (Heller 2010; Simpson 2020). In **Extract 8.24**, when the student is not compelled to pay for the commodity (i.e., is a refugee or economic migrant, hence not a ‘client’), ‘I think’ mitigates pejorative, public perceptions of both student and teacher. This verifies Wright’s assertion that it is doubtful “whether

learners, teachers, and the general public have similar perceptions of each other's worth" (1987, p. 14).

Public misconception of how well-qualified many ELT teachers actually are (Chapter 5, 5.3.3), and the sector insists that they be (Chapter 1, 1.2) is given consideration by

**Participant 9:**

**Extract 8.25**

**FG5-9:** people still have this perception, they think you're not a real teacher...they don't realise, we were just saying earlier, really [DoS's name] wouldn't employ anybody less than that had, **you know**, that didn't at least have a master's (**FG5-10:** yeah) **I think many people** don't realise how well-qualified teachers actually (**FG5-10:** I agree) are nowadays...they still have that attitude, **you know?** WHY, WHY would we, if somebody asks us 'What is your job?' why would we feel.....[whispers quietly] 'I'm an English teacher.' **You know**, WHY would we feel that? **I think** it's got to come too from within us about how we feel about....ah...US AS TEACHERS...in this, PROFESSION **you know?** It goes both ways.

In using 'I think', **Participant 9** mitigates her own sense of shame when revealing her chosen ELT AS PATH to others. She debates whether teachers themselves are to blame for perpetuating this common-sense view of the ELT teacher not being 'a real teacher', hence diminished ELT AS PROFESSION worth. Both views are reinforced through repetition of 'you know'. What "goes both ways" in **Extract 8.25** alludes to difficulties faced by teachers trying to transition out of the private ELT sector. To work in ELT in an Irish state body such as an Education and Training Board (ETB), one is requested to register with the Teaching Council of Ireland (Section 5.3.3). In addition to maintaining professional standards of conduct and practice, the Council supports professional development of all state-sector teachers, has done since first established in 1991, and ensures accountability for the teaching profession in Irish state schools (Pollard 2019, pp. 147-149). Neither privately-run ELT schools, nor their teachers, come under its remit. The Teaching Council publication *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education* categorically defines 'teacher' as someone "registered with the Teaching Council" (2020, p. 6). No similar, separate, state-registry body exists for private-sector, ELT teachers.

There is an extremely rigorous registration process for the Teaching Council, including police vetting in every country that one has ever lived in (Teaching Council 2023). The relevant judiciary bodies for each country must be applied to by teachers themselves, at their own expense, with complex, lengthy administration processes and response times. This is challenging for ELT teachers given their proven tendency to work in multiple countries over a career span (Section 5.3.1). For successful applicants, requirements set down in Teaching Council regulations mean, by definition, an English teacher normally works in a secondary-school setting. Regarding work conditions, state-sector teachers have the option of belonging to one of three main teacher unions, the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI), or the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) for second-level, and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) for primary-level teachers.

State-run Education and Training Boards (ETBs) hire ELT teachers, but prefer the term ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), and provide ESOL and literacy classes to post-primary and adult learners. However, only an applicant's undergraduate degree is accepted as their principal qualification. Any ELT qualifications are regarded as add-ons, or 'other' in the registration process (Teaching Council 2023). It denotes how, for these participants, postgraduate ELT qualifications are not regarded by Irish-based, state-school teaching gatekeepers as equal in status to an undergraduate degree, which may be in an entirely different, non-ELT-related field, and can thus disadvantage ELT teachers in their registration processes.

Not being perceived as a 'real' teacher is raised in **Focus Group 4**, by **Participant 7**, a 35-year-old male, and **Participant 8**, 36 and female, a couple based in the same school. Their 'I think' prefaced evaluations include 'like' as a hedging device, and 'you know' describing their own shared-knowledge, and societal perceptions:

#### **Extract 8.26**

**FG4-7:** it's not an industry that is treated as such sometimes...ehm and **other people** don't see it as such, **people don't** and **like** even **people** who are...who I'd say are...GOOD about things...I would say we probably work in...one of the better schools...but **you know** it's still **like**, well...**you know**...not enough to

give you SICK DAYS and things like that or **you know**, saying that most professionals get, so I kind of I see myself as a professional, I'm not sure that

**FG4-8: the world sees you as such**

**Researcher:** When you say “**other people**”, do you mean other teachers outside of ELT or, or

**FG4-8: I think people in general! (Researcher: People in general, yeah?)**

**FG4-7:** In general, yeah, they're **like**, 'Oh yeah..' [downward intonation] **a lot of people, I think** their exper-, their exposure to...ehm...TEFL teaching is...their friend who went abroad...to (**FG4-8:** to Vietnam for a summer! Yeah!) and did that

**FG4-8:** yeah! With no degree, no, no nothin'!

'I think' mitigates the fact that, despite self-identifying as professionals, the pervasive Chapter 7 ELT AS BUSINESS metaphor emerges in 'industry'. Diminished professional treatment is mitigated with use of 'I would say', 'like' and 'kind of' in employer withholding of sick days and work-related benefits other workers take for granted, in the VCM 'and things like that' (Section 7.5.1). This appears to contribute to the wider, societal perception of diminished, ELT teacher professional status. Pressed to elaborate, 'I think' downtones the TEACHER AS BACKPACKER, once again alluded to in terms of pejorative 'TEFL' as the standard held by 'a lot of people', i.e., the public at large.

This resonated with **Focus Group 2. Participant 3**, a 34-year-old female, uses 'I think' and mitigating 'like' not only to outline perceptions others have, expressed in 'you think', but also a perceived, identity crisis among the general, ELT teacher body. This presents in unrealistic comparison with what she believes to be 'real', state-sector-endorsed teachers:

### Extract 8.27

**FG2-3:** You say to someone like, ‘Oh, I’m a **teacher**’, and they’re **like**, ‘Oh, June July and August’...and I’m **like**, ‘Babes, you have NO IDEA’ (**FG2-4:** yeah) **like**, **you know** I DO love my job but it’s VERY DIFFERENT than what **you THINK** I do (**FG2-4:** yeah) **do you know?** And **I think** maybe that’s the crux of it...because of the title...**people** are confusing it, and maybe **WE** are confusing it, **you know**, with...working, you know in a primary school or a secondary school, **you know**, we don’t work for the government, **like**

‘We’ and ‘you know’ reinforce a collective sense of delusion in **Extract 8.27** that **Participant 3** mitigates with ‘I think’, and this time, ‘like’. ‘The crux of it’ is that ELT teachers, in her view, are simply not on a par with state-sector ones, a perspective she tries to emphasise in appealing to a shared-fact understanding in her multiple uses of ‘you know’ and ‘do you know’. This viewpoint is mirrored by **Participants 1** and **2** in **Focus Group 1**. Two female teachers, the former a senior, very experienced practitioner, the latter younger and less experienced, provided further examples of how negative perceptions impacted teacher self-perceptions, compromising ELT AS PROFESSION:

### Extract 8.28

**FG1-2:** I was never able to VIEW it as a profession (**FG1-1:** mm) I just never felt like I had a PROFESSION (**FG1-1:** I’m a professional, I know) because it just kinda, and even **other people’s view** of it, it’s **like**, ‘Oh, you’re an English teacher’, it’s kind of **like**, **d’ya know**, **I dunno**, **I think** that was my own insecurity at the time

**FG1-1:** It’s the job that you do ‘cos you can’t do...yeah, no...**I think, I think** there’s a perception out there, you’re an English language teacher because you **can’t cut it as a REAL TEACHER** (**FG1-2:** yeah)

The idiom ‘can’t cut it’ means inability to deal with difficulty (Cambridge University Press (2022e), suggests incompetence, and reveals what **Participant 1** regards as a highly derogatory, societal perception of teachers on ELT AS PATH. **Participant 2**, the younger teacher, employs multiple hedging devices: ‘kind of’, ‘like’, ‘d’ya know’, and ‘I dunno’

in addition to ‘I think’, almost apologetic in her admission to not believing in her own professional status. In contrast, **Participant 1**, the more senior teacher, is more direct, nevertheless feels the need to use minimal hedging in repetition of ‘I think’. Their observations concur with Jenks’ own of dehumanizing practices on the part of ELT institutions in many international settings, based on “perverted” belief systems (2019, p. 534). Such ‘common sense’ values may well transfer to an Irish, societal context, promoting the trope that state-school teachers are superior to their ELT peers. This others ELT teachers more generally, and Irish-based ones specifically. By influencing wider societal perceptions of ELT practitioners somehow not being ‘real’ teachers, this may explain and/or justify lack of government regulation, or appetite for policymaker intervention to compel employers to treat them accordingly. Such considerations are empirical issues incentivising growth in ELT scholarship (Jenks 2019, pp. 534-535). In ruminating what can be done to eradicate such discrimination, Mahboob (2009, p. 38) urges ELT to “develop into a profession” rather than remain “largely unlegislated”.

Power, or lack of, is potentially “implicit in any social role” (Wright 1987, p. 16). **Participant 21** in Chapter 6 (6.5) detailed how establishment of a designated ELT teacher union is a step in the right direction toward teacher empowerment. In these final two extracts, strength in solidarity was discussed by **Participant 23** in **Focus Group 14**, actively involved in UNITE ELT Branch. He viewed ELT teacher work as essential, referenced by ‘we’ to express solidarity, not just in the pandemic context. Of only four years’ experience, he employs “I think” to voice his views. In so doing, he demonstrates himself, as a younger novice, more circumspect than was the more experienced, middle-aged **Participant 21** in delivery of similar convictions:

### **Extract 8.29**

**FG14-23:** ...I do, so of course I’m biased on this, but **I do think** that ahm you know we are STRONGER, TOGETHER, like teachers as a, as a ahm English-language teachers as a unit would be stronger together if we fought for our right, and **I think** that...it’s kind of a, it IS a very under- .....ahm..(3 sec)...UNDERVALUED, perhaps? [laughs nervously] ahm trade ah if you can call it a trade, or ahmm industry ahh as it stands and **I think** that..(2 sec)..we facilitate the kind of what the government ah would need in society, which is that the students that provide those services and work for work ah work for us that the

government and the country need, so **I think** that we ARE in essence, ESSENTIAL to ahm life in Ireland, as as it stands and **I think** that it's very important that...**people** NOTE that...or that it IS noted

Despite apologetic “of course I’m biased on this”, longer pauses than an online interview would normally necessitate, hedging with “perhaps” and “kind of”, and nervous laughter throughout, he references the essential work that ELT teachers conduct for the Irish state. The passive versus active use in “people NOTE that...or that it IS noted” is consistent with Fairclough’s observation of passivated and activated social actors as variables, whereby specifically-named agents are deliberately elided at policy-making level, and processes, represented linguistically as verbs, present in more non-congruent, metaphorical ways (2003, pp. 143-145).

However, in this concluding extract, **Participant 23** grows more assertive, challenging negative perceptions that see ELT as flawed, and teachers scapegoated as thus. There is a distinction between attitudes, often ‘hidden’ or demonstrated through behaviour, and beliefs, which are always verbalised; both determine one’s values (Wright 1987, p. 22). **Participant 23** indicates such beliefs and values in continued application of ‘I don’t think’ and ‘I think’:

### **Extract 8.30**

**FG14-23:** ...because often we’re the ones that are overlooked as ‘Oh! You just do a four-week course and that’s good enough for you to teach’, but...**I don’t think** it IS that and **most people** that I’ve, I’ve talked to ha- have worked for over a year in the industry and if they DON’T, they usually leave within the first year, so **I think** that it’s something to note, that, the kind of discrepancy with the ahhh OVERALL view of the industry and then also of US, as teachers

Ultimately in **Extract 8.30**, ‘I think’ demonstrates how public perceptions are at odds with how **Participant 23** perceives and evaluates himself and fellow teachers, who are in fact the ‘people’ he references this time. He nonetheless embeds both sector and teachers firmly within ELT AS BUSINESS, ‘industry’, at the expense of ELT AS PROFESSION, consistent with overall findings in Chapters 6 and 7.

Teachers in this section did not evaluate themselves as holding high, social status in the eyes of the Irish public, and felt, in the main, not perceived as ‘real’ teachers. Despite positive self-evaluations of professionalism, believed in most cases on a par with state-sector teachers, societal evaluations nonetheless presented as overwhelmingly negative. Public conceptions about qualifications, and demands of their ELT roles, were compounded by the pejorative TEACHER AS BACKPACKER identity, embodying an overall lack of public understanding of the essential contribution made by ELT teachers. This included nurturing and elevating the language skills of non-native speaking nationals, so crucial to a modern, Irish-based workforce and economy. Difficulties posed by Teaching Council registration were deemed to be contributing to these pervasive perceptions. Older, more experienced males and females were more assertive in expressions of their professionalism, greater hedging in evidence among younger and more novice teachers, particularly through application of VCMs ‘sort of’ and ‘kind of’, as well as mitigating ‘like’. However, one experienced female suggested confusion among many ELT teachers who incorrectly hold themselves equal in status to state-sector teachers. Ultimately, who ELT teachers are, and what they do, was perceived as lesser in the eyes of the public, compromising ELT AS PROFESSION, positioning teachers firmly within ELT AS BUSINESS, and ultimately, diminishing their worth.

## **8.6 Summary and Conclusions**

This final analysis chapter focused on themes of identity arising from corpus-assisted, CTA and Metaphor examination of focus group and survey data. Corpus investigation found combinations with ‘I think’, ‘a lot of’, ‘people’ and ‘teacher’ to be the primary focal items, in themes that emerged from two questions: a) *What, in your opinion, are the typical attributes of a professional ELT teacher?* and b) *Do you regard yourself as a professional?* Jones notes use of the approximator ‘a lot of + [noun phrase]’ in the combination ‘I think there’s a lot of people’ to add authority to an opinion, making it more difficult to challenge (2022, pp. 135-136). This is significant if one feels disempowered, observed in this chapter when teachers described how sector outsiders perceived them, and what it is that they do for a living. Phrase recurrence was noted in references to the single-item ‘people’ (Table 8.6). This was not only in the combination ‘a lot of’, but in a range of quantifiers, e.g., ‘some people’, ‘other people’, as well as synonyms ‘everyone’ and ‘others’. These shared equal importance, relating to views held by ‘a lot of people’ of ELT and its teachers. In combinations with modal ‘think’, Koester

(2006, pp. 72-73) identifies ‘a lot of’ as a rich, interpersonal marker and intensifier in pursuit of relational goals, cementing social relationships, observable at points as interviews progressed. While Section 8.2 examined how ‘I think’ explored perceived, ELT teacher attributes, three further subthemes in Sections 8.3-8.5 saw ‘I think’ detailing how teachers perceived their ELT contribution, how teachers viewed fellow teachers, and how society at large considered them in their ELT role.

Frames act as structures to organize speaker perceptions of given events (Alejo-González 2024, p. 5). Interviewee perceptions framed with ‘I think’ saw the ELT AS PROFESSION/ELT AS BUSINESS hybrid re-emerge, teachers overwhelmingly self-identifying as professionals, yet very much within ELT AS BUSINESS confines. Social intelligence, adaptability and cultural sensitivity emerged as valued, common-denominator core, ELT teacher traits, yet an interesting TEACHER AS PERFORMER versus TEACHER AS FACILITATOR dichotomy arose between younger male teachers, who identified with the former, and older female ones, who aligned more strongly to the latter. For these more senior and experienced females, a TEACHER AS EXPERT PRACTITIONER role epitomised TEACHER AS FACILITATOR, enabling greater classroom spontaneity. Nonetheless, both groups displayed a shared view of professionalism as an attitude acquired and honed over time. Despite perceived lack of sector professionalism, teachers used ‘I think’ to mitigate whilst, simultaneously, strongly self-identifying as professionals. This is consistent with survey responses to the question *Do you regard yourself as a professional?* (Section 8.3, Figure 8.4). Commitment to professionalism was considered vital if teachers themselves were to see beyond a ‘fleeting, gig economy’ perception of ELT AS BUSINESS to embrace its real opportunities.

More experienced interviewees demonstrated directness in evaluations, perceptions and views when using ‘I think’, while younger and less experienced teachers made greater use of hedging. This was visible through use of ‘you know’ to underline instances of common-sense, shared knowledge, and the VCMs ‘sort of’, and ‘kind of’. These items were used in expressing disempowerment and feelings of displeasure when questioning their own professionalism (especially among more inexperienced teachers), being critical of other teachers who did not uphold appropriate levels of professionalism, and when people outside the sector questioned their professional status. Metaphors such as TEACHER AS ENGINEER converged with previous findings on teacher identity (e.g., Provenzo *et al* 1989; Pollard 2019, pp. 12-13) and demonstrated empowerment.

However, an emergent, novel metaphor demonstrated power asymmetry in a highly-criticised TEACHER AS VAULT and showed incongruity in this respect, with power favouring the teacher in the classroom environment at the expense of students.

Ultimately, exploration of ‘I think’, ‘a lot of’, ‘people’ and ‘teacher’ revealed an inverting of the traditionally high social status enjoyed by state-sector teachers, with interviewees consistent in reporting contemporary, negative, culturally-engrained, public perceptions of them somehow not being ‘real’ teachers. These were attitudes neither they nor the survey respondents subscribed to, and which they found unfair, frustrating, humiliating, outdated and ultimately, disempowering. This keen awareness of pejorative, societal perceptions of them, and the fact that from a societal perspective, theirs was somehow not a ‘real’ profession, played out in idiomatic descriptions such as being regarded as ‘the lowest rung of the [teaching] ladder’, or not being able ‘to cut it as a real teacher’, rating ELT a lesser teaching option, which impacted self-esteem.

O’Keeffe and McCarthy remind us: “We are still, in the final analysis, practitioners of rhetoric. The persuasiveness of our arguments about language depends on the plausible and robust interpretation of the principled empirical evidence which the data throw up” (2022, p. 6). This study has aimed to complete such analysis of the survey and focus group data, through exploration and investigation of the corpus-assisted, CTA and Metaphorical themes and subthemes produced within Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. What follows in Chapter 9 is comment on the findings of these four analysis chapters. In addition are recommendations to be made for the Irish-based, privately-run ELT sector.

## Chapter 9 Conclusions and Recommendations

### 9.0 Introduction

In its publication *Education at a Glance: Indicators and Directorate for Education*, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2006, p. 284) identifies language of instruction as a “critical factor” among non-native-speaker students in selection of a third-level institution. Many aim to improve English-language skills through immersion in English-speaking nations, overall regarded as the most attractive language-learning destinations (ibid; OECD 2017, p. 223). This has favoured Ireland as a third-level destination, ranked fifth among OECD-listed, inner-circle countries (Chapter 1, 1.1).

While the OECD examines early childhood, primary, secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary, and tertiary education in thirty-five member countries, it gives no mention to privately-run ELT schools (OECD 2006; 2017; 2023). This is curious, given the current influx of asylum seekers and economic migrants into Ireland, and that the same organisation accepts language proficiency as a key factor promoting or hindering integration for such non-native speaking immigrants. OECD catch-up options include “online courses, preparatory classes, and the creation of additional language classes in universities, schools and community centres” (OECD 2023, pp. 25-26). ‘Schools’ in this instance, however, indicates state-sector, educational providers, not privately-run, ELTOs (Chapter 1, 1.2). The OECD does not specify why the latter are excluded from such provision. Regarding adult pursuit of third-level instruction, its assumption is that students who choose immersion in Irish-based, English-language courses largely do so in selected, tertiary institutions. However, facts on student numbers in privately-run ELT schools, and the annual €800 million in revenue these schools generate, suggest their centrality in terms of sector worth (English Language Education Ireland 2021, p. 4; Chapter 1, 1.2). These were such anomalies I had noted at the beginning of this PhD journey. Coupled with Ireland’s popularity as a prime tourist destination, the fact of over 11 million visitors in 2018, for the fourth year in a row, generating €5.8 billion, indicates the undeniably lucrative contribution to be made by privately-run, ELT schools. It also somewhat compounds the discrepancy of their OECD exclusion. Given how a pre-pandemic, eighth consecutive year of Irish economic expansion reflected tremendous

growth potential (Tourism Ireland 2019; O'Brien 2016, p .9; Hassey 2017), this bodes well for continued, ELT sectoral success. It leads me to one among several definitive, post-study conclusions: that continued OECD, non-recognition of this education sector seems unjustified.

This final chapter first provides an overview of how survey response and focus group interview data analysis was applied to address the selected, study research questions. Based on these data revelations, it then offers recommendations for the sector. A personal response to the study undertaking is then offered, followed by concluding comments.

## **9.1 How observed study outcomes addressed its Research Questions**

While each analysis chapter concluded with a summary of findings, I now provide a synopsis of what the overall study data revealed, to demonstrate clearly how these outcomes may be linked to its three, specific research questions. Each one is addressed in succession.

### **9.1.1 Research Question One**

The first Research Question acknowledged the study's thematic emphasis:

**RQ1:** What are the primary themes arising from perceptions and concerns of English language teachers within the private ELT school sector in Ireland?

Data investigation revealed broad themes which constituted the primary focus for each analysis chapter, with related subthemes, all of which had metaphorical overtones. This addressed my study intention to focus on metaphor, an often-overlooked yet key, ELT classroom feature, and means through which emotive issues may be expressed (Section 1.5). Chapter 5 examined reasons for an ELT choice of career, embodied in the thematic ELT AS PATH, alluding to a prevailing TEACHER AS BACKPACKER identity. This description had been observed as equally prevalent in earlier, ELT research (Section 2.4), and was largely viewed by participants in Chapter 5 as positive. Chapters 6 and 7 each explored the sector itself, metaphorically realised in ELT AS PROFESSION, and ELT AS BUSINESS respectively. Despite my attempts to distinguish these as discrete themes in their own, distinct chapters, persistent overlap presented a recurring, hybrid scenario. Consequently, attempts to isolate and promote ELT AS PROFESSION by examining teacher

CPD participation, establishment of ELT Ireland as a teacher professional organisation, and examination of UNITE ELT Branch to address teacher workplace conditions found ELT AS PROFESSION consistently compromised by ELT AS BUSINESS. Teachers appeared fully aware and accepting of this reality, which resulted in offerings of an emergent TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR identity to counter potential, workplace precarity. The final analysis Chapter 8 revealed pervasive, metaphorical themes of teacher identity. These were unanticipated data encounters, which I nonetheless honoured with impartial analysis. Emergent identities were at times in tension, demonstrating empowerment and disempowerment that was self- and societally held. These included two, conventional roles: TEACHER AS PERFORMER, instigated by student feedback, versus a more empowered TEACHER AS FACILITATOR. The TEACHER AS BACKPACKER and TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR identities re-emerged, yet this time were criticised as contributing to negative, ELT teacher portrayals. An empowered identity included TEACHER AS ENGINEER. However, a final, novel yet pejorative TEACHER AS VAULT regarded practitioners as empowered, but at student expense.

### 9.1.2 Research Question Two

The second Research Question depended heavily on my study methodology synergy:

**RQ2:** What language do these teachers use to represent perceptions and evaluations of their professional status within Irish ELT?

Entry-point, corpus investigation assisted repeated, CTA reading and Metaphor Analysis of specific language explored in each analysis chapter. The synergy of these three methods (Sections 4.4.1-4.4.3) was what I deemed to best serve this study's purposes in addressing its research questions. Chapter 5 saw corpus-assisted, primary focus on the two-word combination 'I want' reveal wanting to travel and wanting to teach as principal, motivating factors for embarking on a metaphorical ELT AS PATH. This concurred with survey responses of 70% of teachers having taught abroad, and almost all twenty-four, focus group interviewees citing travel as influencing ELT AS PATH. The synergised methods then revealed how participants extended ELT AS PATH, becoming career ELT teachers in pursuit of ELT-specific, largely self-funded, postgraduate qualifications. Corpus-identified 'I wanted' demonstrated how, for the majority, travel was an affirmative rite of passage to becoming an ELT teacher. This was consistent with wider,

metaphorical perceptions of source domain JOURNEY as positive (Roberts and Bolognesi 2024), embodied in a TEACHER AS BACKPACKER identity (see Chapter 2, 2.4) which, in Chapter 5, equated with positivity. Recorded decades previously was the theme of destiny leading teachers to the metaphorical ELT AS PATH (e.g., Doble 1997; O’Keeffe 2001). My study’s methodology blend outlined how fate-instigated, ELT entry was found a still-persistent theme in the current Irish context, through a participant majority confessing to having ‘fallen into’ the contemporary, Irish-based ELT sector. This emerged through corpus-identified items ‘luck’, ‘wandered into’, and ‘ending up in’ ELT, whilst CTA explored wider, societal factors, such as the 2008 economic crash and subsequent Irish housing crisis, as contributing factors.

Chapter 6 explored how Metaphor Analysis revealed the primary ELT AS PROFESSION theme to off-set ELT AS BUSINESS, through corpus-investigated, keyword focus of ‘ELT’, ‘profession’, and ‘business’. This synergy enabled me, in both Chapters 6 and 7, to examine whether lived, cohort experiences paralleled those of teachers in media reportage (Section 1.4) under each, discrete theme. Pronoun keyword ‘I’ and combinations with deontic ‘have to’ revealed sector obligations of participants and power differentials, analysed through synergised CL, CTA and Metaphor Analysis (Chapter 6, Section 6.1). CPD-related feedback, ELT Ireland and UNITE ELT Branch were in turn investigated for their roles in contributing to ELT AS PROFESSION. Despite high, CPD-commitment in survey responses (Section 6.3.1), my mixed-methods approach revealed how focus groups questioned its validity, particularly when unpaid, diminishing ELT AS PROFESSION. Negative, school-operator feedback was perceived as solely serving ELT AS BUSINESS, with ELT Ireland and UNITE ELT Branch (Sections 6.4 and 6.5) evaluated as committed to promoting ELT AS PROFESSION. CTA examination nonetheless revealed teachers themselves to consistently ‘build away’ from open conflict, contributing to self-disempowerment. Positive ELT AS PROFESSION attributes included metaphorical allusions to ELT AS KEY/WINDOW INTO THE WORLD, but novel metaphors ELT AS PYRAMID SCHEME and ELT AS CAR DEALERSHIP countered this, and embodied ELT AS BUSINESS models instigating precarity, a consequence of what the methodology highlighted as ongoing, sector deregulation.

Methodology synergy then demonstrated how the thematic, dominant ELT AS BUSINESS in Chapter 7 lent credence to claims of substandard work practices which had circulated anecdotally in previous decades (see Chapter 1, 1.4-1.5). My empirical, survey evidence

combined the corpus-assisted, thematic analysis of focus group data to support accounts of teacher-participant, lived experiences within many privately-run, Irish-based ELT schools, the primary study impetus. Corpus-identified keyword ‘ELT’, nominal item ‘business’ and enterprise-related synonyms were explored. Pronoun ‘it’ referenced the ELT sector, an individual school, or money-related terms, while ‘they’ referred to sectoral stakeholders including school operators, policy makers, sometimes students, but excluded teachers. Furthermore, the cluster ‘you know’ underlined persistent, shared knowledge of ‘common-sense’, direct experience of sector work-practices within Irish-based ELT AS BUSINESS, estimated as of a higher standard in schools abroad, yet inconsistent among schools here. CTA revealed this as largely permitted through deregulation, while Metaphor Analysis saw ELT SCHOOL AS SINKING SHIP embody business models instigated in pursuit of LANGUAGE AS COMMODITY. In addition, the corpus-revealed prepositions ‘in’ and ‘of’ presented in chosen, precarity-related, idiomatic expressions (‘put all your eggs in one basket’, ‘bear the brunt of’, ‘make a hames of’) and perceptions of inevitable business prioritisation over pedagogy (‘at the end of the day’).

Chapter 8 analysed persistent identity themes in combinations ‘I think’, ‘a lot of’, ‘people’ and ‘teacher’. Whilst unanticipated, this allowed me to examine the esteem in which ELT teachers held themselves, and felt they were held, thus determining how such perceptions compared with historical observations (Section 2.3.3). Disclosed ELT teacher attributes included social intelligence as a core pre-requisite, but valued above all was commitment to students. The ELT AS PROFESSION/ELT AS BUSINESS hybrid re-emerged, teachers self-identifying as professionals within rigid, ELT AS BUSINESS confines, consistent with survey responses (Section 8.3, Figure 8.4). Commitment to professionalism was deemed vital if teachers were to see beyond ‘fleeting, gig economy’ ELT AS BUSINESS perceptions. CTA revealed pervasive, negative, culturally-embedded, public perceptions of participants disregarded as ‘real’ teachers, attitudes neither they nor survey respondents concurred with, which ultimately disempowered. This displayed in idiomatic descriptions ‘being the lowest rung of the [teaching] ladder’, and ‘can’t cut it as a real teacher’, diminished ELT as a sector, and impacted self-esteem. The methodology synergy revealed how metaphors TEACHER AS PERFORMER, TEACHER AS FACILITATOR and TEACHER AS ENGINEER converged with previously recognised teacher identities (Provenzo *et al* 1989; Scrivener 2011; Harmer 2007; Pollard 2019), and demonstrated empowerment. While a novel yet incongruous TEACHER AS VAULT showed power favouring the teacher in the classroom environment at students’ expense, ultimately,

where participants demonstrated greatest uniformity in their assertions, was in their dedication to students.

### 9.1.3 Research Question Three

Through the third and final Research Question, I was able to consider how responses and linguistic choices were influenced by participant demographic:

**RQ3:** To what degree are variables of age, gender, or years of teaching experience a factor in how ELT teachers use language to express their position in their workplace?

The study enabled me to ascertain how both males and females stressed ELT as something they had decided to pursue while younger novices, after an initial, ‘ELT tourism’ opportunity (Stainton 2018). The focus group interviews I conducted outlined how twenty-five percent of participants reported having ‘fallen into’ the ELT sector, irrespective of age or gender, five of whom were Irish nationals, one of whom was British. However, a sole, non-native-speaking participant emphatically insisted that he had not ‘fallen into’ ELT, as well as one native-speaking, North American participant. Both males in their early forties, their individual, early-life experiences of positive, teacher role models had influenced their later, ELT pursuit. Further exceptions included three Irish nationals. One was a retired male, another a female in her forties; both had retrained as ELT teachers after retirement and/or redundancy from other sectors. The third had viewed ELT as a ‘calling’. This indicates that while ‘falling into’ ELT persisted as a contemporary reality for a quarter of these participants, there were those among them who had actively sought out ELT AS PATH, a study revelation I found encouraging.

My mixed-methods approach revealed correlations between the largely middle-aged, focus group participant profile, and survey participant findings. For instance, focus group interviewee decisions to become career ELT teachers corresponded strongly with survey findings of a predominantly middle-aged, ELT cohort (Chapter 4, Table 4.1), and ELT-specific, postgraduate-qualification pursuit (Chapter 5, Section 5.3.3). The metaphor analysis identification of the TEACHER AS BACKPACKER role helped me reveal how, unlike in previous research portrayals (see 2.4), it was not perceived negatively among

interviewees in Chapter 5. Rather, across age categories, it was a vital stepping-stone onto a final, self-selected ELT AS PATH.

I was able to determine how, irrespective of demographic, perceived, cross-cohort prioritisation of ELT AS BUSINESS consistently dominated and cancelled out attempts to emulate ELT AS PROFESSION. This was despite ELT Ireland and UNITE ELT Branch attempts at building a TEACHER AS ACTIVIST identity that challenged a historic TEACHER AS INVISIBLE NON-ENTITY role, perpetuated by certain stakeholders to serve ELT AS BUSINESS ends (Wiczonoch 2025). Activism was evaluated as elevating ELT AS PROFESSION, yet mainly among older teachers. Concern raised about teacher-training courses omitting information regarding ELT workplace rights reflected recommendations for political-economy awareness being extended to trainees and novices (Gray and Block 2012, pp. 142-143). Discouragement of union membership, whilst not illegal in an Irish context, was perceived as contributing to a disempowering TEACHER AS SERVICE PROVIDER identity (Gray and Block 2012; Wiczonoch 2025), while a novel TEACHER AS ENEMY OF THE STATE embodied exclusion from policy-making engagement. My findings showed both identities were regarded as impacting all ELT teacher participants, regardless of demographic status.

Similar to perceptions of fate influencing ELT AS PATH, I unearthed how favourable, Irish-sector work conditions were considered due to good fortune, particularly among younger and less experienced male and female teachers, instead of a legal entitlement as a highly-qualified professional, in a regulated profession. Many participants expressed a wish to remain in ELT pending improvement in work conditions, consistent with survey responses (Chapter 6, 6.5). I then observed how younger, and less experienced male and female teachers, irrespective of nationality, mitigated directness on precarity-related issues regarding hourly pay rates, lack of pension, sick pay, and sudden school closure. However, when discussing these sensitive topics, empowering, metaphorical references were also noted, embodied in the root analogy GOOD IS UP. I also noted how older, more experienced teachers stressed the demands of teaching, and felt more empowered to negotiate better work conditions. Nevertheless, deregulatory practices and absence of union representation (Chapter 6 , 6.5) provided them with limited leverage. In contrast, I observed how younger teachers preferred supplementing ELT work with other income streams in a dominant TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR metaphor, displaying individual response over collective action as their precarity antidote. I found this metaphor to

empower and disempower equally, and to be reminiscent of observations of ‘McDonaldization’ practices in education marketing (Ritzer 2011; Section 6.3.1). CTA helped me reveal how ELT teacher deskilling presents in TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR, diminishing need for pedagogical methodologies (Curran and Jenks 2022), prioritising ELT AS BUSINESS. I discovered how lived, substandard work-practice experiences included lack of payment not only for redundancy, but holidays, lesson preparation, CPD attendance and of tax contributions. Discouragement of membership of ELT Ireland or UNITE ELT Branch compounded a disempowering TEACHER AS SERVICE PROVIDER identity, and disadvantaged teachers in emulating ELT AS PROFESSION, irrespective of age, gender or years’ experience.

My study finally revealed a dichotomised TEACHER AS PERFORMER versus TEACHER AS FACILITATOR identity. Two younger, male practitioners related to the former, with an older, more experienced, female dyad aligning to the latter, extending to a TEACHER AS EXPERT PRACTITIONER role enabling deviation from rigid, lesson confines. Nonetheless, both the older female and younger male pairs acquiesced to professionalism as being an attitude perfected over time. More experienced interviewees demonstrated directness when using the corpus-identified cluster ‘I think’. In addition, I noted younger and less experienced teachers to have made greater use of hedging, with persistent use of ‘like’, to mitigate disempowerment when questioning their own professionalism, in criticisms of other teachers who did not uphold what they considered to be appropriate, professional standards, and when sector outsiders questioned their professional status.

Based on these RQ-related findings from my study undertaking, recommendations are now presented.

## **9.2 Recommendations**

In addressing my three study research questions, the analysis overview I presented in Sections 9.1.1- 9.1.3 indicated teacher passion and genuine commitment towards their chosen ELT AS PATH. The majority expressed how much they wanted to be ELT teachers, loved what they did, enjoyed the close bonds formed with their students, and opportunities that travel and being in contact with people from diverse backgrounds gave them for personal growth. A sense of reward came from their belief that their professional contribution was making a real difference to students’ lives, such conviction tallying with

equally positive King Report (2019) evaluations. However, reservations regarding workplace conditions, and prevailing societal perceptions of their role, culminated in expressions of disempowerment. What recommendations can be drawn from these findings I now discuss.

### 9.2.1 Recommendation One: Regulation of the Irish-based, ELT sector

Detailing pandemic history, Fox (2020) outlines one stark reality: things are never the same in its aftermath. Some changes are temporary, some “more deeply ingrained”, disrupting what was once accepted, “normal” (ibid) or, in other words, ‘common sense’ practice. Rudd (2025, p. 26) elaborates: “Five years on, the financial and psychological costs of a once-in-a-century event continue to reverberate.”. COVID-19 demonstrated how globalisation has shortcomings which impact in ways that must be acknowledged, and addressed, despite the “unparalleled benefits” it has brought to many (Fox 2020; Sections 2.3-2.4). It is hoped that beneficial social, political and intellectual changes can now materialise to challenge the kinds of ‘common sense’ states of affairs I have revealed in this study as being disenfranchising for many of my profiled, Irish-based ELT teachers (Sections 6.4-6.5). ENGLISH AS COMMODITY is marketed to a constantly prioritised STUDENT AS CUSTOMER, which, in many instances, reduces Irish ELT teachers to mere service providers, discrediting their academic and pedagogical credentials. This exacerbated teachers’ perceptions of being ‘invisible’, and intensified feelings of isolation and precarity within the sector. From the perspective of political economy, the “language edutourism” (Yarymowich 2005; Heller 2010, p. 109) model embraced by Irish-based, ELT AS BUSINESS has aligned itself to dominant, neoliberal ideology, incorporating practices which strongly favour school owners, but disempower teachers, and disregard them as true stakeholders (UNITE ELT Branch 2020b; Wiczonoch 2025).

To counter, my first recommendation is for an independent, sector-feasibility study which is unrestricted to ACELS/QQI-affiliated schools. This would require audits undertaken of any school wishing to operate privately in the Republic of Ireland, irrespective of affiliation, and is in keeping with recommendations of O’Luain (2024), Labour Rights Officer of the English Language Students’ Union of Ireland. A recent Oireachtas Joint Committee meeting on Education, Further Education, Research, Innovation and Science found “dubious practices” to be still-persistent among a “minority of schools”, despite post-pandemic attempts at sector reform (Horgan-Jones 2024). A feasibility study might

ensure that pre-pandemic, substandard yet accepted, ‘common sense’ practices are addressed in a sector-wide manner. Moreover, it might encourage government-led intervention in a sector-approach establishment of state-run, ELT schools, along the Antipodean model. Such government-sanctioned and overseen institutions would be in a position to offer teachers stable contracts and incremental salaries, ensuring pay-scales that reflect teacher qualifications and experience levels in a consistent, cross-school manner.

#### 9.2.2 Recommendation Two: Addressing Irish-based, ELT crises of identity, and subsequent impact on teacher identity

I subdivide this broad area into four, more specific sections, and make suggestions for each, presented as follows.

##### *9.2.2.1 Addressing pejorative societal views of ELT teacher identity*

A pre-pandemic, keynote presentation I attended on the theme ‘Teachers Matter’, delivered by the primary advisor to the Minister for the Department of Education and Skills, focused on leadership as a policy perspective in Irish education. When asked, during the post-presentation Q and A, as to where they would position ELT teachers within Irish teaching, the response was a simple, yet honest, “I don’t know” (Wall 2019). The same advisor admitted that ‘teacher’ solely evoked state-sector, primary and secondary school-practitioner associations. That neither ELT, nor its teaching force, registered is reminiscent of my study’s metaphoric revelation of TEACHER AS INVISIBLE (6.4 and 6.5), reflected historical indifference of successive, government departments towards the sector and its teaching cohort, and has perhaps compounded the negativity and confusion driving ELT-teacher identity expressed in Chapter 8. Such a context justifies teacher concerns about sector insistence on undergoing Continuous Professional Development (Chapter 6, 6.3.1), particularly when unpaid.

It underlines Recommendation One calls for state-established, Irish-based ELT schools, which genuinely emulate ELT AS PROFESSION toward creation of a unique, celebrated, and societally-accepted, ELT teacher identity. Despite my study’s repeated revelations of ELT AS BUSINESS, the pandemic overwhelmingly disproved how private schools offering English-language instruction were confined to the category of ‘industry’. The government

closure of all schools and colleges in the Republic of Ireland from 6pm on Thursday, 12 March 2020 included language schools, “no discretion for school owners and directors but to observe” (MEI 2020a). A tentative March re-opening date was extended until 19 April (MEI 2020b), then re-extended, underscoring the Department of Education and Skills’ decisiveness in where it located ELT schools: subject to the same health and safety restrictions as all other Irish learning institutions. That ELT schools now reside under the new auspices of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science sets a precedent regarding future sector status. It addresses pre-pandemic, ELT-sector bouncing between the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and the Department of Justice. Now, one minister has sole responsibility for its oversight. I see this as a positive development, as such sector-identity crisis may well have contributed to teacher-identity confusion over the last few decades. I recommend that the sector, therefore, remain located under the responsibility of this one Department, and its appointed Minister, going forward.

Of equal note was the consistent, mid-pandemic reference to ELT schools as “education providers” in an “education sector” made by ACELS/QQI (2020), the sector’s government organ. This challenges traditional ELT AS BUSINESS mindsets which have positioned ELT schools entirely within an enterprise locus, and side-lined its practitioners as somehow not ‘real’ teachers. It also coincides with a post-pandemic zeitgeist that wonders whether “the economic case for a rapid expansion of both public employment... and public infrastructure...is overwhelming” (O’Toole 2021). O’Toole (2021) cites €1 billion raised from National Training Fund employer levies. This could assist the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in sector regulation, enabling compliant, ELT school operators to pay incremental salaries, offer pay-scaled contracts and benefits. This would bring ELT teacher professionalism and identity truly on a par with their public-sector counterparts.

The fact remains that the pandemic has been a gamechanger regarding the way in which not only Irish, but world economic affairs are conducted, with governments globally proving increased need for public-private partnership, and direct, emergency intervention when circumstance dictates (Burrow 2020). This suggests a timely precedent unlike any before witnessed for state intervention, expansion of the public sector, and a real need for a “new social contract between the public and private realms” (O’Toole, 2020a), the ELT

sector notwithstanding. Nevertheless, O’Luain (in Joint Committee of the Oireachtas 2024) notes earlier plans for ACELS to be fully replaced by QQI have yet to materialise, observing how “in this vacuum, the sector is festering and metastasising”, with “no incentive to regulate in a rush”.

OECD *Education at a Glance Indicators* (2018) observe the starting and top-of-scale salaries of Irish, lower-secondary teachers to rank seventeenth out of forty member countries, salaries in both primary and secondary sectors in Ireland increasing by 20% between 2000-2017 (OECD 2018, pp. 365-366). This outlines a key concern of all OECD countries in ensuring sufficient numbers of skilled teachers (OECD 2006, p. 376), and demonstrates the importance of value placed upon TEACHER AS EXPERT PRACTITIONER, an identity study participants aligned to, but did not feel was socially ascribed to them. It notes how “theoretically, a system that offers greater rewards to experience and performance provides greater incentives to perform at a higher level and to stay within the profession” (OECD 2006, p. 379). This favours the TEACHER AS PERFORMER identity and offers security, as opposed to the potential precarity it provoked in Chapter 8. By extension, TEACHER AS FACILITATOR and TEACHER AS ENGINEER could equally thrive, accommodating different personalities, yet embodying efficient styles that enable learning. The OECD (2006 pp. 381-403) outlines additional payments that may affect one’s decision to enter and remain within the teaching profession, based on management duties and responsibilities, age, qualifications, performance, and “working time”. This is defined as direct contact hours taught, or hours devoted to other teaching-related activities (e.g., lesson preparation time, correcting, setting tests, counselling students, attending CPD, meetings and general school tasks), depending on the formal policy of a given country. “Working time” does not include paid overtime (ibid). Such a salary-structure, viewed as integral to a country’s education well-being and its state-supported teaching population, could be extended to the ELT sector and its teaching cohort under a government-regulated model, which would permit ELT teachers to register as a distinct, professional cohort with the Teaching Council, their unique, ELT-specific qualifications recognised fully, rather than as an addendum. In addition, a less arduous Teaching Council registration process might benefit state-sector teaching, allowing ELT teachers to bring their discrete skill-sets to the public-sector school landscape, particularly given the well-publicised, current teacher shortage in Irish, state-sector schools (Walsh 2024).

### *9.2.2.2 Addressing concerns of mode of delivery*

Many of my study participants recognised the vast potential of online teaching in the post-pandemic landscape (e.g., Moorhouse, Li and Walsh 2021), influencing a TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR identity. However, fears raised by older teachers of teacher exploitation provoked a preference for the tangibility the face-to-face classroom environment afforded, especially in creating vital, social connections. This would encourage maintaining a more traditional, in-person lesson delivery, and underlines continued need for bricks-and-mortar schools in the Irish context. Irrespective of lesson delivery mode, or which identity teachers self-aligned to, disempowering, lived-experience revelations of passion exploitation saw ELT AS BUSINESS over-ride and compromise ELT AS PROFESSION in most schools in which they had taught face-to-face. This fact underlines the conviction that “having a strong and well-organized professional organization to represent the occupational group is essential [...] The only way to mandate standards is through the power of the state” (Breshears 2004, p. 34). Such reiteration of the need for state-established and regulated schools observed in Recommendation One raises the next two recommendations. The first suggests having measures in place that ensure appropriate work standards, beginning with advocacy.

### *9.2.2.3 Need for advocacy groups to focus on teacher work conditions*

Economic models, careers, social organizations and companies fit into the metaphorically embodied ABSTRACT COMPLEX SYSTEMS, with four primary issues influencing the metaphors describing them: whether the system functions effectively, if it is long-lasting and has stability, if it is developing as it should, and whether it is in appropriate condition (Kövecses 2010, pp. 155-156). Overnight closures of supposedly secure schools (Section 1.5) revealed an inherent instability in the Irish ELT sector, prompting the following response from ELT Advocacy (2019):

- that Irish-based ELT is “not a safe industry to work in” in its current incarnation;
- that “the word ‘permanent’ doesn’t exist in ELT”, not only in Ireland, but worldwide, and;
- that anyone entering the ELT profession is advised to have “an exit strategy” planned.

Such revelations, coupled with teacher concerns highlighted at government level (King 2019) see continued need for the existence of UNITE ELT Branch and similar advocacy groups to harness teacher voice. As further remedy, Phillipson's recommendation (1992, pp. 265-267) of greater training for ELT teachers in raising awareness of their own socio-cultural teaching contexts to see "what sort of power needs to be acquired in order to permit change" holds equally true in the contemporary, Irish-based situation (UNITE ELT Branch 2020a, p. 29). ELT teacher-training course providers and ELT Ireland could play equal roles in such information dissemination (Section 6.5), by designing and delivering modules to trainee teachers, or in presentations and workshops for experienced teachers, regarding their workplace rights, including union membership (Wiczonoch 2025). It is hoped that findings from my study can contribute to such scholarship.

Based on government-appointed mediator Patrick King's recommendations, an employment regulation order and establishment of a Joint Labour Committee led to the subsequent, inter-departmental and inter-agency COVID-19 Working Group for the English language education sector. This comprised representatives from the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, QQI, MEI, the Progressive Colleges Network and the Irish Council for International Students (Department of Education and Skills 2020). Initially, however, no groups such as UNITE ELT Branch, or ELT Advocacy were invited to act directly on behalf of teachers (ELT Advocacy 2020). This has been rectified, UNITE ELT Branch now holding representation. It indicates how it has taken a global pandemic crisis for a much-needed, radical change in thinking towards the work conditions of private-sector, ELT teachers, and how imperative it is that Irish-based ELT teachers have access to a dedicated union and advocacy. The findings from my study highlight continued need for such teacher representation at policy-making level. Of contemporary concern to unions worldwide is that social dialogue will continue to be "undermined", with eroded, collective-bargaining rights at local, national, sectoral and international levels resulting in a roll-back of social-protection measures, and labour rights (Carter 2020). The penchant toward TEACHER AS ENTREPRENEUR my study revealed favours this scenario, discouraging teacher mobilisation and collective-bargaining; a current example at a Canadian-based school chain sees evidence of teacher unionisation to have been met with "hostility" (Wiczonoch 2025). That Ireland remains an outlier among EU countries in its attitude to private-sector

employee, union membership is unhelpful, and needs reform if Irish-based, ELT teacher work conditions are to become prioritised and enshrined in policy.

#### *9.2.2.4 Need for teacher inclusion in payment protection schemes*

With one in five Irish companies furloughing staff over lockdown (Gleeson 2020), the pandemic saw expedient, unprecedented government funding of small-and-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Forty per cent of Irish-based, ELT teachers reported resorting to the COVID Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Jobseekers' Benefit or Allowance having been furloughed by their schools (Unite ELT Branch 2020a, p. 12), the direct, lived experience of many of my interview participants (Sections 6.5 and 7.5). It emphasises continued need for public-sector intervention in the administration of ELT schools. Teachers at one Dublin-based school revealed discovering, via online sources, how it had gone into liquidation, owing them upwards of five weeks' wages and holiday pay (Neylon 2020). For the 172 students left of 323, Marketing English in Ireland secured alternative schools, a strategy activated in 2018 after numbers of earlier school closures (Ellis *et al.* 2018; Section 1.2). Need for extended, contingency plans of student reallocation does not inspire confidence in privately-run, Irish-based ELT, suggests that overseeing body MEI has little faith in the very schools it purports to endorse, and that acceptance that schools are apt to close at a moment's notice has become worryingly normalised.

Whilst students, rightly, enjoy at least some protection, still "none at all" has been initiated for teaching practitioners (Ellis *et al.* 2018, p. 2); one reported case saw the same teacher left "high and dry by one rogue employer after another" on three, separate occasions (*ibid.*). In such event, a teacher's only recourse is to apply through a liquidator, administered by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, to the insolvency payments scheme (Ellis *et al.* 2018, p. 3). ELT Advocacy (2020b) is critical of what it views as the Irish government allowing, for forty years, "careless employers" to run unregulated, for-profit, at-risk businesses. A new Qualifications and Quality Assurance Education and Training Amendment Bill in 2018 promised to allow only providers that met "robust quality assurance procedures" to carry the International Education Mark (IEM), and recruit international students. It also pledged to provide QQI with "additional statutory powers to examine the bona fides of a provider...their legal personality, ownership and corporate governance arrangements" (Ellis *et al.* 2018, p. 3).

Whilst a very positive development, it makes no mention about duty of care to teachers, or teacher work conditions. Recommendations made by Minister for Higher and Further Education Patrick O'Donovan include a 'sinking fund' which Irish-based, ELT schools wishing to receive the aforementioned International Education Mark would be compelled to contribute to (Horgan-Jones 2024), providing added insurance for students. However, there is neither legal obligation for schools to acquire this mark in order to operate, nor are they obliged to extend the recommended sinking fund, or establish one such similar, for teachers. As my study participants demonstrated (Section 7.5), the majority middle-aged, career ELT teachers by choice, many had paid the price of precarity for what they perceived to be administrative irregularities on the part of their school operators. Denying teachers such insurance diminishes ELT AS PROFESSION, and will continue to disempower them through precarity. To mitigate, I therefore recommend that any sinking fund made available to students be extended to teachers, or a separate one established and ringfenced for teachers, in the event of a permanent school closure.

### 9.2.3 Recommendation Three: Re-imagining, reconstructing and embracing TEACHER AS BACKPACKER

ELT training-course providers have a valuable role to play in promoting ELT AS PROFESSION. My study participant testimonies point to a strong need to expose ELT trainee-teachers to the field of political economy: economic factors driving ELT AS BUSINESS that may negatively impact their daily ELT pursuit. This would involve honest acknowledgement on the part of teacher-trainers of identified ELT-workplace issues, imparting such information to trainees under their guidance, and incorporating coping strategies within a module (Section 6.5), especially those concerning precarity. Equally encouraging would be to see ELT offered as a viable career choice at Undergraduate level. For instance, the MIC 2024-2025 Undergraduate Prospectus contains a new B.A. in Drama and English offering candidates a Teaching as a Foreign Language module in Year 2, a positive development. Noted, however, is that offered under the heading of 'Career Opportunities' are 'Post-Primary Teaching' and 'Freelance Teaching', but not, specifically or distinctly, 'ELT' (MIC 2024, p. 97).

Perhaps reframing and embracing TEACHER AS BACKPACKER as something aspirational rather than pejorative, as did certain of my study participants (Section 5.3.2), would position ELT teachers more favourably, reinforcing beliefs that metaphors "function as

stepping stones to a new vantage point” (Martinez *et al.* 2001, p. 974). From this, practice may be perceived from new perspectives. It could result in more practitioners aspiring to the “platonic ideal” of a professional ELT teacher that one of my participants described so passionately (Section 8.4). This would, ultimately, be somebody fuelled with a core desire to teach, and specifically choosing the ELT medium through which to, thus breaking historic, cyclical observations of ‘falling into’ the sector. It would reflect Thornbury’s sentiment: “...as a profession, we should worry less about what other people think of us, and concern ourselves more with what we are good at: being out there, at the front, in the firing line, on the edge” (2001, pp. 395-396).

In response to the argument that ELT “suffers from low self-esteem”, Thornbury offers a third sector path for academia to embrace, to shake off its public perception as “a low status, even slightly disreputable thing to do” (2001, p. 391). As an alternative to a rigid academic model that promotes professionalism, or a therapeutic paradigm that ELT has reinvented itself with to improve student and teacher self-esteem, Thornbury suggests a third, *dialogic model*. This embodies a more co-participatory, teacher-learner role, acknowledging “the privileged space on the frontier between languages, and hence on the frontier between cultures” which ELT teachers uniquely occupy (Thornbury 2001, p. 394). Recognising interactional and social aspects of language learning, this allows students and practitioners freedom and flexibility to “simply talk about things” (*ibid*) of direct concern to them, within more empowered parameters. It would call for greater, negotiated syllabus design with students in targeting topics they themselves actually wish to engage with, and reflect an English for Specific Purposes (ESP), or genre-based approach (Thornbury 2006, p. 75; Harmer 2007, p. 327).

Such a model would favour the identified TEACHER AS ENGINEER, TEACHER AS FACILITATOR and TEACHER AS EXPERT PRACTITIONER roles in this study, might help to re-appraise dismissive attitudes, and re-frame the pejorative “backpacker school of teaching” in a more positive light (Thornbury 2001, p. 395). It would require rigorous training in, and implementation of robust methodologies to assist a dialogic process, like scaffolding and recasting through *instructional conversation* (Thornbury 1996; italics Thornbury’s). It would also, however, require a complete change of mindset among teacher trainers, such as use of a new acronym, e.g., EDP (English for Dialogic Purposes) over the continued ‘ELT’ reference, which some of my study participants dismissed outright (Section 8.5). A dialogic model might favour and value the more senior,

experienced, ‘reflective’ practitioner, as it entails an acceptance that “excitement, danger, and risk is an integral part of language learning”, (Thornbury 2001, pp. 395-396), promoting and justifying the ‘ad hoc’, lesson tangents outlined in Section 8.3.2. In turn, a more respected, empowered TEACHER AS CULTURAL BRIDGE may evolve to replace TEACHER AS BACKPACKER.

### **9.3 Personal reflections on this study**

Concerns regarding work conditions within Irish-based ELT, and how these impacted teacher life (Chapter 1, 1.2; Chapter 2, 2.2) prompted me, in my capacity as a PhD candidate, to engage in the action research for this study. This had been influenced directly by revelations of media-highlighted, questionable work practices in certain Irish-based, ELT schools (Sections 1.4-1.5), reportage which I had genuinely found shocking, dismaying, and incredible given estimated sector worth (9.0). ELT is a sector I have dedicated over thirty years of my professional life to. During this time, I was ‘lucky’ enough, to coin one study keyword, to have been in the employment of some of the finest schools in this country, emulated as sector models. I truly loved being an ELT teacher, willingly engaged in CPD, believed I was good at what I did, and never had a single day where I dreaded going into work. In addition, I had what I regard as the most stimulating of environments one could wish for to work in: the beating heart that is an ELT staffroom, with dynamic, committed, highly creative and supportive colleagues. I began this journey in the pre-pandemic era, determined to conduct my investigation in an impartial manner. The pandemic, and its many lockdown twists and turns made this increasingly challenging. For the first time in nearly thirty years of my very positive ELT experience, I found myself suddenly immersed in real, fear-inducing precarity as I was rendered furloughed, my future uncertain. My subsequent departure from the sector, owing to my school having been taken over by a competitor, was my choice, yet one I would have preferred not to have had to make.

The findings from my study lead me to ascertain that high qualifications, CPD commitment, adherence to standards of excellence and self-alignment to professionalism have not, thus far, translated into either government recognition of, or upward mobility within, the evolving ELT sector in Ireland. Based on its participant testimonies, my study has proved categorically to me that, for many contemporary Irish-based, private-sector ELT teachers, there remains no vertical progression in terms of promotion, or the

incremental pay, force majeure and superannuation benefits which are automatically extended to their state-sector counterparts. As the teacher in Chapter 1 (1.5) succinctly observed, there still simply appears to be **no up** for Irish-based, ELT teachers within their privately-operated, school confines.

My examination of ELT teacher perceptions of the privately-run, Irish-based ELT sector aimed to capture their voices in lived-experience accounts of work conditions within, to place these data on academic record. While I did not find the theme of travel as a prerequisite, rite of passage for the majority to a metaphorical ELT AS PATH as surprising, that the historical theme of ‘falling into’ the sector continued to prevail did come as a surprise, given attempts at professionalisation of the sector on the part of ELT Ireland, and availability of postgraduate, ELT-related courses. Despite high levels of student commitment on the part of these teachers and their self-identification of professionalism, the reliance on fate or luck in provision of decent work conditions, and the theme of precarity as a very real, ongoing threat in an Irish context wrought by sector deregulation alarmed me, consequently becoming my own, unexpected lived experience. I also found the persistent domination of metaphorical and thematic ELT AS BUSINESS over ELT AS PROFESSION of concern. That entrepreneurialism was viewed over union membership and activism as a preferred coping mechanism, despite concerted, UNITE ELT Branch efforts to reach out to and mobilise teachers, was equally concerning. Recent events in Canada demonstrate how precarity in ELT schools is of global concern, and highlights the importance of collective action among teachers themselves in countering this issue (Wiczonoch 2025). Many emergent metaphors were consistent with what I had anticipated in terms of the kind of classroom language teachers would typically employ: e.g., phrasal verb and idiom usage. What I had not anticipated were so many revelations of teacher identity, both established and novel, that expressed teacher professionalism and empowerment. Regardless, the pejorative societal perceptions of ELT teachers that continued to disempower this cohort, given their undeniable expertise, professionalism and commitment, was a finding that saddened me.

The King report was conducted in 2019, the two UNITE ELT Branch surveys in 2020 and the data for this study within similar time frames. Therefore, comprehensive research in the form of a nationwide, follow-up study to see whether the work conditions and self-perceptions of Irish-based, private sector ELT teachers have improved in a 2024-25 landscape, would be advisable going forward. A good place to begin would be with the

participants of this study, to see whether or not they have chosen to remain within the ELT landscape.

#### **9.4 Conclusion**

Examining real employment worth, O’Toole (2020b) outlines how we have constructed a social system with an inverse relationship between the true value of a job, and the way it is financially valued, observing “it takes an existential crisis to bring home to us the realisation that these are merely arbitrary choices sanctified by power and prejudice”. This study concludes that from a currently unregulated sector, in which teachers believe themselves disregarded as true stakeholders and excluded from policy-making, substandard work practices have remained largely unchallenged at official level within privately-run, Irish-based ELT. This reality continues to perpetuate negative associations with ELT as a sector, and by extension, its teacher cohort. During the earlier-mentioned Joint Committee Meeting of the Oireachtas (Section 9.2.1), similar observations were made of a worsening, post-pandemic scenario, more and more school operators choosing to run solely on a “for profit, pro-growth and pro-greed” basis (O’Luain 2024).

Teachers in this study expressed hope that government intervention would counter the current, unhealthy, neoliberal ECONOMIC MODEL AS DISEASE metaphor afflicting Irish ELT, and aspire to the type of highly-regulated, workplace standards upheld in Antipodean countries. Nevertheless, it must be considered that relentless, ELT-sector-driven promotion of English, fuelled by globalisation (Chapter 1, 1.2), may find itself flatly rejected by the non-native, English-speaking world in this current, geopolitically unsettled era. Commenting on the human condition, Maslow (1943, p. 375) reminds us how, when more urgent needs such as food, shelter or personal safety require attention, “the whole philosophy of the future tends to change”. This is one which is inevitably and ultimately marked by uncertainty. Under such a new world order, the direction and fate of Irish-based ELT and its teacher fraternity remains to be seen.

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## **List of Appendices**

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## **Appendix A**

# **QUALTRICS Online Questionnaire for ELT participants**

Available: <https://micquality.eu.qualtrics.com>

# Questionnaire for ELT participants

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. It should take no more than twenty minutes. It forms part of a PhD research project into the career paths and aspirations of ELT teachers in the Republic of Ireland. Information from teachers about their own career paths is particularly valuable. **Your anonymity is assured at all times.**

---

**Q1 Please choose the county in the Republic of Ireland your school situated in**

▼ Carlow (1) ... Wicklow (26)

---

**Q2 Please select the school you work for**

▼ Access English Campus (1) ... Other (86)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q2 = Other*

**Q3 Please state the school you work for**

---

---

**Q4 Is your school an ACELS-recognized school?**

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

**Q5 What is the gender you identify with?**

- Male (1)
  - Female (2)
  - Other (3)
- 

**Q6 What is your nationality?**

- Irish (1)
  - Other (please specify) (2)
- 

**Q7 Which age category do you fall into?**

- Under 20 (1)
- 21-30 (2)
- 31-40 (3)
- 41-50 (4)
- 51-60 (5)
- 61-70 (6)
- 71+ (7)

---

**Q8 How many years' ELT teaching experience do you have? (Please tick what is relevant for you).**

- If you don't have experience teaching in paid employment in a school/schools: (1)
- If you have experience teaching in paid employment in a school/schools, are you: (2)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q8 = If you don't have experience teaching in paid employment in a school/schools:*

**Q9 If you don't have experience teaching in paid employment in a school/schools:**

- The only teaching experience I have had so far is through the hours/practice sessions I had to teach on my course. (1)
- The only teaching experience I have had so far is through volunteer work. (2)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q8 = If you have experience teaching in paid employment in a school/schools, are you:*

**Q9 If you have experience teaching in paid employment in a school/schools, are you:**

- Newly qualified (under 1 year) (1)
- 1-2 years (2)
- 3-4 years (3)
- 5-6 years (4)
- 7-10 years (5)
- 11-15 years (6)
- 16-20 years (7)
- 21-25 years (8)
- 25 years+ (9)

---

**Q10 What type of undergraduate qualifications do you hold? (You may choose more than one response if applicable to you).**

- None (1)
- BA in Linguistics/Applied Linguistics (2)
- BA in English Language and Literature (3)
- BA in ELT (4) Please specify: (e.g. EFL, ESOL) \_\_\_\_\_
- BSc. (5) Please specify in which discipline(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (6) Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- 

*Display This Question:*

*If Q10 = BA in Linguistics/Applied Linguistics*

*Or Q10 = BA in English Language and Literature*

*Or Q10 = BA in ELT*

*Please specify: (e.g. EFL, ESOL)*

*Or Q10 = BSc*

*Please specify in which discipline(s):*

*Or Q10 = Other*

*Please specify:*

**Q11 If you have an undergraduate degree:** During your course, was there a postgraduate course in ELT/ESOL available to you, if you had so wished to study one, after completing your undergraduate course?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
-

**Q12 Do you hold postgraduate qualifications?**

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q12 = Yes*

**Q13 If you hold postgraduate qualifications, please indicate which (You may choose more than one if applicable to you).**

- CELT (QQI Ireland) (1)
- NUI ELE Certificate (2)
- DELTA (Cambridge) (3)
- Trinity College London ESOL (4)
- CELTA (Cambridge) (5)
- Other (6) Please Specify:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- MA in ELT (7) Please specify: (e.g. EFL, ESOL)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- MA in English Language and Literature (8)
- MA in Applied Linguistics (9)
- MA Other (10) Please specify:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- PhD in ELT (11) Please specify: (e.g. EFL, ESOL)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- PhD in English Language and Literature (12)
- PhD in Applied Linguistics (13)
- PhD Other (14) Please specify:  
\_\_\_\_\_

-----  
*Display This Question:*

*If Q12 = Yes*

**Q14**  
**If you hold a postgraduate qualification:**

Why did you decide to undertake postgraduate study? (You may tick more than one answer).

- For my personal development (1)
  - To fulfill ACELS/QQI requirements (2)
  - For my professional development (3)
  - It was required by my employer (4)
  - To fulfill Continuous Professional Development (CPD) obligations (5)
  - Other (Please specify) (6)
- 

*Display This Question:*

*If Q12 = Yes*

**Q15 If you hold a postgraduate qualification, was your course:**

- full-time (1)
  - part-time (2)
  - online only (3)
  - blended (online and face-to-face contact) (4)
  - Please specify course duration (5)
- 

*Display This Question:*

*If Q12 = Yes*

**Q16 How was your course funded?**

- By me personally (1)
  - By my employer (2)
  - Other (e.g. grant/scholarship) Please specify (3)
- 

**Q17 Have you attended any ELT workshops/conferences in the past 12 months?**

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

*Display This Question:*

*If Q17 = Yes*

**Q18**

**If so, how many?**

- 1-2 (1)
- 3-4 (2)
- 5 or more (3)

*Display This Question:*

*If Q17 = Yes*

**Q19 Why did you attend? (You may tick more than one option).**

- For my personal development (1)
- For my professional development (2)
- For CPD obligations (3)
- Required by my employer (4)
- Required by ACELS/QQI/EAQUALS (5)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q17 = Yes*

**Q20 Did you have to travel outside your town/city to attend your last workshop/conference?**

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q17 = Yes*

**Q21 Were you paid for the time you spent attending this conference/workshop?**

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q17 = Yes*

**Q22 Were you paid travel/accommodation expenses for this workshop/conference?**

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q17 = Yes*

**Q23 Did you receive a certificate of attendance at the end of it?**

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q17 = Yes*

**Q24 Was the conference/workshop held during:**

a weekday (1)

a weekend (2)

---

*Display This Question:*

*If Q17 = Yes*

**Q25 Which would you prefer? Please specify**

---

**Q26 In general, would you prefer to attend conference presentations/workshops:**

- At the organized conference/workshop venue (1)
  - Online (2)
  - In-house (i.e. at your own workplace) (3)
  - Other (Please specify) (4)
- 
- 

**Q27**

**Your work environment (please select all relevant answers).  
How many hours do you work a day?**

- 1-3 (1)
  - 4-6 (2)
  - 7+ (3)
- 

**Q28 When and at what time? (Please tick all that apply and specify length of lessons in minutes.)**

morning (8:00 - 12:00) (1)

---

afternoon (12:00 - 16:00) (2)

---

evening (16:00 - 19:00) (3)

---

night (19:00 - 22:00) (4)

---

weekends (5)

---

---

Q29

**Where do you mostly prepare your lessons?**

- at home (1)
  - at work (2)
  - other (Please specify where) (3)
- 

---

**Q30 Where do you teach your classes? (You may choose more than one answer).**

- at my school (1)
  - at my home (Please specify whether face-to-face private lessons or online) (2) \_\_\_\_\_
  - other (Please specify) (3)
- 

---

**Q31 How long do you spend on lesson preparation per week?**

- 1-2 hours (1)
  - 3-5 hours (2)
  - 6-9 hours (3)
  - 10 hours + (4)
-

**Q32 How long do you spend on homework correction per week?**

- 1-2 hours (1)
  - 3-5 hours (2)
  - 6-9 hours (3)
  - 10 hours + (4)
-

**Q33 Which of the following do you have access to at work to supplement your teaching? (Please select all relevant items.)**

- photocopier (1)
- school laptop (2)
- school tablet (3)
- teacher resource books for teaching classes (4)
- language laboratory (5)
- smart television (6)
- school desktop (7)
- printer (please specify whether colour or black and white) (8)
- interactive whiteboard (9)
- stationery (markers/biros/paper/staplers etc) (10)
- reliable wifi (11)
- projector (12)
- a permanent staff room (i.e. exclusively for teachers' use, not as a classroom outside breaktime) (13)
- school email account (14)
- school social media account (15)
- online resource-sharing platform (e.g. Edmodo) (16)
- online platform/options for listening activities (e.g. USB storage/Google Drive, not CDs) (17)
- access to speakers for listening activities (18)

resource library for lesson planning (19)

resource library for CPD (20)

---

**Q34 Is there any resource you do not have access to that you would like to have?**

Yes (Please specify) (1)

\_\_\_\_\_

No (2)

---

**Q35 Your role as a teacher (Please select all relevant answers).**  
**What are your typical duties in your school?**

- planning lessons (1)
  - planning/organizing timetables (2)
  - teaching adult learners (3)
  - teaching teenage learners (4)
  - teenage young learners (5)
  - training new teachers (6)
  - mentoring new teachers (7)
  - ordering stationery/textbooks/resource books (8)
  - keeping communal workspaces tidy (9)
  - liaising between students and management (10)
  - assessing students during term-time (11)
  - interviewing new students (12)
  - administering and/or correcting level-placement tests for new/existing students (13)
  - socializing with students (14)
  - organizing extra-curricular activities for students (15)
  - organizing/running a resource library for teachers (16)
  - providing cover for absent teachers (17)
  - other (please specify) (18) \_\_\_\_\_
-

Q36

**Your work conditions (Please select all appropriate answers for you).**

**I am paid:**

an hourly rate (Please specify how much per hour) (1) \_\_\_\_\_

a weekly rate (please specify how much per week) (2) \_\_\_\_\_

an annual salary (please specify) (3) \_\_\_\_\_

for lesson preparation/correction (4)

for exam preparation/correction (5)

for holidays (please specify how many per school year you are paid for)  
(6) \_\_\_\_\_

for sick days (please specify how many per school year you are paid for)  
(7) \_\_\_\_\_

for force majeure (i.e. time taken off for urgent family commitments/bereavement - please specify how many force majeure days per school year you are paid for) (8) \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Q37 Please select whether the following statements are true or false for you and your circumstances.**

---

Q38 I have a pension plan which my school contributes to.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q39 I have my own private pension plan which my school does not contribute to.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q40 I do not have a pension plan.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q41 I have medical insurance which my school contributes to.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q42 I have my own private medical insurance which my school does not contribute to.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q43 I do not have medical insurance.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q44 I do not have paid holidays.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q45 I have a mortgage.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q46 I live in rented accommodation.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q47 I live with my parents or family members other than my spouse/partner/children.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q48 I share rented accommodation with people who are not family members.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q49 I do not have paid sick days.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q50 I am required to attend meetings at my school.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q51 I am paid for attending meetings at my school.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q52 I am paid for attending conferences/workshops that are not at my workplace.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q53 I am given expenses for attending conferences/workshops that are not at my workplace.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
-

Q54 Course fees are covered fully by my employer.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q55 Course fees are covered partially by my employer.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q56 Course fees are not covered at all by my employer.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q57 My school regularly organizes social events for teachers.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
-

Q58 My school sometimes organizes social events for its teachers.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q59 My school never organizes social events for its teachers.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q60 My school always pays for social events it organizes for its teachers.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q61 My school sometimes pays for social events it organizes for its teachers.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
-

Q62 My school never pays for social events it organizes for its teachers.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q63 I am entitled to force majeure.

- Yes (1)
  - No (2)
- 

Q64 My school is concerned with teacher wellness and well-being.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q65 My school encourages teachers to look after their mental health.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
- 

Q66 My school is mindful of good health and safety practices for its teachers.

- Yes (1)
  - Don't know (2)
  - No (3)
-

Q67 My school provides a quiet, management-free staffroom for teachers to have their breaks in.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q68 My school provides a kitchen with access to a kettle/microwave/fridge for teachers to store/heat drinks and meals in.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q69 My school provides separate toilets for teachers and students.

Yes (1)

No (2)

---

Q70 My school provides support for teachers with professional difficulties (e.g. uncooperative/disruptive students, unfamiliarity with a new level).

Yes (1)

Don't know (2)

No (3)

---

Q71 My school provides support for teachers with personal difficulties.

Yes (1)

Don't know (2)

No (3)

---

Q72 I have worked in a school or schools abroad.

Yes (Please specify which country or countries). (4) \_\_\_\_\_

No (5)

---

Q73

**Your attitudes to ELT.**

**Why did you decide to work in ELT?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

Q74

**What are your longer-term career plans? Do you see yourself continuing in ELT?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

Q75

**Do you view ELT as a profession? (Please give reasons for your choice).**

Yes (1) \_\_\_\_\_

Don't know (2) \_\_\_\_\_

No (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Q76

**What in your opinion are the typical attributes of a professional ELT teacher?**

---

---

---

---

---

**Q77 Do you regard yourself as a professional? (Please explain your reason for your choice).**

- Definitely yes (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- Probably yes (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- Might or might not (3) \_\_\_\_\_
- Probably not (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- Definitely not (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q78

**Is there anything else you would like to add that hasn't been covered in this questionnaire?**

---

---

---

---

---

**Q79 Would you be interested in participating in an interview for this study?**

Yes (Please provide an email contact) (1) \_\_\_\_\_

No (2)

# Appendix B

## Face-to-Face Focus Group Interview Participation Letter



### **An Examination of Self-Perceptions of Teachers in the Private English-Language School Sector in the Republic of Ireland**

#### **Focus Group Interview Participant Information Letter**

##### **What is the project about?**

The current study will focus on the direct experiences of English-language teachers in the Republic of Ireland within the private-sector area of English-language teaching and aims to increase the understanding of how teachers in this area perceive their role and career paths in it.

##### **Who is undertaking it?**

My name is Deborah Tobin and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing a Structured PhD in Applied Linguistics in the Department of English Language and Literature under the supervision of Dr Joan O'Sullivan ([joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie](mailto:joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie)) and Dr Brian Clancy ([brian.clancy@mic.ul.ie](mailto:brian.clancy@mic.ul.ie)) The current study will form part of my thesis.

##### **Why is it being undertaken?**

The objective of the study is to find out more about the career patterns and aspirations of English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers within schools in the private ELT sector here in the Republic of Ireland.

##### **What are the benefits of this research?**

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will enhance understanding of the direct experiences of ELT teachers in the private-language school sector in the Republic of Ireland, and determine to what degree variables of age, gender and years of teaching experience have influenced the direct experiences of the teacher participants. The study hence aims to build a baseline of data of teachers in the approximately 85 non-university, ACELS-recognised English-language schools

around the Republic but will also seek to include teachers who may be based in non-ACELS-affiliated schools.

**Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)**

The study will consist of a **focus group interview** to investigate your experiences as an ELT teacher in four parts, asking a range of questions to gain information about your role as a teacher and the path that has led you to English language teaching in the first place. It will take approximately forty minutes to complete and ideally you will be in a group of two - four teachers.

Part One will explore your background story and what led you to ELT.

Part Two will investigate your attitudes to ELT as a long-term career and profession.

Part Three will ask you about relationships you have to the area of ELT as a profession.

Part Four will seek your attitudes about being an ELT teacher in the Republic of Ireland today.

The interview will be conducted at your workplace or at an alternative venue convenient for you as participants. It will be audio-recorded only (not video) on an iPad, with a back-up Dictaphone recording device.

**Right to withdraw**

Your anonymity is assured, and you are free to withdraw from the focus group at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

**How will the information be used / disseminated?**

The data from your focus-group interview will be combined with that of the other focus-group participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Transcribed data only will appear in the thesis, individual participants will not be named, but assigned a code for reference purposes.

**How will confidentiality be kept?**

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity.

**What will happen to the data after research has been completed?**

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

**Contact details:**

If at any time you have any queries / issues regarding this study, my contact details are as follows:

Deborah Tobin

Email: [Deborah.Tobin@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Deborah.Tobin@mic.ul.ie)

***If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:***

MIREC Administrator

Research and Graduate School

Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road, Limerick

Limerick

E-mail: [mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)

# Appendix C

## Modified Focus Group Interview Information Letter for Online Interview



### An Examination of Self-Perceptions of Teachers in the Private English-Language School Sector in the Republic of Ireland

#### Zoom Focus Group Interview Participant Information Letter

#### **What is the project about?**

The current study will focus on the direct experiences of English-language teachers in the Republic of Ireland within the private-sector area of English-language teaching and aims to increase the understanding of how teachers in this area perceive their role and career paths in it.

#### **Who is undertaking it?**

My name is Deborah Tobin and I am a Postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing a Structured PhD in Applied Linguistics in the Department of English Language and Literature under the supervision of Dr Joan O'Sullivan ([joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie](mailto:joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie)) and Dr Brian Clancy ([brian.clancy@mic.ul.ie](mailto:brian.clancy@mic.ul.ie)) The current study will form part of my thesis.

#### **Why is it being undertaken?**

The objective of the study is to find out more about the career patterns and aspirations of English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers within schools in the private ELT sector here in the Republic of Ireland.

#### **What are the benefits of this research?**

It is hoped that the data gathered from participants will enhance understanding of the direct experiences of ELT teachers in the private-language school sector in the Republic of Ireland, and determine to what degree variables of age, gender and years of teaching experience have influenced the direct experiences of the teacher participants. The study hence aims to build a baseline of data of teachers in the

approximately 85 non-university, ACELS-recognised English-language schools around the Republic but will also seek to include teachers who may be based in non-ACELS-affiliated schools.

**Exactly what is involved for the participant (time, location, etc.)**

The study will consist of a **focus group interview** to investigate your experiences as an ELT teacher in four parts, asking a range of questions to gain information about your role as a teacher and the path that has led you to English language teaching in the first place. It will take approximately forty minutes to complete and ideally you will be in a group of two - four teachers.

Part One will explore your background story and what led you to ELT.

Part Two will investigate your attitudes to ELT as a long-term career and profession.

Part Three will ask you about relationships you have to the area of ELT as a profession.

Part Four will seek your attitudes about being an ELT teacher in the Republic of Ireland today.

The interview will be conducted online via the platform Zoom. It will be video and audio recorded, and audio-recorded on an iPad as a back-up.

**Right to withdraw**

Your anonymity is assured, and you are free to withdraw from the focus group at any time without giving a reason and without consequence.

**How will the information be used / disseminated?**

The data from your focus-group interview will be combined with that of the other focus-group participants in this study and used to form the results section of my thesis. Transcribed data only will appear in the thesis, individual participants will not be named, but assigned a code for reference purposes.

**How will confidentiality be kept?**

All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. A random ID number will be generated for each participant and it is this number rather than the participant's name which will be held with their data to maintain their anonymity.

**What will happen to the data after research has been completed?**

In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all research data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years.

**Contact details:**

If at any time you have any queries / issues regarding this study, my contact details are as follows:

Deborah Tobin

Email: [Deborah.Tobin@mic.ul.ie](mailto:Deborah.Tobin@mic.ul.ie)

*If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent, you may contact:*

MIREC Administrator

Research and Graduate School

Mary Immaculate College

South Circular Road, Limerick

Limerick

E-mail: [mirec@mic.ul.ie](mailto:mirec@mic.ul.ie)

# Appendix D

## Informed Consent Form for Face-to-Face Focus Group Participants



### Informed Consent Form for Focus Group Interview Participants

Dear Participant,

As outlined in your **participant information letter** the current study will investigate the personal experiences of English-language teachers in private-language schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Details of what each part of the focus group interview involves are contained in your **participant information letter**. The participant information letter should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the study.

Your anonymity is assured, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years at which time it will be destroyed. Anonymised research data may be held indefinitely or as required by the Researcher.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understood the **participant information letter**.
- I understand what the study is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of **all** the procedures involving myself, and of any **risks and benefits** associated with the study.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

Name (PRINTED): \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Signature): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix E

## Modified Consent Form for Online Focus Group Participants



### Informed Consent Form for Zoom Focus Group Interview Participants

Dear Participant,

As outlined in your **participant information letter** the current study will investigate the personal experiences of English-language teachers in private-language schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Details of what each part of the focus group interview involves are contained in your **participant information letter**. The participant information letter should be read fully and carefully before consenting to take part in the study.

Your anonymity is assured, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. All information gathered will remain confidential and will not be released to any third party. In accordance with the MIC Record Retention Schedule all participant data will be stored for the duration of the project plus three years at which time it will be destroyed. Anonymised research data may be held indefinitely or as required by the Researcher.

Please read the following statements before signing the consent form.

- I have read and understood the **participant information letter**.
- I understand what the study is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I agree to be interviewed via the online platform Zoom in lieu of a face-to-face interview.
- I am fully aware of **all** the procedures involving myself, and of any **risks and benefits** associated with the study.
- I know that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving any reason.
- I am aware that my results will be kept confidential.

Name  
(PRINTED): \_\_\_\_\_

Name  
(Signature): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix F

## Study Information Email sent to Directors of Studies

Dear Director of Studies,

My name is Deborah Tobin and I am a postgraduate student attending Mary Immaculate College. I am presently completing a Structured PhD in Applied Linguistics in the Department of English Language and Literature, under the supervision of Dr Joan O'Sullivan ([joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie](mailto:joan.osullivan@mic.ul.ie)) and Dr Brian Clancy ([brian.clancy@mic.ul.ie](mailto:brian.clancy@mic.ul.ie)). My current study and any data emerging from it will form part of my thesis.

I am writing to ask you if you would be willing to distribute this attached information sheet about my study among the teachers at your school, and to provide them with the link to the online questionnaire:

[https://micquality.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_9Y3wWrASnm5LM9f](https://micquality.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9Y3wWrASnm5LM9f)

I would be most grateful for your support and for teacher responses.

Please find attached an information sheet about my study, as well as the link to the online survey. Thank you for your attention to the above. If any teachers are interested in participating, I look forward to hearing from them.

Kind regards,

Deborah Tobin

# Appendix G

## Breakdown of the Metaphor Identification Procedure framework (MIP)

Steps of MIP	Details of each step
<b>a) Text details</b>	Name: Teacher Focus Group Interviews (13 hours) Source: Face-to-Face and online Mode: Spoken and transcribed Genre, register: interview, semi-formal Dates conducted: Between 11 July 2019 and 4 Nov 2020 Length of text: 137, 911 words Length of context read by analyst (as apart from coded) – all fifteen, complete interviews
<b>b) Listener or readership assumed</b>	A present-day audience is assumed for readership of transcripts and subsequent analysis of this research. Contemporary meanings are thus assumed identical with present-day meanings.
<b>c) Lexical unit decisions</b>	Single headwords in the dictionary, polywords (e.g., <i>of course, all right</i> ), phrasal verbs and individual words at the word class level, particularly grammatical words (e.g., the frequency word prepositions <i>of, in</i> ; pronoun <i>I</i> in expressions of modality) were regarded as single lexical units.  Multiword units, classical idioms, and fixed collocations were broken down into their component words for analysis.
<b>d) Resources used</b>	<i>Cambridge Grammar of English</i> (Carter and McCarthy, 2006) <i>The Penguin English Dictionary 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition</i> (2003) <i>Cambridge English Dictionary (online)</i> (2022) <i>Collins English Dictionary (online)</i> (2022) <i>Merriam-Webster Dictionary (online)</i> (2022) <i>The Idioms (online)</i> (2022) <i>English Guides 7: Metaphor</i> (Deignan, 1995) <i>The Language of Metaphors</i> (Goatly, 1997) <i>Metaphor: A Practical Introduction</i> (Kövecses, 2010) <i>English Idioms in Use</i> (McCarthy and O’Dell, 2002) <i>Metaphor and Thought 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition</i> (Ortony, 1993)
<b>e) Coding decisions</b>	On first reading while transcribing, the researcher used a colour-coding system to identify CTA open-coding features, including empowerment/disempowerment, shared knowledge/experience, IrEng or issue specific to Irish ELT , Vague Category Markers and Approximators, pronoun use and metaphor to assist in identification of recurrence and repetition patterns. <b>Bold print</b> indicated slight word intonation. CAPITAL LETTERS indicated strong, raised intonation or volume to assist identification of enforcement patterns. Pauses of 1 second were indicated by ellipses, longer pauses indicated in parentheses (e.g., 3 sec).

	<p>On second reading when closely identifying <b>metaphor</b>, the distinct parts of <b>step c</b> were applied in select, relevant sections of the overall text for all word classes. Decisions about contextual meaning, basic meaning (if any) and relationships between these were made intuitively, with consultation of above-named resources, to see which words/phrases constituted metaphorical use. In addition, CTA closed-coding was applied to examine how the open-coding linguistic features reflected teachers' evaluative stance of their immediate workplace environment and the Irish ELT sector, where they positioned themselves and how empowered they felt within both, and how their work conditions and broader societal factors influenced these perceptions.</p> <p>Final coding applied to selected, transcribed extracts after corpus analysis: <b>key phrases</b> of each chapter focus; <b>metaphor</b>; <i>pronouns</i> under investigation; CAPITAL LETTERS for thematic reinforcement.</p>
<b>f) Analysis details</b>	<p>Number of analysts: 1  Who the analyst was: a native-English speaking, Irish-based ELT teacher and PhD student of Applied Linguistics.  Precoding training: Reading of above-named reference books on metaphor.</p> <p>Number of 'passes' (rounds of coding) made: Two – first when being transcribed, with a second full reading of each interview by the sole researcher. Thereafter, multiple readings of the data were undertaken in the analysis stage</p>
<b>g) Additional/subsequent analyses</b>	<p>Sketch Engine corpus software provided frequency, n-gram and keyword lists for objective identification and closer analysis of word patterns that may have been used metaphorically, and emerged as recurring themes; Critical Thematic Analysis could then be reapplied.</p>
<b>h) Results of analyses including statistical analyses of reliability</b>	<p>N/A as there was only one researcher</p>

**Chapter 4, 4.4.2 The MIP checklist (Pragglejaz Group 2007) for manual examination of metaphor.**

## Appendix H

### Publications Related to this Thesis

Tobin, D. (2022) 'There is no up: Self-perceptions of ELT Teachers in the Republic of Ireland', *EL Gazette*, available: [https://www.elgazette.com/elg\\_archive/ELG2207/mobile/index.html](https://www.elgazette.com/elg_archive/ELG2207/mobile/index.html) [accessed 10 February 2024].

Tobin, D. and Bennett, C. (2023) 'Continuous Professional Development and Work Conditions for English-Language Teaching Practitioners in Ireland: Where do we go from here?', *Irish Journal of Academic Practice*, 11(1), available: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijap/vol11/iss1/1> [accessed 10 February 2024].

Tobin, D. (2024) 'Language schools - a fairer deal for all', *Irish Times, Letters to the Editor*, available: <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/2024/08/17/language-schools-a-fairer-deal-for-all/> [accessed 19 August 2024].

