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The impact of Teaching Assistants' activities on their subjective well-being

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Student Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own, except where explicit attribution is made.

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Abstract

Teaching Assistants (TA) have diverse roles, ranging from classroom support and delivering interventions to providing pastoral care and fulfilling numerous other tasks and responsibilities. Most research on TAs has concentrated on enhancing their effectiveness. However, factors related to wellbeing which either benefit or hinder their work, often emerge indirectly. Wellbeing is important not only for effective performance but also for their sense of self, motivation, and emotions, among other aspects. TAs are frequently required to use the strategies and interventions recommended by Educational Psychologists (EPs), which may improve in effectiveness if staff are content and motivated. The few studies evaluating wellbeing tend to focus on the overall experience of TAs, with limited attention to how it may vary across daily activities, such as specific tasks and responsibilities. Informed by the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project and utilising the Simple Model of Subjective Wellbeing, this research aimed to investigate how various dimensions of subjective wellbeing differ across TAs' activities. A two- phase mixed methods design was adopted; first, a survey was conducted adapting the Day Reconstruction Method, which required TAs to score their subjective wellbeing for each activity on a given day, followed by semi-structured interviews with four TAs to explore wellbeing and related factors in greater depth. Inferences were drawn from descriptive statistics of the survey and thematic analysis of the interviews. TAs derive positive wellbeing from activities that enable them to support pupils in making progress, predominantly in learning, such as facilitating interventions, which are regarded as a core aspect of their job identity. However, activities requiring a high level of responsibility for behaviour management with minimal support, such as teaching classes, were linked to negative wellbeing. In the current system, as TAs are often redeployed to cover classes and manage challenging situations, schools'

risk frequently removing them from activities that provide the most meaning, enjoyment, and a sense of competency. Further discussion and implications are included.

Impact Statement

TAs can be considered the unsung heroes in our schools. Their role is varied, from supporting in the classroom and facilitating interventions to monitoring pupils on the playground, and more recently, covering classes (Webster et al., 2024). Subjective wellbeing is important for TAs' health, sense of self, and resilience, enabling them to perform their work to the best of their ability. While recent research has highlighted the general picture of TA wellbeing in schools, most studies focus on how to best utilise TAs to maximise outcomes for pupils. This is an important area of study, but it also often reveals how TA wellbeing may be affected as well. Using the Simple Model of Wellbeing, which draws upon the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), this thesis aims to capture the views of TAs on how their wellbeing differs between the tasks and responsibilities they undertake as part of their role.

The findings highlighted how TAs value their role by drawing meaning from directly supporting pupils, primarily enabling them to progress in their learning. TAs identify supporting learning as their most important role; a role they feel competent and accomplished in, enjoying the formation of close connections with the pupils. It particularly emphasised that intervention work boosts TAs' wellbeing the most, aligning with Blatchford et al. (2009) recommendations that TAs are most effective in influencing pupil outcomes when formally trained to deliver interventions. TAs shared the challenges to their wellbeing when covering classes, feeling deskilled and overwhelmed by the high level of responsibility and minimal support. This insight has

implications for how schools can deploy their TAs to best accommodate the needs of the pupils while maximising TA wellbeing as much as possible. It also further adds to calls from other research studies (Clarke & Visser, 2015; Geeson & Clarke, 2023; Neaum & Noble, 2023) to formalise and legitimise the TA role. Currently, schools use TAs by requiring them to take on responsibilities as needed; however, this fosters a feeling of being devalued and frustration at not being able to support the pupils as effectively as they feel they can before being redeployed elsewhere. The high flexibility of the TA role demonstrates TAs' expertise in the needs of the pupils they support, which not only aids Educational Psychologists in their work but also promotes TA wellbeing by highlighting that their knowledge and skills are significant. Future research should further explore what TAs want from their roles and how they self-define them, especially in light of the changing needs of the school system, including tightening school budgets and increasing cost of living (UNISON, 2024). It is important to investigate the wants and needs of TAs to ensure their wellbeing while they carry out their invaluable work.

Table of Contents

List of Acronyms

CYP – Child or young person/children and young people

DfE - Department for Education

DISS - The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project

DRM – Day Reconstruction Method

EP - Educational Psychologist

ESS - European Social Survey Wellbeing Module

HLTA- Higher-level Teaching Assistant

SEMH – Social, Emotional and Mental Health

SENCo – Special Educational Needs Coordinator

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SLT – Senior Leadership Team

TA - Teaching Assistant

TEP - Trainee Educational Psychologist

WPR - Wider Pedagogical Role Model

Chapter 1 - Rationale and Background

1.1 Introduction

Teaching assistants (TA) comprise a notable part of the UK's mainstream education workforce, delivering education and pastoral support for pupils (Blatchford, 2006; Hammersley-Fletcher & Lowe, 2011; Hancock & Colloby, 2013). TAs will provide a large proportion of the provisions and interventions recommended to support children and young people (CYP) by Educational Psychologists (EP). EPs' aim for positive outcomes for CYP, and they remain at the centre of their work. However, TAs also have their own psychological needs, which in turn influence the outcomes of the pupils they work with (Jardí et al., 2022). TAs' psychological needs, such as wellbeing, should also be supported and should make up a part of the EP role in their continuing drive towards supporting CYP. With knowledge of psychology and the school systems, EPs are in an excellent position to understand TA wellbeing and influencing environmental factors. While wellbeing as a psychological construct has been researched extensively (Diener et al., 1999; Lambert et al., 2015; Ryff, 2013), more research on TA wellbeing specifically is needed.

This doctoral thesis explores how TAs' tasks and responsibilities can impact their wellbeing, thus providing a much-needed TA voice in the literature and offering an alternative perspective on the discourse surrounding the TA role and how staff wellbeing can be better accommodated within the school system. This first chapter provides essential background information on the TA role, including its evolution over the past several decades, as well as important frameworks used to inform the research, including the definition of wellbeing and its multiple dimensions.

1.2 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

Qualitative research data requires a degree of interpretation on the researcher's part. In this research, participants' recollections and reflections on their experiences will be further perceived and interpreted through the researcher's lens, influenced by their previous experiences, beliefs and moral values. Consequently, research reflexivity is important. Reflexivity is the process of the researcher acknowledging their own position, personally, functionally, and disciplinary (Wilkinson, 1988). This enables others to critique the interpretation further.

Functional Reflexivity refers to the researcher's influence on the research process. This influence can manifest in methodological decision-making, such as the questions presented to participants or the selection of data collection tools. Additionally, functional reflexivity reflects how the researcher impacts data collection; for instance, participants may alter their responses based on their beliefs about what the researcher wants to hear or withhold information due to perceived power dynamics. Functional reflexivity will be reported throughout the relevant sections of this thesis.

Disciplinary reflexivity refers to how the discipline or sub-discipline of the research may have developed or evolved to shape the direction of the field by including or excluding particular research theories, hypotheses, and ideas. Previous research on TAs will heavily influence the design of the data collection tools to promote ease of use. However, the researcher risks unintentionally excluding components that have not received appropriate attention, propagating the same ideas about the TA role, and missing the opportunity to expand the knowledge base.

Personal reflexivity refers to acknowledging one's motivations, interests, and attitudes, which could influence the interpretation of the data. For clarity, this

researcher's personal reflexivity is included below in a first-person narrative. My prior roles as an agency TA, volunteer TA, and residential worker have influenced how I view TA work. Below are the key experiences that shaped my stance:

Isolation and low support

During a school tour for a one-to-one TA position with an autistic pupil, I saw how isolating and stressful this role could be without collegial support. This experience underscored how TA roles can negatively affect mental health if adequate support is lacking.

Pupil Success

When working with a Year 6 pupil who I believed lacked confidence, I used humour and encouragement to help him complete work after weeks of him not engaging. This reinforced my belief that TA work can be demanding and rewarding.

High demands

As both a residential worker and a TEP, I heard TAs express their frustration through phrases such as “I can get better pay at [a supermarket] with less stress”, highlighting how low pay and emotional demands prompted them to leave working in the education sector altogether; a sentiment expressed by TAs in the media too (Alston, 2023). However, my reflection is that pay alone isn’t the sole issue; stress and lack of support are equally critical.

TA status and impact on wellbeing

During a training session, a TA asked, “Why do we have an EP at our table? Do we look like we need help?” I hypothesised that the TAs were feeling deskilled or

undervalued which led to further conversation around being kept out of critical discussions around pupils because they “were just TAs”. I reflected that other TAs may also be feeling deskilled and dismissed by other staff members. Similarly, while shadowing secondary school TAs, I noted how adaptable they had to be working in multiple classes and with multiple pupils over the course of each day. Yet, I also observed how the TAs often worked independently of the teacher, and their presence was sometimes met with confusion. This reinforced my view that TAs’ experience of social standing can influence their wellbeing and how they conduct their role.

Based on my personal experience, I believe that the social dynamics between the TA, other staff members, and pupils influence subjective wellbeing. Due to the highly social nature of working with children's education, this is a critical component of good TA work, which may get overlooked in favour of pupil outcomes. Large-scale wellbeing surveys of education staff and previous discussions with TAs led to a desire to explore TA wellbeing in a more rigorous research methodology.

The nature of Reflexive Thematic Analysis encourages noticing of the impact of beliefs and incorporating them into the interpretation. Therefore, the interpretation is, by definition, not fully objective (Braun & Clarke, 2019). However, this risks, consciously or unconsciously, only including evidence which identifies patterns that are expected to be seen based on my positionality (Nickerson, 1998). The interpretation cannot be wholly guided by my personal lens in order to ensure it is grounded in some level of subjective reality removed from my own (Nickerson, 1998). Therefore, steps were taken to ensure that the research was informed by the literature, the data and not just my positionality. Descriptions of such steps are included in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

1.3 The role of TAs & how this has changed?

In UK schools, Teaching Assistants (TA) have a demanding but fundamentally important role in delivering effective education to children and young people. Since the "Raising standards and tackling workload" policy was introduced by the Department for Education (SHA & UNISON 2003), the role of the TA has undergone significant changes. Initially, TAs were redeployed to cover and deliver some curriculum content to give class teachers more preparation and planning time. This push coincided with the increasing encouragement for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) to be educated in mainstream settings. As a result, TAs were encouraged to adopt a more curriculum-based role and increasingly worked with pupils who have SEN and require more intensive support to access mainstream content while the class teacher worked with the rest of the class (Hammersley-Fletcher & Lowe, 2011).

TAs are often required to fill several different responsibilities depending on the needs of their setting and pupil cohort, pulling away from the traditional administrative support role (Butt, 2016). Blatchford et al. (2006) identified that the TAs' working day mainly included support for teachers with curriculum, direct learning and pastoral support for pupils, indirect support for pupils and supporting the school, such as managing the physical environment. On average, TAs spent 3.8 hours per day directly supporting pupils' learning needs. This was more time than on other tasks, such as working directly with teachers (Blatchford et al., 2006). TAs often spend time working with vulnerable pupils, individual pupils or small groups inside and outside the classroom. TAs may also deliver direct interventions to a particular pupil or small groups (Blatchford et al., 2006, 2009). Blatchford et al. 2006 reported that a third of their respondents supported pupil learning. However, since the Blatchford et al.'s (2012) research, nearly all TA roles will include some proportion of direct learning

support according to a recent government survey (CFE, 2024). Supporting learning directly, either the whole class or one-to-one, made up most of the TA role, followed by facilitating interventions, supporting learning, but outside of the classroom. TAs take on pastoral roles by supporting vulnerable pupils' wellbeing and mental health (Lewis, 2023; Webster et al., 2011). Often, this support is informal and occurs through increased one-to-one interactions with the pupils to support their learning needs (Conboy, 2021). Some TAs will take on additional responsibilities such as individual pastoral support, family liaison and other on-call support for behaviour management (Hancock & Colloby, 2013). Since the Covid-19 pandemic, pastoral support has been increasingly required as part of the jobs that TAs share, taking up this responsibility due to a lack of any other suitable candidate to do so (Hall & Webster, 2023). While there is high similarity among TAs across the UK, the exact daily nature of a TA role is defined by the class teacher the TA supports or the school senior leadership team (SLT; Geeson & Clarke, 2023).It is highly likely that the roles and responsibilities of TAs will shift again in response to the changing needs of the education system.

The role of TAs in primary and secondary schools can be different. Primary school TAs are often allocated to a single class for each academic year and work under the responsibility of one class teacher. They may work with other TAs or independently, depending on the age and needs of the pupils in the class. Secondary school TAs are often deployed from a centralised SEN base and move between classes to support assigned pupils. However, secondary school TAs, like primary school TAs, can support a whole class of pupils, not just those to whom they are allocated. However, the key difference is they move between classes and often work under the responsibility of multiple class teachers. Compared to each other, primary school TAs were more likely to work with groups of pupils (Blatchford et al., 2006),

while secondary school TAs spent more time on average directly supporting pupils' learning needs (Blatchford et al., 2009). Recent government survey on the deployment of TAs report that broadly, TAs in primary and secondary schools adopt similar roles with the only notable difference being secondary school TAs are more likely to tutor outside of lessons while Primary school TAs are more likely to cover lessons with work provided by the teacher (CFE Research, 2024).

1.3.1 A note on titles

Before continuing, it is important to note the different titles used by support staff who provide classroom and direct learning support in schools. So far, Teaching Assistant or TA has been used as it is considered the preferred title (Blatchford et al., 2006) and is often used in research. However, Learning Support Assistant and Classroom Assistant are also commonly used titles that reflect an equivalent role (Hancock and Colloby, 2013). Other titles include Learning Mentor; Behaviour Supports Teaching Assistant and Home School Worker. Such roles may come with additional responsibilities, but direct learning support is still a component (Hancock & Colloby, 2013). There is no apparent consistency in the choice of title used by such support staff, and often, they are selected based on regional and local decisions.

Higher-level teaching assistants (HLTA) are an exception as this title pertains to a recognised role with extra training and additional responsibilities, including cover classes to enable teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time during the school day. The title reflects a newer professional status included in the National Workforce Agreement (SHA & UNISON, 2003).

As there is no clearly defined distinction between the role titles, except for HLTA, for the purposes of this research, TA will be used to refer to all individuals who have

fulfilled the aforementioned roles.

1.4 The importance of wellbeing

Wellbeing has been linked to multiple other psychological factors, which in turn influence the system across multiple disciplines. Promoting wellbeing is important for school operations and achieving the best outcomes for CYP (Aldrup et al., 2022). It can also be beneficial for the TAs themselves. While extensive research has looked at the role of wellbeing in the workplace, less research has been done in the education sector, particularly at TAs.

Positive affect is correlated with higher levels of resilience or the ability to bounce back from adverse events (Seligman et al., 2005). Kansky & Diener (2017) proposed that positive emotions may help an individual see adverse events as more surmountable by buffering against stable negative emotional responses. Using positive emotions in emotion regulation strategies can also promote resilience during stressful and difficult events (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Positive affect is also linked to creativity at work (Amabile et al., 2005) and curiosity (Jovanovic & Brdaric, 2012), which in turn are connected to flexibility, idea generation and problem-solving solutions (Kansky & Diener, 2017). However, a more complex picture may present in workplaces, as negative affect can also foster strong social bonds with colleagues in shared experiences, increasing social cohesion (Stoverink et al., 2014). Some individuals may strive to improve performance if the source of their negative affect is dissatisfaction with their work (George & Zhou, 2007).

Research in fields outside education has linked wellbeing to higher job performance. Wellbeing has not been linked to actual improved cognitive performance (Tenney et al., 2015). Rather, job performance may be boosted indirectly through

increased productivity (Rothbard & Wilk, 2011) and increased collaboration with staff (Carnevale & Isen, 1986). Staff who experience higher job performance and success alongside wellbeing at work are also more likely to stay in their position, reducing job turnover (Luhmann et al., 2013) and lower absenteeism (Tenney et al., 2016).

Although these studies do not focus specifically on TAs or other education staff, they highlight the ongoing importance of wellbeing. Within education, improvements in the wellbeing of teachers have been linked to higher quality of instruction, and student wellbeing and outcomes (Dreer, 2023). Pap et al. (2023) suggested that teacher's self-efficacy positively predicted pupil wellbeing over time, which in turn may have supported their engagement in learning. While the mechanism between teacher wellbeing and these outcomes is not yet well understood (Dreer, 2023), in one study, teachers shared feeling more reflective, having higher levels of efficacy and a greater willingness to take risks (Stewart, 2018) similar to findings in other professions (Amabile et al., 2005; Kansky & Diener, 2017; Rothbard & Wilk, 2011). Similar mechanisms may underpin TA wellbeing, who operate within similar occupational contexts, but is also not yet as well understood and is under researched. For example, higher levels of wellbeing are associated with reduced burnout and stress among TAs, as well as increased self-efficacy (Paris et al., 2021). In turn, this could promote greater confidence and resilience, enabling TAs to adopt more proactive approaches in their practice. Ultimately, this may help to generate better learning outcomes for pupils (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015) highlighting a need to better understand TA wellbeing in context.

1.5 Frameworks

The following section outlines the theoretical frameworks and models that underpin

the rationale for the thesis and inform the inferences and conclusions.

1.5.1 The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project and Wider Pedagogical Role model

Research conducted in the 2000s showed that while the expansion of the TA role, as a consequence of the "Raising standards and tackling workload" (SHA & UNISON, 2003) policy, successfully reduced teacher workload, as was its intent. However, the impact these new responsibilities had on pupil outcomes was not measured before its introduction (Blatchford et al., 2006; Webster et al., 2011, 2013). The UK-based Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project by Blatchford et al. (2009) aimed to address this shortfall by researching two main research questions:

1. To provide an accurate and representative description of the types of support staff and their deployment in schools, particularly in light of changes to the workforce since the "Raising Standards and Tackling Workforce" policy (SHA & UNISON, 2003).

2. To assess the support staff's impact on pupils' learning and behavioural outcomes.

The study consisted of three waves. The first wave included a large-scale survey of support staff and teachers with approximately 20,000 respondents. This wave aimed to document the roles and responsibilities of the TA as outlined in the first question. The second and third waves were part of a multi-method approach to address both research aims. These included a longitudinal assessment of 2528 pupil outcomes across primary, secondary and special school settings. Systematic observations were also used to assess the nature and context of TA-pupil interactions and how this impacted the support given. Case studies focused on the TA deployment

in other school processes. Later case studies also looked at the utterances and language used by TAs in their interactions with pupils.

The project found little evidence to suggest that TAs had a net positive impact on student behavioural outcomes such as distractibility, motivation, confidence, and independence, among others (Webster et al., 2011). Similarly, the results suggested that TAs had a limited positive impact on academic outcomes, with a negative direction observed in core subjects such as Maths and English. Despite these discouraging findings, the project also highlighted opportunities for change.

Webster et al. (2011) outlined the core TA tasks and required skills from the DISS project and remodelled the findings into the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model (shown in Figure 1). The model places the role within the wider context of the school system and considers factors that determine their deployment. The WPR model comprised three core components: "Preparedness," "Deployment," and "Practice. Additionally, there were two secondary components, "Conditions of employment" and "Characteristics," which provided further insight into the TA role but were not considered as significant to pupil outcomes (Webster et al., 2011).

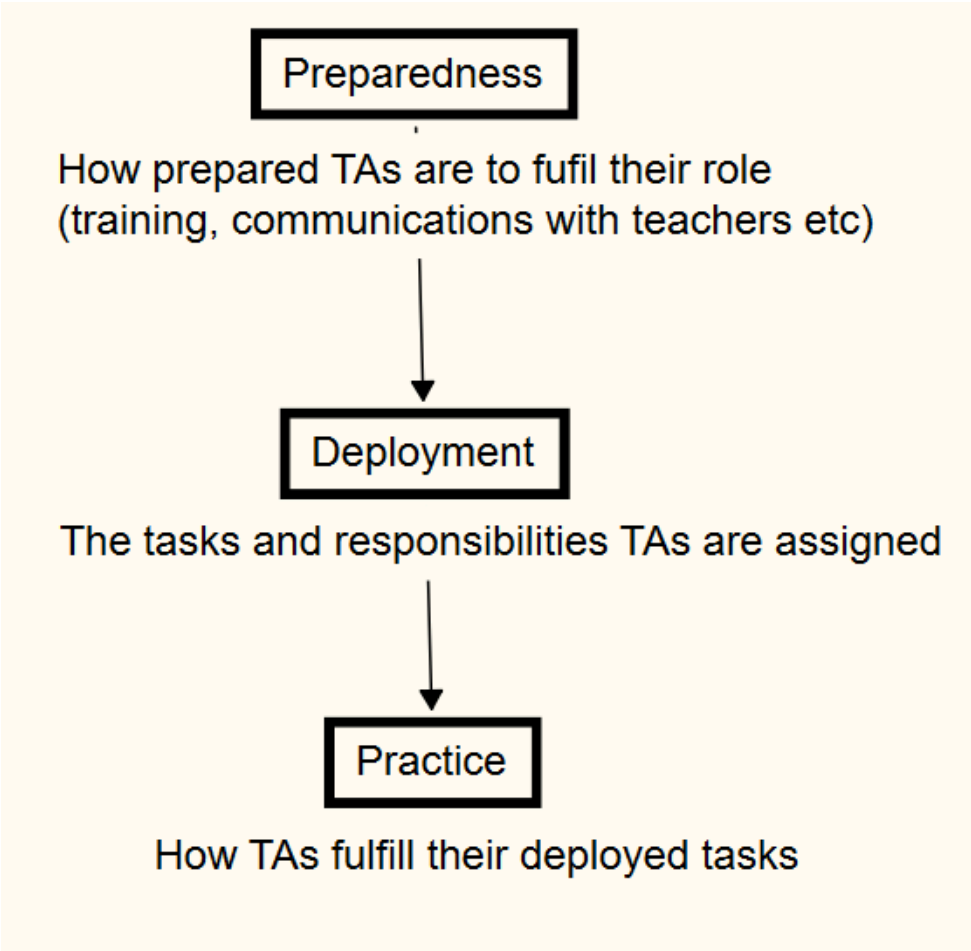

Figure 1: The Wider Pedagogical Role Model adapted from Webster at al. (2011).

“Deployment” reflects the actual tasks TAs were assigned, such as one-to-one and small-group intervention work (Webster et al., 2013). "Preparedness" highlights the need for TAs to have sufficient training and professional development, as well as day-to-day opportunities to prepare before lessons and provide feedback to the class teacher. "Practice" focuses on how TAs fulfil their deployed tasks, primarily through interactions with pupils and other staff members.

Webster et al. (2011) provided suggested outcomes under each core component of the WPR to improve TA effectiveness. Under "Deployment", TAs were recommended to work with all pupils in the classroom, not just those with Special

Educational Needs. This enabled the class teacher, who have received formal pedagogical training, to support such pupils instead. Based on the recommendations made under the "preparedness" category, it was suggested that additional training opportunities should be made available for TAs to enhance their skills. In addition, it was recommended that further options for professional development should be provided to support their continued growth and development in their roles. Webster et al. (2011) further suggested that TAs should be given time to plan and prepare for interventions and other tasks independently and in collaboration with the class teacher. TAs should also have opportunities to provide feedback to the class teacher. "Practice" suggested that TAs should receive specific training on how best to communicate with pupils to encourage active participation in learning rather than prioritise task completion. Webster et al. (2011) suggested that teachers who have already received training in this manner from their teaching qualification were the best placed to supervise TA practice in this regard. Webster et al. (2013) implemented these strategies in ten schools and reported an increase in TA productivity. However, the impact of the WPR model on TAs' wellbeing is still unclear.

This thesis explores how wellbeing relates to the TA role through the lens of the WPR model with consideration to the three core systemic components; how a TAs deployment (range of activities) impact wellbeing, how the level of preparation for activities affects wellbeing and how TAs practice relates to the wellbeing. This framework is based on systemic thinking, consideration of how factors interact with the school ecosystem, instead of focusing on individual TA experiences.

1.5.2 Wellbeing models

Wellbeing is a complex concept. Within the psychological literature, there is no consensus among theorists (Lambert et al., 2015). Wellbeing is generally considered

to consist of multiple dimensions broadly divided into hedonic and eudemonic strands (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Lambert et al., 2015). The hedonistic or affective dimensions of wellbeing consider how a person feels. Hedonistic wellbeing could be regarded as a balance of high positive affect, such as happiness, joy, and contentment, and low negative affect, such as sadness, anger, and fear (Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; Kansky & Diener, 2017). Eudaimonic wellbeing refers to good psychological functioning and focuses more on capability and a sense of achievement (Huppert et al., 2009; Ryff, 2013). Wellbeing is achieved through finding meaning and pursuing goals (Huppert et al., 2009).

One model of wellbeing that effectively combines hedonistic and eudemonistic dimensions is "The simple model of subjective wellbeing," proposed by The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2013), as shown in Figure 2. The dimensions of wellbeing are known as sub-components.

Figure 1.1. **A simple model of subjective well-being**

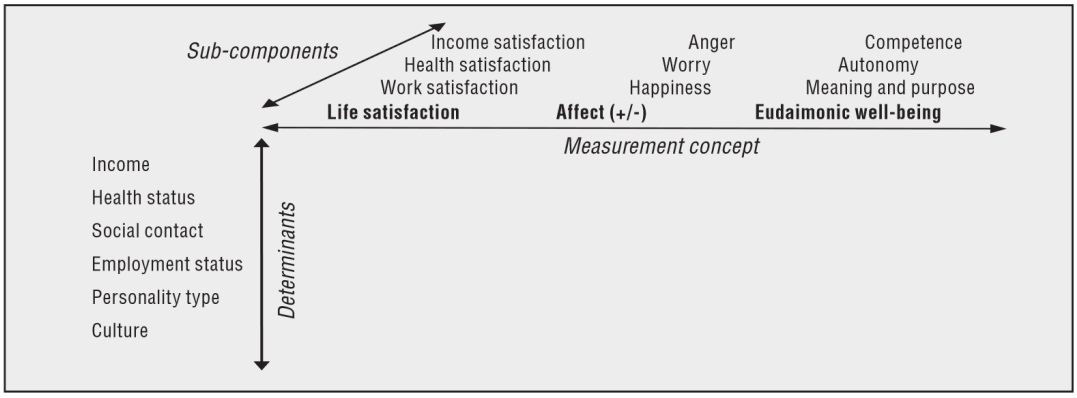

Figure 2: The simple model of subjective wellbeing (OECD, 2013).

In this model, life satisfaction is also considered a component of subjective wellbeing alongside affect and eudaimonic wellbeing (OECD, 2013). A person's life

satisfaction is often self-evaluated by setting personal standards and comparing their circumstances to those standards. Determinants are additional factors likely to strongly influence wellbeing components, such as health status, personality, and culture.

Correlational data highlights that each concept (life satisfaction, affect and eudaimonic wellbeing) should be considered a separate construct, as while they have a positive relationship, this is not a strong one (OECD, 2013). Although other models consider these concepts separately (Lambert et al., 2015), all models are based on evidence that suggests that they are still related and influence each other (Lambert et al., 2015; OECD, 2013).

The Simple Model of Subjective Wellbeing predominantly draws upon the principles of Diener et al. (1999) who defines hedonistic components of wellbeing as pleasant and unpleasant affect (see Table 1). Lucas et al. (1996) analysis suggests that pleasant and unpleasant effects should be considered separate constructs rather than opposing ends of the dimension. Furthermore, while the emotional states outlined in Table 1 all reflect their assigned affect category, these states should also be considered discrete constructs too (Diener et al., 1999). After all, it is possible to experience multiple emotional states simultaneously (Diener et al., 1999).

Pleasant Affect	**Unpleasant Affect**
Joy	Guilt and shame
Elation	Sadness
Contentment	Anxiety and Worry
Pride	Anger
Affection	Stress

Happiness	Depression
Ecstasy	Envy

Table 1: List of pleasant affect and unpleasant affect as defined by Diener et al. (1999).

Typically, affect is considered an emotional state or feeling at a particular moment. However, emotional states can reflect long-term moods by considering the dominant emotional state the individual has held over some time (Diener et al., 1999).

The OECD (2013) referred to the wellbeing model by Huppert et al. (2009) and Self-determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) to develop the eudaimonic strand of their model. Huppert et al. (2009) suggested that wellbeing includes positive and negative affect, as well as satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of belonging, and good social support. They also identified functional dimensions of wellbeing such as autonomy, competence, goal orientation, sense of purpose, and resilience. These components originated from the work of humanistic theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1943) proposed that an individual requires positive relationships with others and a sense of belonging to a community to gain self-esteem and a sense of achievement. Once both these needs have been fulfilled, the individual can achieve a desire to seek personal growth, known as self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943).

Ryan & Deci (2000) focused on an individual's sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy reflects an individual's need for control over their own lives and decision-making. Competence refers to the need to interact effectively with the environment; for example, by successfully completing a task. Finally, relatedness pertains to an individual's need for social connection and support. Although the SDT model was initially conceived to reflect the fundamental components of intrinsic

motivation, similar to self-actualisation outlined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), intrinsic motivation signifies an internal drive to seek new experiences, challenges, and knowledge, independent of external motivators. This also reflects eudaimonic wellbeing, i.e. a need for purpose and fulfilment of goals.

Although not included in the OECD (2013) model of wellbeing, Seligman's (2011) PERMA model integrates similar hedonistic and eudaimonic strands. It posits that wellbeing can be measured across five dimensions: positive emotions (affect), engagement, also known as a sense of absorption or flow, positive relationships, a sense of meaning, and accomplishment. Most components align with the dimensions of wellbeing identified in Huppert (2009) and SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The PERMA model has also recently been expanded to better reflect work-related contexts by include 4 additional dimensions; environment, mindset, physical health and economic security, called PERMA +4. (Donaldson et al., 2022). Goodman et al. (2018) found no significant difference between PERMA and other wellbeing models, while Cabrea and Donaldson (2024) reported that PERMA has a negative association with depression and anxiety. The PERMA model's high degree of overlap means it can be considered alongside the other models.

Furthermore dimensions, although defined as separate, interact with each other to influence overall wellbeing. For example, positive affect and social relationships are strongly linked (Frisch, 2016). Following the induction of positive affect, participants became more talkative and self-disclosing (Cunningham, 1988). Participants also displayed a greater interest in social situations and activities (Cunningham, 1988). Therefore, it is essential to consider the components of wellbeing not just in isolation but as part of a network.

It can be argued that existing wellbeing models largely reflect the same underlying dimensions, so introducing additional frameworks adds little novel insight to the field (Goodman et al., 2018). In fact, convergence and divergence across models may reflect the “jingle-jangle” fallacy, where constructs are assumed identical because they have the same name (jingle), or assumed to be different because they are named differently (jangle; van Zyl et al., 2024). Furthermore, such constructs are challenging to test against objective criterion which further challenges their validity as the field continues to rely on subjective measures (Schneider & Schimmack, 2009). However, wellbeing itself is a constructivist concept shaped by language, meaning that its dimensions can change based on how we define and describe them both within theoretical literature and in societal discourse (Gaffaney & Donaldson, 2025). Therefore, care must be taken when selecting wellbeing dimensions until an agreed upon definition has been established.

Because wellbeing is inherently subjective, self-report instruments dominate positive psychology, appearing in 78% of empirical studies (Ackerman et al., 2018). However, relying on positivist measures risks losing contextual nuances as lived experiences are reduced by the numerical data (Ackerman et al., 2018). Other forms of capturing data such as observations and wellbeing scores provided by close associates to compare to self-report data have been completed, but both qualitative and mixed methods design promise deeper insight into the complexity of each dimension, which are underused in the field (Lomas et al 2021; Wissing, 2021).

Additionally, policymakers and organisations such as the OECD (2013), promote global wellbeing indices to gauge population health, these broad measures may be less relevant when focusing on specific roles or settings, such as the experiences of TAs. Global wellbeing measures do not capture the momentary or day to day

experiences (OECD, 2013; Heshmati et al., 2023). To capture these momentary differences, measures need to be completed as close to the event as possible to reduce recall bias reflecting the dominant long-term effect (OECD, 2013). For example, a TA may report high levels of stress over time, but stress reduced during particular times of the day. Over time, the TA is less likely to report the moments of low stress when asked in favour of the overarching affect. Experience Sampling Method (ESM) and the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM) offer viable alternatives for collecting real-time wellbeing data (see Section 3.3.1 for more detail). To date, most momentary research has focused on affective wellbeing, meaning eudaimonic dimensions is less understood outside of global wellbeing (Heshmati et al., 2023; Scollon et al., 2003) Capturing momentary eudaimonic experiences remains relatively novel, and strengthening this work will require triangulating quantitative measures with qualitative evidence to build a multidimensional understanding of wellbeing (Heshmati et al., 2023).

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The literature review offers a narrative of the existing research on the TA role and their wellbeing. In line with the phenomena described in section 1.2, conscious efforts were made by the researcher to include literature that extended beyond sources which merely supported their own perspective. To achieve this, the review focused on studies that interpreted wellbeing through established models described in section 1.5.2, rather than relying on personal definitions. Systematic keywords were used in the database searches, and research addressing the TA role was selected based on the perspectives outlined in section 1.3, not just on activities presumed to influence wellbeing according to prior beliefs. To ensure the relevance and accuracy of findings, the search was limited to literature published from 2010 onwards, as studies conducted prior to this period may not adequately capture the current context experienced by TAs, as described in section 1.3. Finally, care was taken to ensure the review presented a balanced discussion of factors influencing wellbeing, both positively and negatively. Since the researcher's positionality tended towards the viewing the challenges of TA experience and how it negatively impacts their wellbeing (see section 1.2), presenting a balanced analysis was essential to directly challenge and broaden these views.

During December 2023 and April 2024, systematic searches were conducted through the University College London (UCL) library, Google Scholar, and the online databases EBSCO, ERIC, and PsycINFO. These databases were chosen for their established reputation in the fields of Education and Psychology, including topics related to Educational Psychology. Additional searches were performed in the UCL Discovery repository for educational psychology theses relevant to the same topics. Further papers were identified from reference lists and citations of key papers.

Initially, the keywords Teaching Assistant, Learning Support Assistant, Classroom Assistant, Support Staff, and wellbeing/well-being were used to conduct a scoping review of the literature. This aimed to identify key papers already completed in the field, which led to a limited number of directly relevant papers. A narrative of this search is included in section 2.1. Subsequent searches expanded the search terms to include teacher wellbeing and specific dimensions of wellbeing, based on established models, as described in section 1.5.2. Interestingly, most papers returned focused on the effective use of TAs to promote pupil outcomes or explored TAs' perspectives on the facilitators and barriers to specific components of their role, such as working with CYP who have Social, Emotional, and Mental Health needs or facilitating interventions. Although they did not focus explicitly on wellbeing, these studies discussed TA wellbeing in the context of the component of their role being researched and its potential impact. For example, how low sense of competence hindered intervention work. A narrative review of these studies is provided in section 2.2.

2.1 Large-scale surveys of Teaching Assistant wellbeing

TA wellbeing has been assessed through large-scale surveys. The Teacher Wellbeing Index 2023 provides a recent overview of staff wellbeing and how it is supported (Education Support, 2023). Twenty-five per cent of support staff felt that their organisation had a positive effect on their global wellbeing, while forty-one per cent believed it had a negative impact. Similarly, Ravalier et al. (2021), through a large-scale questionnaire involving 2957 TAs, identified a relationship between various factors, including job demands, control, role clarity, relationship quality, and student behaviour, some of which were previously highlighted, related to job stress. However, these surveys overlook the influence of day-to-day interactions. TA deployment

models, such as the WPR model (Webster et al., 2011), consider the smaller components of the role, including individual tasks, training, preparation, and daily interactions with pupils and other staff members. Surveys such as these indicate that wellbeing is declining among school staff but fail to identify specific components contributing to this trend. For example, TAs may share they are feeling less competent generally but not attributing this feeling to specific areas of practice.

2.2 Wellbeing in other TA research

Most research on TAs, particularly studies that follow on from the DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2009), focuses on the facilitators and barriers to TA effectiveness and their impact on pupil outcomes. Several follow-up studies analysed the feasibility of the WPR model (Webster et al., 2011) and other typical TA responsibilities in real-world settings. These studies shifted their focus from measuring effectiveness to identifying the facilitators and barriers to TAs executing various aspects of their roles, including those proposed by the WPR model (Webster et al., 2011). Common facilitators and barriers are not solely logistical factors, such as time constraints, but also involve interpersonal and intrapersonal factors. For example, TAs report that limited opportunity to feedback to class teacher may impact their sense of occupational value as well as potentially hindering pupil outcomes (Hall, 2023). One psychological concept underpinning many of the aforementioned facilitators and barriers to TA work is wellbeing, as defined by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011).

2.2.1 Affect

TAs report feelings of uncertainty, fear, and anxiety, but also fulfilment and success regarding their daily responsibilities and tasks. TAs reported experiencing

negative affect in the form of uncertainty and anxiety related to their job definition (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). As real-world events unfold, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising cost of living, the role of the TA evolves (Hall & Webster, 2023). Individual schools are responsible for defining the TA role, yet senior leaders are hesitant to establish strict job descriptions due to the necessity for flexibility in adapting to the ever-changing student body. Consequently, TAs frequently question their responsibilities or whether it is "their place" to fulfil specific actions (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Geeson & Clarke, 2023; Salisbury, 2017). For instance, TAs in Clarke & Visser (2019) held back from behaviour management, having felt unsure if it was their "place to do so" and fearing they might "undermine the teacher. Participants expressed feelings of "awkwardness" and "discomfort" when required to manage behaviour, despite considering this a "vital" component of their role (Clarke & Visser, 2019). In Salisbury (2017), participants mentioned supporting pupils' social and emotional needs as not an explicit component of their job description but a necessary gap they find themselves filling to assist teachers, further highlighting the flexibility of the role in responding to the needs of the school.

When working directly with pupils, TAs reported feelings of positive affect (Black & Halstead, 2021; Conboy, 2021). TAs who worked with pupils experiencing mental health difficulties stated that their role was rewarding and noted that they enjoyed witnessing the children's success (Conboy, 2021). However, TAs also recalled feeling "upset or scared" when observing the challenges these children faced (Conboy, 2021). TAs expressed fears of exacerbating the situation, stemming from a belief that they lacked the necessary knowledge and skills (Conboy, 2021).

2.2.2 Competency

Other studies reported TAs feeling less confident in their knowledge and skills

compared to other staff members (Neaum & Noble, 2023) and professionals such as Speech and Language therapists and occupational therapists when required to deliver interventions (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). The effectiveness of the intervention may be enhanced by the quality of training TAs received; however, self-confidence in those skills and expertise is also influential (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015) and reflects a low sense of competency, a component of eudaimonic wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Burton & Goodman (2011) reflected that this continuing self-perception of TAs as "unskilled" even after successful completion of training could be due to a lack of ongoing competency accreditation that evidence skills throughout their practice.

As reported by TAs themselves, feelings of competency were potentially enhanced when they were given opportunities to share their knowledge and skills, particularly related to the pupils they support, and when these were recognised and sought after by teachers and senior leadership (Jardí et al., 2022; Geeson & Clarke, 2023).

2.2.3 Autonomy

TAs often have low autonomy and few opportunities to influence decision-making, as reported in the DISS project (Blatchford et al., 2012). Their work environment and methods are supervised and directed by the SLT and the class teacher (Blatchford et al., 2012). This seems to contradict reports of high job flexibility and self-reflection within their roles in specific situations and tasks. While such flexibility might imply significant autonomy, it is frequently accompanied by high uncertainty and a sense of potentially making mistakes (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Clarke and Visser 2019). These feelings lead to low autonomy or reduced control (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Some TAs in Salisbury (2017) expressed feeling greater autonomy in their roles when they perceived trust from their line managers with whom they maintained open and reciprocal working relationships. This rapport facilitated a more hands-on management approach, enabling TAs the flexibility and freedom to carry out their roles independently (Salisbury, 2017). Nonetheless, freedom and flexibility may require careful balancing; other TAs reported feeling they needed additional guidance (Salisbury, 2017). As noted by Clarke and Visser (2019), clearly defined roles reduce feelings of uncertainty and other negative impacts, enhancing a sense of agency by establishing the boundaries within which TAs can operate autonomously.

Providing feedback and planning sessions for class teachers can enhance TA effectiveness and improve pupil outcomes (Webster et al., 2013; Hall, 2023), while also potentially boosting wellbeing simultaneously. However, TAs in Clarke and Visser (2019) felt they held less power due to the lack of opportunities to share their insights with teachers and other people, due to the limited communication opportunities.

2.2.4 Relatedness

Relatedness, social relationships, and a sense of belonging are three components of hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing that are often highly interlinked in real-world systems (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Huppert et al., 2009; Lambert et al., 2015; OECD, 2013; Ryff, 2017). Positive collegiate relationships and collaboration, particularly with class teachers, have been widely discussed in relation to promoting effective TA work (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Hall, 2023; Jardí et al., 2022). This factor is unsurprising considering the inherently social nature of education within school systems. However, these interactions also serve to promote wellbeing. Devecchi & Rouse (2010) found that mutual respect and trust are crucial for TAs in planning and implementing pupil support. Consistent opportunities for

feedback are also necessary for good practice, and TAs report feeling reassured in their role when receiving feedback (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). However, poor working relationships can also have a detrimental impact on wellbeing. Relationship dynamics in schools are influenced by perceived status and position within staff hierarchies. TAs generally perceive themselves as lower in the hierarchy than teachers, which affects their interactions and collaborative contributions with teachers (Neaum & Noble, 2023; Watson et al., 2013). This inequality in the hierarchy can sometimes lead to communication breakdowns and a lack of openness in their relationships, potentially resulting in feelings of low self-worth (Hall, 2023; Neaum & Noble, 2023). Positive social relationships, particularly with class teachers, can enhance TAs' sense of belonging to the school community (Jardí et al., 2022; Hall, 2023). When TAs maintain a close collaborative relationship with the class teacher, they feel more comfortable and integrated into the group (Jardí et al., 2022). However, logistical considerations of the TA role can hinder a sense of belonging, such as their absence from staff and strategic planning meetings and not receiving information first-hand (van der Heijden et al., 2015). TAs report feeling isolated and experience difficulties establishing relationships with staff when required to work one-on-one with pupils, particularly outside of the classroom, which also diminishes their sense of connection to the broader life of the school (Neaum & Noble, 2023; Watson et al., 2013). TAs' sense of value and relatedness to their work is often fostered through their working relationships (Hall, 2023). TAs also feel valued by the children they support and have formed positive, supportive relationships with (Black & Halstead, 2021; Conboy, 2021).

2.3 Teacher Wellbeing

While not the focus of this thesis, teachers and TAs work together closely in the education context, both providing direct learning support to pupils. Over the past twenty years, teachers' wellbeing has attracted substantially more attention in psychological and education literature than TAs, even producing at least two major systematic reviews (Hascher & Waber, 2021; McCallum et al., 2017). Likely, this is because teachers are perceived as the main drivers of pupil success and hold more accountability (Hascher & Waber, 2021). Therefore, their wellbeing has attracted more policy interest; including the adoption of the aforementioned "Raising standards and tackling workload" which was partly introduced to support teacher wellbeing through reduce workloads (DfE & Skills, 2003) (see section 1.3).

Some of the key factors related to teacher wellbeing include the impact of the learning environment and the benefits of supportive collegial and pupil relationships, which may also apply to TAs as described in section 2.2. However, it cannot be assumed that all findings transfer directly, because the day-to-day roles of teachers and TAs differ in important ways. For example, much of the teacher wellbeing literature links stress to excessive workloads, a challenge less pronounced for TAs, who typically have fewer responsibilities for lesson planning, marking, and administrative duties that extend beyond classroom hours (Butt, 2016). Likewise, TAs bear less accountability for pupil outcomes, another stressor shown to undermine teacher wellbeing (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). Although this study does not seek to compare teacher and TA experiences, it is important to acknowledge these role differences. If, for example, workload is a primary driver of negative wellbeing for teachers (SHA & UNISON, 2003) this is less likely to apply to TAs who has different responsibilities (Butt, 2016), suggesting other aspects of the TA role must be shaping their wellbeing in distinct ways.

2.4 Research Rationale, Aims and Questions

The DISS project and the WPR model have highlighted the role of TAs, promoting their contributions. Educational research on TAs predominantly focuses on how to utilise TAs effectively to enhance pupil outcomes. However, as outlined, many facilitators and barriers to TA work are significantly influenced by underlying psychological factors related to the wellbeing of the TAs themselves. For effective work to persist through the use of models such as the WPR model, it is crucial to understand the interplay between TA work and wellbeing. Large-scale wellbeing surveys offer a broad overview; they tend to overlook the finer details of the day-to-day roles and responsibilities that the WPR model addresses. Instead, it is through research aimed at improving pupil outcomes that the impact on TAs' wellbeing is reflected in the results.

The aim of this research is to explore the relationships between TAs' wellbeing and the different assigned tasks and routines of the school day, which, as far as the researcher is aware, have not been the primary focus of psychological or educational research previously. Understanding which components of TAs' workday, as framed by the WPR model, have a positive or negative influence on which components of wellbeing, which could lead to changes that enhance and support wellbeing. This could result in positive outcomes for the TAs personally, alongside promoting effective work and improved pupil outcomes.

The research aims to address the following research questions.

1. What is the relationship between TA activities and wellbeing?

2. Which activities have the greatest impact on TAs' wellbeing?

2.4.1 Primary School or Secondary School

As outlined under Section 1.2, "The role of teaching assistants", while the broad role definitions of TAs in both primary and secondary schools are similar, the methods of their deployment differ to meet the logistical demands of these settings. Therefore, it could be argued that treating the TA role as identical across settings may undermine the contribution to the wellbeing that these different deployment models provide. Considering that the research focuses on how wellbeing and TA deployment relate to each other, this could represent a significant oversight. The current literature does not favour research in one type of setting over another. As mentioned earlier, TA wellbeing is under-researched across all settings. Furthermore, as argued in section 1.2, the deployment of TA activities is not dissimilar between setting types. Therefore, research in both primary and secondary schools would add invaluable knowledge to the field.

2.4.2 Working Model of Wellbeing

As outlined in Section 1.6, the theoretical understanding of wellbeing is complicated by the absence of a single, universally accepted model (Lambert et al. (2015). Therefore, the model selected for this research, needed to be one that best captures the lived experiences of TAs operating within educational contexts, guided by the findings in the literature and reflexive engagement with the researcher's own professional experiences as discussed in Section 1.2.

The literature review indicated that, while affective measures could capture elements of wellbeing, the evidence also highlighted the importance of autonomy, competence, and relationships, particularly the latter, thereby indicating the relevance of SDT. Furthermore, SDT as a theory reflects how external factors shape wellbeing along these three dimensions (Ryan & Deci, 2000), making it suitable for capturing

wellbeing across activities. Hascher et al. (2021) further noted that teachers experience a sense of meaning linked to altruistic motivations for entering the profession. Given the nature of the TA role (see Section 1.3), it is reasonable to postulate that similar experiences of meaning, and purpose arise when supporting pupils. PERMA offers a structure that incorporates the relational and competency dimensions of SDT alongside positive affect, thus allowing for a multidimensional assessment that appears to align with the TA role. However, PERMA's exclusive focus on positive experiences meant modification for the purposes of this research was needed. The literature review also identified the presence of negative emotions within the experiences of education professionals. As Diener et al. (1999) argued, negative affect is not simply the absence of positive affect but constitutes an independent dimension of wellbeing. Therefore, negative affect was included alongside PERMA's dimensions to provide a more complete account of wellbeing in this context.

Many wellbeing models, including PERMA, are designed for the assessment of global wellbeing, rather than activity-specific or momentary states. Within PERMA, the Engagement dimension, though unique to the model, was excluded for this study. As discussed in Section 1.5.2, engagement (or "flow") is difficult to achieve within the TA role due to the highly time-bound and interruption-prone nature of the school environment. While Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009) suggested that flow may be achieved in as little as fifteen minutes, such a timeframe presumes a distraction-free environment, which is unlikely in the context of most TA tasks. Moreover, TAs' responsibilities are frequently dictated by rigid schedules (Butt, 2016), further limiting opportunities for deep engagement. Similarly, the updated PERMA+4 model includes additional dimensions such as physical health, environment, economic security, and mindset (Donaldson et al., 2022), which best reflect global wellbeing traits as

supposed to states that change across activities (Stone & Shiffman, 1994). Therefore, this research adopts an adapted model of wellbeing (see figure 3) drawing upon the dimensions from PERMA and SDT instead of using a single model to ensure better capture of TAs' wellbeing experiences as suggested by the literature review.

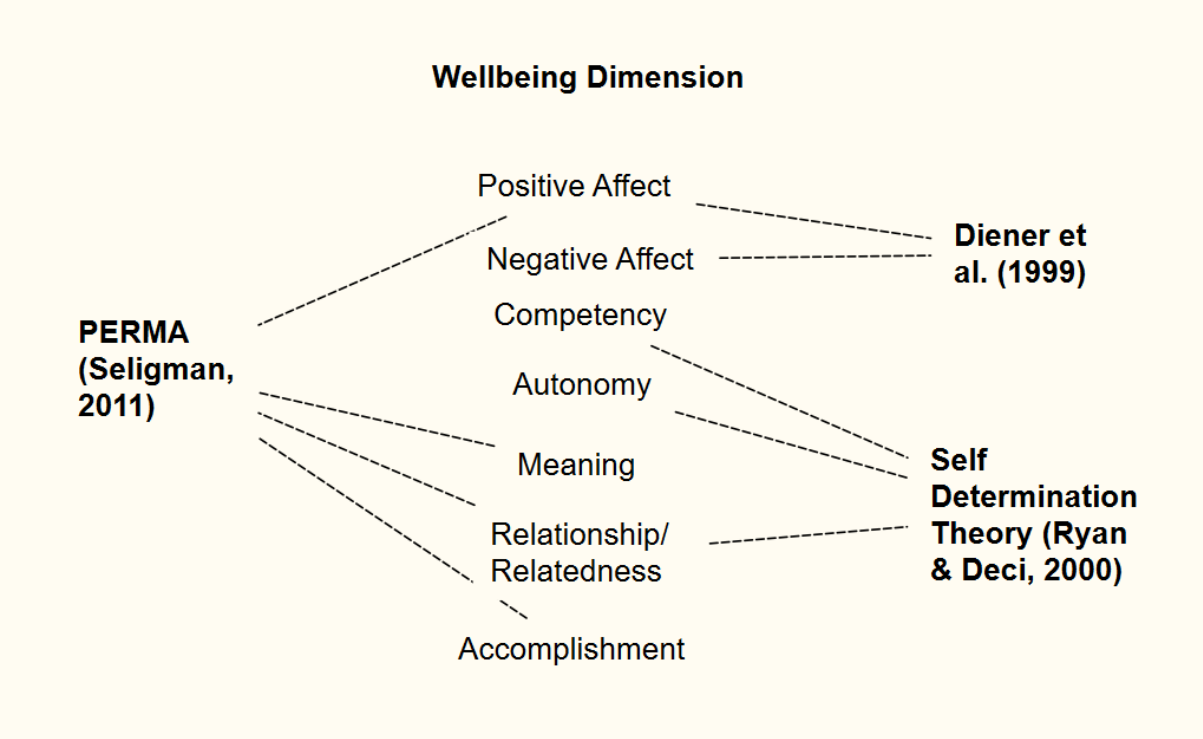

Figure 3: The working model of wellbeing used for this thesis, integrating dimensions from three theoretical wellbeing frameworks; Positive Affect, Relationship, Meaning, and Accomplishment drawn from the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011); Positive and Negative Affect informed by Diener et al. (1999) and Competency, Autonomy, Meaning, and Relatedness drawn from Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Chapter 3 – Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods design comprised of two parts: a survey and semi-structured interviews. This chapter first outlines the overall research paradigm and design before detailing and justifying the measures and procedures used in phase one (the survey) and phase two (the interviews). The researcher's thinking and rationale are incorporated throughout. An overview of the analytical approaches used, and the ethical considerations are also included.

3.1 Research Paradigm

Before designing the study, the researcher considered the epistemological and ontological assumptions inherent to it, both of which can be conceptualised along a crude dichotomy from positivism to constructionism. Ontology refers to our assumptions about what exists in the world, i.e. how tangible or abstract the phenomena are. A positivist perspective assumes that reality is objective and exists outside of our perceptions, while a constructionist view posits that reality is created through our social interactions and shared perceptions. Epistemology refers to our assumption of how ontological knowledge is acquired and interpreted, i.e. how do we know what we know? A positivist perspective, based on the principle of objectivity, suggests that phenomena can be measured and experimentally manipulated, whereas a constructionist view emphasises a deeper exploration of individual experiences and subjective interpretation.

This thesis aimed to explore the patterns of wellbeing across TAs, thereby implying an objective reality shaped by a subjective experience. There was an inherent assumption in this research that all TAs, on the whole, have similar work experiences, generating similar circumstances that connect to wellbeing. If we consider wellbeing as a psychological phenomenon that we all experience similarly with some individual

differences, then, with a sufficiently large data set, patterns can emerge that reflect collective experiences. For example, which activities do TAs (as a collective group) find positively or negatively impactful on their wellbeing? These patterns, in themselves, reflect an objective reality that unifies them and can be inherently measured.

Wellbeing as a concept is a personal experience and is always influenced by the internalisation and reflections of the participants. Each participant will experience their own wellbeing differently, depending on multiple contextual and experiential factors from their life experiences (Bronfenbrenner ,1974). While patterns in wellbeing between participants are expected to be identified, a constructionist perspective is also required to fully understand the underpinning factors and how they are similar or different, i.e. resulting in the same score. Holding the assumption quantitative data alone can reveal the subjective contextual factors influenced by TAs' perceptions and contextual experiences would limit the conclusions.

This research adopted a critical realism paradigm which proposes that there is an objective reality that can be measured and observed through a positivist framework (Archer et al., 1998). However, this reality is viewed through individual subjective perceptions, which can, in turn, influence behaviour, aligning with a constructionist paradigm (Archer et al., 1998). Critical realism embraces both positivist and constructionist epistemologies, making it best suited for exploring the shared experiences of TAs across multiple settings as well as analysing subjective experiences.

3.2 Overall Research Design

This thesis adopted a convergent mixed methods research design to account for

both a positivist and constructionist perspective. This section includes the rationale for this design being used.

Quantitative methods are well-suited for identifying potential relationships and trends across larger populations, such as TAs working in the UK. Standardised tools, such as surveys, allow for the transformation of theoretical ideas into numerical data, facilitating direct comparisons between participants. This enhances external validity and supports generalisability beyond the sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Moreover, statistical analysis of numerical data reduces susceptibility to researcher bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Although wellbeing is a subjective experience, employing a standardised measure can minimise ambiguity and help ensure consistency in how participants interpret the concept (Boateng et al., 2018). Nevertheless, this process is inherently reductionist; while patterns may emerge, the diversity and nuance of individual experiences might be lost. As a result, although such findings offer valuable insights, they may have limited practical application for supporting TA wellbeing in real-world contexts.

In contrast, qualitative approaches are better equipped to explore the complexity of subjective experiences, such as wellbeing, and the potential links to TA activities in greater depth. Identifying causal relationships through quantitative means is particularly challenging in educational settings, as the experimental manipulation of key variables may raise ethical concerns, especially when such changes could affect both TAs and the pupils they support (Howe & Moses, 1999). While qualitative methods cannot establish causality in the same manner as statistics can, they are valuable for uncovering possible mechanisms underpinning these relationships, as well as identifying influencing factors that may not be apparent in quantitative analysis alone (Maxwell, 2004). Furthermore, qualitative approaches can capture lived

experiences in richer detail, providing the environmental context, albeit risks perpetuating a narrower view of the picture, due to smaller sample sizes (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

A mixed methods design was used as it draws upon the strengths of both approaches. Mixed methods research has increased in its use in psychological research and is widely accepted for its ability to provide more comprehensive evidence by integrating both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). While several forms of mixed methods design exist, all involve separate data collection and analytical processes, with insights from both approaches subsequently integrated (Younas et al., 2023).

This thesis initially chose to employ an explanatory sequential design: qualitative data collection aimed to identify key relationships and influential factors, followed by a quantitative phase intended to test and extend these findings. This approach would have enabled a deeper exploration of the strongest relationships and any unexpected results emerging from the qualitative data. However, as the design of the qualitative phase expanded (see Section 3.3.2.3.1), it became apparent to the researcher that a convergent mixed methods design would be more suitable. An explanatory sequential design would have necessitated a larger sample size to support meaningful statistical inference, which was not feasible within the time constraints and the researchers' capacity.

Instead, a convergent design was employed, involving the simultaneous collection of both types of data. Each dataset was analysed independently before integration. Unlike the sequential approach, qualitative insights were not limited to the results of the quantitative data but emerged directly from participants' chosen

activities. Some patterns evident in the quantitative data may not have been as pronounced for participants who volunteered for the qualitative phase, and other unanticipated themes could arise. This convergence of data sources facilitated triangulation, also known as metainferences (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), enhancing the overall robustness of the study. Furthermore, it provided an opportunity to identify and explore contextual influences or underlying factors that might moderate or mediate the observed relationships, even if these were not captured through statistical modelling due to small sample sizes.

3.3 Phase 1: Survey

3.3.1 Survey Design

The DRM was used as a framework for the survey design, asking participants to recall each activity and rate their wellbeing at the end of the day. Initially conceived by Kahneman et al. (2004), DRM requires respondents to break down their previous day into discrete episodes and score their wellbeing for each one. The survey in this thesis follows a similar structure, where respondents select the tasks, responsibilities, assignments, and demands they completed over the course of their previous working day and complete an identical wellbeing measure for each one, self-reporting on their experience. For conciseness, throughout the thesis, the tasks, responsibilities, assignments, and demands will collectively be known as "activities." This accounts for the variation, both in language and the nature of the work done.

The rationale

A survey is a systematic method of data collection that enables the comparison of variables across multiple cases. It can incorporate various techniques, such as questionnaires, interviews, open-text responses, and content analysis (Gillham,

2008). This variety makes surveys a highly flexible approach to addressing research questions. Although interviews, as used in Section 3.4, can provide deeper insights, they are often time-intensive and yield data that is highly specific to individual experiences. Due to time constraints and geographic location, conducting in-person data collection on a large scale was not practical. Instead, a questionnaire format was chosen to reach a relatively large sample size and identify patterns within the responses using identical questions (Gillham, 2008).

Questionnaires are ideal for this purpose, as they are easy to distribute and typically straightforward to complete. Furthermore, compared to interviews, surveys, particularly anonymous ones, help to reduce social desirability bias (Gillham, 2008), or the tendency to respond in a manner that is perceived as socially acceptable rather than accurate. When anonymous, respondents may feel more comfortable expressing their true beliefs and experiences without fear of judgement or consequences, although social desirability and cultural norms can still influence responses (Scollon et al., 2003) While the format may limit the complexity of questions that can be posed, it still enables the exploration of broad patterns and relationships (Gillham, 2008). Regarding wellbeing as a construct, it is commonly assessed through surveys, questionnaires, and interviews, including within educational settings. However, such assessments are often retrospective and long-term in nature. As described in Chapter Two, studies that measured TA wellbeing tend to focus on the overall role and general wellbeing, often employing long-term retrospective surveys. For example, Ravalier et al. (2021) aimed to investigate the impact of workplace practices, such as working hours and student behaviour, on wellbeing practices, which influenced most aspects of the role. Meanwhile, the Teacher Wellbeing Index (Education Support, 2023) is an annual survey that captures TAs' levels of stress, mental health, loneliness, and other

wellbeing-related factors in a given year. However, this approach is insufficient for exploring a person's day-to-day experiences. As previously described in Section 1.5.2, wellbeing measures rely on participant's self-reporting their experiences. Retrospective self-reported reflections on specific activities made much later, as required for this research, are more prone to positive or negative recollection bias since respondents may feel social pressure to report favourably based on future experiences, reducing their reliability (Thomas & Diener, 1990; Scollon et al., 2003; Gilliam, 2008). Furthermore, the length of time between the original event and the date of recollection also increases the chances of memory distortion, with the event being more likely to align with current beliefs or overall perceptions rather than the immediate experience (Thomas & Diener, 1990; Cutler et al., 1996; Scollon et al., 2004). Therefore, it is argued that reporting closer to the event is more preferable to reduce opportunities for external influences when self-reporting (Thomas & Diener, 1990; Scollon et al., 2003).

While the ESM is regarded as the gold standard for capturing wellbeing in real time (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikzentmihaly, 1990; Hormuth, 1986; Larson & Delespaul, 1992), it requires frequent, on-the-spot participation, which is impractical for TAs with tightly scheduled days. The DRM approach, as described above, only necessitates that respondents recall each activity and rate their wellbeing at the end of the day (Kahneman et al., 2004). Kahneman et al. (2004) found that DRM and ESM yielded similar results for affect, suggesting that retrospective reports of daily experiences can be nearly as accurate as momentary sampling, all while demanding far less time from respondents. Although DRM's equivalence to ESM has been demonstrated primarily for affect (a visceral dimension of wellbeing), and to a lesser extent for eudaimonic dimensions, the researchers focus on comparing wellbeing across activities rather

than minute differences across the day or week, meaning that any slight discrepancy is unlikely to alter the main findings.

Finally, the researcher determined how many days of data to capture. Initially, the researcher considered requesting respondents to complete the survey over one working week, measuring wellbeing during each activity on each day. However, while collecting data over five days would yield richer, within-subject comparisons from greater statistical power, it also demands a much larger time commitment from busy TAs. Promoting responses over a longer period would most likely require ongoing direct communication (Phillips et al., 2016), placing greater demands on the researchers' time and greatly limiting the total number of participants. Limiting the survey to a single day encourages a greater number of responses and reduces respondent burden (Sharma, 2022). Therefore, respondents only scored their wellbeing for each activity for a single day, with any loss of within-week data compensated by a larger sample and varied activity types.

3.3.2 Survey Measure

The following Section presents the survey specifically designed for this thesis. It details each part of the survey and the rationale for including each question. Each element is described in the order in which it appeared in the survey. This includes demographic questions, inquiries related to the day the participant chose to document, the activities they undertook, measures of wellbeing, and optional open-text box questions.

3.3.2.1 Demographic Questions

Demographic questions were included to provide context for the data and facilitate the identification of potential patterns between participant responses and

components of wellbeing that participants may not have been aware of. Collecting demographic data is a standard component of surveys and is not unexpected. All questions included the option “prefer not to say" to ensure that participants could choose not to share this data. Identifying information such as name, exact age, and the name of the school setting was not obtained Responses were grouped into categories. Each allocation consisted of large geographical areas such as London, the South-East, and Scotland. This approach was taken to ensure anonymity. Further questions pertained to the work environment and general experiences.

3.3.2.2 Activity Selection

Participants first entered the date they were reporting on which was repeated throughout the remainder of the survey to ensure their responses reflected that specific day. They then indicated how many lessons they supported; if they had supported more than two, they then chose two lessons to describe in detail. While the ideal would have been to record wellbeing across all lessons for in-depth analysis, the limit was imposed to balance richer data collection with a manageable survey length, around 20 minutes, to reduce the chances of drop-out, as described in Section 3.3.1.3. After lesson support, respondents selected any additional activities they completed that day from a predefined list, shown in Table 2 (drawn from Blatchford et al., 2011; Lewis, 2023; CFE Research, 2024) that had been piloted with a former TA to ensure relevance. Offering predetermined categories saved respondents time and minimised researcher effort in interpreting free-text answers, as per the original study (Kahneman et al., 2004). Although a free-text option remained for any unlisted activities.

Direct structured learning support	Direct structured non-learning support	Direct unstructured support	Indirect support	Staff based activities
Lead an intervention	Attend a school assembly	Monitored on the playground	Engaged in an administrative task (lasting over 15 minutes)	Attended staff training
Delivered Small group teaching	Monitored detention or equivalent	Supported breakfast club	Marked pupils' work	Attended a staff meeting
Delivered whole-class teaching (e.g. PPA cover)	Provided pastoral support outside of the classroom	Provided support to pupils at lunch		
		Monitored the pupils' arrivals		

Table 2: A list of the additional activities included in the survey. Direct support refers to activities that includes interacting with pupils while indirect support benefits pupils without interaction. Unstructured support refers to informal spaces where the pupils have more freedom to interact with others, relax or play. Structured support refers to formal spaces with pre-arranged expectations and outcomes. Respondents selected each activity they competed at least once on their previous typical working day.

3.3.2.3 Survey Module

Once respondents selected all the activities, they were required to complete a set of questions that included the wellbeing measure items and one open text box question. This set of questions is referred to as a survey module. The number of times the survey module was presented depended on how many activities they selected in the lessons they supported. As mentioned previously, lesson support was limited to a maximum of two lessons for that day. Participants are asked to describe the subject of the lesson and the type of support they provided. Additional questions were also included in the active survey module, depending on which activity type was requested. For example, leading an intervention required further details on the type of intervention they conducted. A list of the additional questions associated with specific activities is

in Appendix 4.

Wellbeing Measure

The wellbeing measure was informed by the working model of wellbeing described in section 2.4.2. The wellbeing statements presented in each survey module were identical, regardless of the selected activity. Therefore, for the statements to remain meaningful, they needed to be universally applicable to all TA activities while still allowing for specificity.

The ideal for this thesis would be to use an established wellbeing measure supported by an evidence base that demonstrates both internal and external validity; high construct validity, where the measure's data correlates strongly with other measures, e.g., other wellbeing measures, and internal validity, wherein the individual items in that measure correlate more strongly with the same dimension than with other dimensions, often demonstrated with large representative sample sizes (Cook and Campbell 1979; Paunonen, 1984). The researcher considered using the original DRM design (Kahneman et al., 2004), the ESS wellbeing module (Huppert, 2009), the scales of general wellbeing (SGWB; Lungo et al. (2008)) and the PERMA+4 scales (Donaldson et al., 2022). Of the three, PERMA+4 scales aligned most closely with the wellbeing dimensions evidenced in the literature review. However, the PERMA+4 measures consist of 23 items and require a significantly higher time commitment from the participants, which substantially increases the chances of dropout (Sharma, 2022). Furthermore, as aforementioned in section 1.5.2, most wellbeing measures have been designed to capture global wellbeing experiences, and the items do not translate well to specific activities. Therefore, a custom measure was designed for this thesis.

A custom measure would not possess the same level of validity as an established

measure (Cook and Campbell, 1979; Paunonen, 1984). However, by adapting the items of an established measure, rather than creating a new one, we increase the likelihood of measuring the same dimensions as proposed by the PERMA model. Nevertheless, the PERMA model does not encompass autonomy and competency dimensions. As discussed in section 1.5.2 wellbeing measure, these dimensions were identified by the OECD and Lambert et al. (2015) as integral to wellbeing. The adaptation and rationale for each item can be found in Table 4.

Furthermore, the PERMA+4 framework expands upon the original PERMA framework (Seligman, 2011), described in Section 1.6.3, by including four additional wellbeing dimensions: physical health, mindset, environment, and economic security. This inclusion is argued to more precisely predict work-based wellbeing (Donaldson et al., 2022), although the evidence base is still emerging (Goodman et al., 2018). However, not all dimensions translate well to potential differences across activities. The rationale for excluding these dimensions is also included in Table 3.

Original Items	Dimension	Adapted item per dimension	Rationale
At work, how often do you feel joyful? At work, how often do you feel positive? At work, to what extent to you feel contented? Taking all things together, how happy	Positive Affect	I felt happy I enjoyed my work	Happiness is regarded as a basic affect and is less ambiguous in its meaning than “feel positive," which could prompt non-affect-based reflections. Happy, as a term related to wellbeing, is also used in other wellbeing measures outlined in Table 3. Similarly, enjoyment, as a dimension of wellbeing, is utilised in the DRM (Kahneman et al., 20040). The phrase “taking all things together” suggests the overall wellbeing of the job, which is unsuitable for this research; therefore, it was removed to focus on positive affect on the

would you say you are with your work?			individual activity.
At work, how often do you feel anxious? At work, how often do you feel angry At work, how often do you feel sad?	Negative Affect	I felt worried I felt sadness	Worry is often synonymous with the emotional state associated with anxiety, which is commonly linked to low wellbeing (Cabrea and Donaldson, 2024). It is reported as a factor impacting TA wellbeing, as described in Section 2.2. Furthermore, changing the term from anxiety to worry reduces the connections with clinical mental health conditions such as “anxiety disorders” defined in the DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Sadness is another basic emotion, alongside happiness, and, similar to happiness, it is included in other wellbeing measures as outlined in Table 3. Anger was excluded for the sake of survey

			conciseness.
To what extent do you receive help and support from coworkers when you need it? How lonely do you feel at work? To what extend do you feel appreciated by your coworkers? How satisfied are you with your	Relationships	I had the required level of support from my colleagues I felt lonely	Relationships are also a key dimension of wellbeing commonly researched among educational staff, as described in Section 2.2 However, when considering individual activities, not all require directly working with a colleague, nor do all TAs expect this. While positive relationships with colleagues are generally important, in individual activities, “support” was considered more suitable when associated with work that may not require direct collaboration with colleagues at that moment but could involve working with them during preparation or feedback. The term "lonely" is included to provide the negative wellbeing component as outlined by PERMA.

professional relationships?			
To what extent is your work purposeful and meaningful? To what extend do you generally feel that you have a sense of direction in your work? In general, to what extent to you feel that what you do at wok s	Meaning/Purpose/Achievement	My work was meaningful I felt satisfied with my work I felt a sense of accomplishment	These statements are similar to those regarding “life satisfaction” within the Simple Model of Subjective Wellbeing (OECD, 2013) and also align with components highlighted in Lungo et al. 2018. Considering the purpose of education and the role of TA in this context, which is to achieve the goal of pupils’ education, it follows that, despite this not being promoted as a wellbeing topic in Section 2.2, these dimensions of wellbeing are hypothesised to be impacted in activities. The three statements selected reflect each of the three dimensions.

valuable and worthwhile? How often do you achieve the important work goals you have set for yourself? How often do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your work-related goals? To what extend do			

you feel excited and interested in your work?			
How often are you able to handle you work-related responsibilities	Autonomy/Competency	I had the freedom to support the lesson how I felt best I felt able to complete my work I felt prepared to support this lesson	Autonomy and competency make up 2 of the 3 components of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), a concept synonymous with wellbeing as described in 2.2 and Lambert et al. (2015). While not directly considered a component of wellbeing in PERMA, the question refers to the ability to handle tasks and implies a sense of competency in performing them. Preparation is a component of the WPR model (Webster et al., 2011) and is recommended as an important factor for TA effectiveness. It can also intertwine with the sense of competency and autonomy, as feeling prepared promotes

			both dimensions (Deci & Ryan, 2000).
At work, how often do you become absorbed in what you are doing? At work, how often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy?	Absorbed	Not used	Absorbed is a unique dimension of wellbeing in PERMA compared to other wellbeing measures. It was excluded from this research's wellbeing measure as it does not translate directly to a TA role, unlike other occupations that may allow for longer periods of time to facilitate absorption. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009 argue that it only requires 15 minutes to become absorbed in a task and achieve a sense of flow; however, this is in a distraction-free environment, which is almost impossible to achieve in a school setting. Timekeeping is also an important consideration within the TA role because of the aforementioned tight schedule.

In general, how would you say your health is? How satisfied are you with your current physical Health Compared to others of your same age and sex, how is your health?	Physical Health	Not used	Physical health is a new dimension added to the Workplace PERMA and is included in the PERMA +4 wellbeing measures. As a dimension of wellbeing, physical health is unlikely to be scored differently across most activities, with the exception of physical education activities compared to classroom or administrative tasks. Therefore, while it will impact TAs' wellbeing, it is unlikely to create differences among the various activities that constitute the role and thus was not included.

Table 3: Items used to measure multiple dimensions of wellbeing for each activity selected by respondents. The Table includes the original item from The Workplace PERMA profile (Kern, 2014), the adapted version, and the rationale for the change. It also outlines the reasons for the removal of certain wellbeing dimensions that were included in The Workplace PERMA profile (Kern, 2014).

The PERMA+4 also includes dimensions considered non-relevant or influencing factors rather than components of wellbeing, according to the definition of a subjective internal experience, such as economic security and environment (Donaldson et al., 2022). Similar to physical health, as described in Table 3, these components are unlikely to differ across activities, as multiple activities are typically conducted in the same classroom environment, particularly for primary school TAs (CFE Research, 2024). Therefore, differences in wellbeing are unlikely to be identified. Similarly, economic security, while having an overall impact on TA wellbeing and being notably well-documented as a point of contention in recent discourse (Topping, 2022), is unlikely to result in differences in wellbeing between activities. The mindset dimension includes statements related to future orientation, which again may not pertain to individual activities.

Throughout the remainder of this thesis, these dimensions of wellbeing will be referred to by the labels included in Table 4. All survey items are scored on a Likert scale reflecting how true the respondent perceived each statement, ranging from 1 = “Not at all” to 7 = “Very Much”.

Dimension Label	**Survey Item**	**Positive or negative**
Happiness	“I felt happy”	Positive
Enjoyment	“I enjoyed my work”	Positive
Worry	“I felt worried”	Negative
Sadness	“I felt sad”	Negative
Freedom	“I had the freedom to support the lesson how I feel best”	Positive

Ability	“I felt able to support in this lesson”	Positive
Satisfied	“I felt satisfied with my work”	Positive
Support	“I had the required level of support from my colleagues”	Positive
Lonely	“I felt lonely”	Negative
Accomplishment	“I felt a sense of accomplishment”	Positive
Meaningful	“My work was meaningful”	Positive
Prepared	“I felt prepared to support the lesson”	Positive

Table 4: An overview of each item used for the survey wellbeing measure, a short descriptive tag and whether the item reflects a positive or negative dimension of wellbeing as described in section 2.4.2.

Open-Text Box Questions

Open-text box questions were included in this research, as it was anticipated that some participants might wish to expand their responses. The survey indicated that the primary function of the open text boxes was to enable participants to consider additional factors that may have influenced their wellbeing at the time. The original questionnaire was piloted with a former TA. Based on their feedback, adjustments were made to the wording of the questions to clarify what was meant by the term 'factors,' including examples. Furthermore, a character count was included, and the

definition of the word 'brief' was introduced to ensure participants did not spend a significant proportion of the survey detailing all their experiences. This adjustment aimed to improve participant retention, especially since they had subsequent survey modules to complete. The wording for the questions can be found in Appendix 4.

3.3.2.4 Additional considerations

The survey consisted of two nearly identical branches: one for primary school TAs and one for secondary school, differing only in terminology (e.g., year groups, lesson types) to keep the questions relevant without altering their meaning. Plain, jargon-free language was employed throughout to enhance accessibility and reduce dropouts (Gillham, 2008). Display logic and skip patterns ensured that participants saw only questions relevant to the activities they had selected; for example, only those who worked one-on-one with a pupil were asked about that pupil's needs. This same logic also allowed wellbeing items to be repeated only when a relevant activity was selected. In short, the branching and display features in Qualtrics maintained each respondent's experience as streamlined, relevant, and easy to navigate, while also facilitating survey distribution.

3.3.3 Procedure

The thesis was distributed online via a public link. Online distribution is quicker, more practical, and facilitates the automatic generation of data records. Qualtrics is an enhanced tool for academic research by University College London, Institute of Education, and is regarded as a secure platform for data collection. Additionally, online platforms enable distribution through multiple channels, including email and social media. Qualtrics also permits access to the survey via PC or mobile, catering to participant preferences, which broadens the potential scope of recruitment.

The survey was distributed using purposive sampling, leveraging the researcher's professional connections and targeted social media recruitment, as well as snowball sampling, where participants were encouraged to forward the survey to other TAs within their own networks. These sampling methods aimed to enhance exposure to TAs in the UK. The survey was initially sent via email to schools associated with the researchers' local authority work placements through the SENCOs, and to the researchers' training cohort for distribution to their school contacts. Moreover, the survey was promoted on the social media platforms LinkedIn and Facebook. These advertisements included a flyer, a copy of which can be found in Appendix 5. Participants had the option to scan a QR code, a type of two-dimensional barcode, to access the survey from a mobile device, or to use a shortened URL link for access via a PC browser.

The survey was distributed in two waves: first in January, shortly after its launch, and secondly, after the February half-term, which marked approximately the halfway point. The survey was conducted from January 2025 until March 2025. In total, it received responses from 26 individuals, with 15 respondents forming the final sample. Further details about the sample, as well as the limitations posed by its size, are included in Section 1.3.2. To be part of the final sample, respondents had to complete the survey module for at least one activity.

3.3.4 Analysis

The survey data were summarised using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, ranges) as the sample size and survey design precluded inferential tests. For each activity, the means of twelve wellbeing scores were calculated (one for each dimension; see Table 4 in Section 3.3.5). Following Field (2013), activities with fewer than five responses were excluded from descriptive comparisons to reduce the

chances of type 1 error. Where activities shared similar constructs, their scores were merged (see Section 4.1.2).

Lesson support differed from other activities because many respondents provided two sets of scores (one per lesson). To determine whether these should be treated as a single sample, the researcher applied the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, a non-parametric means comparison test appropriate for small samples and ordinal wellbeing scores (1–7). This confirmed whether lesson support scores could be combined or should remain separate samples, indicating the presence of confounding variables.

Inferential statistics were not employed for the overall analysis. Not all respondents scored each activity, resulting in a mix of within-subject and between-subject data. Secondly, sample sizes ideally needed to range between 50 and 100 responses to satisfy test assumptions, which was not achieved.

Although factor analysis could have been used to test whether multiple wellbeing dimensions load onto a single score (VanderWeele, 2022), the strong overlap among constructs (Cabrera & Donaldson, 2024) made this unlikely to succeed. Spiegelman (2018) supports treating wellbeing dimensions separately, so they were retained individually rather than combined into one score.

Open-ended comments were coded using the themes already identified in Phase 2 interviews (see Section 3.4.5).

3.4 Phase 2: Interviews

3.4.1 Why semi-structured interviews?

As mentioned in Section 3.2, the qualitative components of this thesis aimed to

gain deeper insight into wellbeing during various activities by exploring possible influencing factors. Two methods were initially considered: focus groups and interviews. Focus groups typically consist of three to seven participants who interact and expand upon each other's ideas in real time, which reduces the researcher's time commitment. However, they are less ethically suitable for sensitive topics like wellbeing, as participants may feel uncomfortable sharing personal feelings, and confidentiality is harder to enforce among peers (Harding, 2013). To best support participants' wellbeing during data collection, private one-on-one conversations are preferable, allowing the researcher to build rapport and gauge mood more effectively. Consequently, interviews were employed in this thesis. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were selected as they provide greater flexibility compared to structured interviews while still enabling direct comparisons between participants to generate themes that may be more challenging to decipher in open interviews (Harding, 2013). Flexibility was important for the same reasons that rendered focus groups less ethical. The researcher could alter the order of questions or offer alternative approaches based on participants' reactions or confusion, thus providing clarity when necessary. This adaptability accommodates the nuances of wellbeing more effectively. Additionally, flexibility permits follow-up questions that can lead to unexpected insights, enhancing the overall quality of the research.

3.4.2 Recruitment

Participants for the semi-structured interviews were recruited directly from a primary school and a secondary school in northwest London. The researcher utilised their professional contacts at the schools, who acted as points of contact, to identify potential participants who consented to take part. They also aided in arranging a private location for the researcher and the participant to meet, thereby facilitating face-

to-face interviews. All participants worked either full-time or part-time as a TA, LSA, or HLTA.

The researcher recognised the limitations of recruiting participants from the same setting. Recruiting from only two settings potentially restricted the range of experiences that could be shared, which would limit the possibility of uncovering fewer common factors relating TA activities to their wellbeing. Furthermore, the weight of the factors would be skewed more heavily towards the experiences occurring within the individual setting, thereby not reflecting a representative sample of all TAs. For this reason, the interview data and the survey combined would triangulate to provide a broader representation of the sample, although the results of this research do not claim to be representative of the entire population. Ideally, the researcher would have recruited from a wider array of schools; however, this was not feasible within the available time frame.

3.4.3 Measure; the interview schedule

The survey items were adapted to create the interview schedule, including the use of the same wellbeing measure as described in Section 3.3.2. This approach facilitates a direct comparison between the survey data and the interview findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) with the aim of encouraging deeper reflections.

The interview schedule comprised eight sections: introductory questions, activities that impacted wellbeing (including influencing factors), and additional factors. A full copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix 8. The rationale for the inclusion of specific types of questions is provided. Firstly, the introductory questions aimed to ease into the interview and establish whether the previous week was

unusual, ensuring the findings reflected a typical week. Most of each interview centred around two activities chosen by the participant as having a notable impact—either positive or negative—on their wellbeing in the past week. Participants received no guidance regarding specific activities to avoid eliciting responses that were less significant to them. For each activity, they described what happened and how they felt, using prompts that mirrored the survey's multiple wellbeing dimensions. The researcher then inquired about factors they believed influenced their experience, if not already mentioned. The final question for this section asked what changes they might want to inform potential interventions. The subsequent question inquired whether there were any changes in wellbeing over the working week, included to reduce the survey length as described in Section 3.3.1. Finally, the interview concluded by inviting the participants to share any additional factors that impact their wellbeing at work, which had not been previously mentioned. This question aimed to provide a broader context surrounding the activities and circumstances while also offering participants an opportunity to share any further information they deemed important.

3.4.4 Procedure

The researcher met each participant twice: firstly, in the pre-meeting, occurring at least 4 days before the main interview. The pre-meeting served to inform the participants what to expect in the interview, obtain consent, collect demographic details, and encourage participants to reflect on and record their wellbeing over the week. Participants were encouraged, but not required, to document their experiences and reflections in a diary to aid memory and reduce the likelihood of attributing to wellbeing to other contaminating factors (Koriat et al., 2000). At the start of each interview, participants confirmed they had not kept a diary due to their demanding schedules.

The interviews were conducted in person at the participating schools in a private room. Each interview lasted between 50 and 60 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded, and the researcher took reference notes to support subsequent analysis. The researcher transcribed the two secondary school interviews, while University Transcriptions, a UCL-approved provider which specialises in research transcriptions, transcribed the primary school interviews. This service was used to maximise the researcher's analysis time and improve accuracy.

3.4.5 Interview Analysis

The interview data was analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis that draws insight from patterns and themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This method allows for both inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning. The data analysis was informed by the working model of wellbeing described in section 2.4.2 to deduce wellbeing while inductive reasoning was used to discover new underpinning factors not previously described in the literature (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Unlike the original Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), Reflexive Thematic Analysis places more emphasis on researcher reflexivity and reflection on how this influences their conclusion (Braun & Clarke, 2019). It also enables hybrid approaches provided that the researcher is transparent and reflexive about their approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). As part of high-quality reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher has presented an overview of their analysis, along with a reflexive account of the reasoning behind the decisions.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis is composed of six stages, outlined below, which provides a flexible framework for analysis. However, these stages should be understood as guidelines rather than rigid rules (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In practice,

the process was iterative, with the researcher moving back and forth between stages as their understanding of the data evolved (Braun & and Clarke, 2019).

1) The researcher familiarised herself with the data, first through delivering interviews themselves then through re-reading the transcripts and personal notes, recording initial ideas.

2) Codes, or short phrase which described a section of data, were generated using free coding rather than following a systematic coding structure or codebook (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The aim was to encapsulate the meaning of the quote in a highly descriptive phrase or sentence that can be assessed and understood without the need for additional information from other quotes or codes.

3) Codes were then organised into broader groupings which reflected potential themes. Initially, the codes were organised into groups reflecting the dimensions of the working wellbeing model (i.e. positive affect, negative affect, meaning etc). However, this approach proved less effective in capturing the full range of factors that helped or hindered TAs' experiences, led to considerable repetition, and limited the depth of interpretation. Some of these factors related to specific activities, while others reflected broader systemic influences. As the purpose of the interviews was not only to enrich the survey findings, but also to explore experiences related to wellbeing and understand potential underpinning mechanisms relating to the relationship between wellbeing and activities. As the analysis progressed, the model-driven groups were restructured in relation to data-driven groups, forming overarching themes that reflect connections between timetabled activities, practical tasks, and systemic factors. Data-driven codes captured interpretations of the data that were not prescribed by pre-

existing frameworks such as the wellbeing model. However, wellbeing was still reflected within each theme as per the theoretical model.

4) Themes were reviewed in relation to both the original interview transcripts and their reflections recorded in their reflexive journal during data collection. This process also ensured that each code was interpreted within the context of the specific activity or interview question to which it related and not just the researcher's own beliefs. Understanding of wellbeing was compared to the original literature review. The themes were refined and combined as needed.

5) The themes were then named, and the essence of the theme was described. Thematic maps for each theme were also generated including the sub-themes which provide structure within the complex themes.

6) The themes were written up in this thesis report, including extract examples that provide evidence of the theme within the data, and linked back to the research questions. The full write up is included in Chapter 4.

Coding and theme generation were completed using NVivo, qualitative data analysis software. An example of interview coding can be found in Appendix 9.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institute of Education, University College London (UCL) before data collection commences. This research also complies with the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (2014). The application is included in Appendix 1.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was sought from all participants in both the survey and the interviews. At the beginning of the study, a summary of what to expect was provided, including time commitments, a link to the information sheets for the survey and interview is located in Appendices 2 and 6, and the researchers' contact details for any further questions. For the interviews, key information regarding the research, including the right to withdraw from the interview if they wished, was provided at the pre-meeting that took place 4 to 5 days prior to the interviews, with a reminder given just before the interview. A copy of the Interview consent form is included in Appendix 7.

Sensitive Topics

Discussing affect, wellbeing, and experiences can be a sensitive topic for some participants. To mitigate this, the researcher was transparent about the subjects covered before both data collection components and prior to obtaining consent. During the interviews, the researcher developed rapport with each participant. Breaks were offered, and the researcher attuned themselves to the participant's emotional state to provide breaks at appropriate times when necessary. Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time without explanation. The survey could be completed at the participant's own pace, allowing for breaks if needed. Participants could also provide as much or as little detail as they wished in response to the questions.

Confidentiality/anonymity

Multiple participants were recruited from each participating school. Participants knew who else took part in the research from their own setting; however, the interviews were conducted privately. The research assured participants that no identifying details would be shared with anyone from their setting, nor included in the write-up. All

interview transcriptions were anonymised, and no individual is identifiable from data analysis or dissemination of the findings.

Data storage and security

Survey data was collected via the secure online platform Qualtrics. The link to the survey was distributed publicly, but no identifiable details, such as name or address, were collected. The data was linked to the researchers' UCL account and was only accessible with a password and through a secure Wi-Fi connection. Individual participant responses will be identifiable via confidential participant IDs. All interview audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected laptop, and all participants' personal data were stored in a separate password-protected document. Interview data was identifiable solely by confidential participant ID numbers. Interviews took place in a private room. Two interviews were transcribed by the researcher in a private setting using headphones to prevent others from overhearing. The other two interviews were transcribed by University Transcriptions, a company approved by UCL for transcription services. All identifiable details were anonymised in the transcript. Participants were also advised not to share identifiable details during their interviews, such as the names of specific pupils or other staff members.

Chapter 4 - Results & Findings

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the data obtained from the online survey, along with the findings from the thematic analysis of the interview data.

4.1 Phase 1 Survey

The follow sections describe the survey results.

4.1.1 Sample demographics

A total of 25 respondents agreed to take part in the survey. Data from 15 respondents was included in the analysis, while data from 10 respondents was removed for the following reasons:

1. Four respondents consented to participate in the survey but completed no further survey items.
2. Six respondents completed or partially completed the demographic data Section but did not score any activities.

The following section provides an overview of the demographic information provided by the 15 respondents, as summarised in Table 5

Demographics	Labels	Count	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25 years	1	7
	26–35 years	3	20
	36–45 years	6	40
	46–55 years	4	27
	56–65 years	1	7
Gender	Female	14	93
	Male	1	7

Region	England – East Midlands	1	7
	England – London	11	73
	England – Northwest	2	13
	England – Southwest	1	7
Qualification	Level 3 – A-levels/NVQ-3/Advanced apprenticeships/International Baccalaureate diploma/T-levels	5	33
	Level 4 or 5 – HNC/CertHE/HND/NVQ-4 or NVQ-5	3	20
	Level 6 – Bachelor's degree/Grad Dip/NVQ-6/Degree Apprenticeship	3	20
	Level 7 – Master's degree/PGCert/PGDip/NVQ-7	3	20
	Prefer not to say	1	7
Education Stage	Primary Education	11	73
	Secondary Education	4	27
School Type	Academy/Academy Trust	2	13
	Faith school/Voluntary aided schools	2	13
	Local Authority/Maintained School	10	67
	Not sure/Prefer not to say	1	7
Title	Attendance Officer	1	7
	Grad Intern TA	1	7

	Higher level teaching assistant	2	13
	Inclusion & Safeguarding Support Officer and Teaching Assistant	1	7
	Learning mentor	1	7
	Learning support assistant	1	7
	Senior Teaching Assistant	1	7
	Teacher Assistant	7	47
Total Years in Current Setting	less than 1 year	2	13
	1–3 years	5	33
	3–5 years	1	7
	7–9 years	3	20
	10+ years	4	27
Total Years in All Settings	less than 1 year	2	13
	1–3 years	4	27
	3–5 years	2	13
	5–7 years	1	7
	7–9 years	1	7
	10+ years	5	33

Table 5. Frequency table of demographic data from N=15

Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 65 years, with the majority falling within the 36–45 age bracket (n=6). The sample was predominantly female, with only one respondent identifying as male. Most participants were based in the London region

(n=11), while four were located across the East Midlands, Northwest England, and Southwest England; no respondents were from outside of England. One respondent chose not to disclose their qualification status. All other respondents (n=14) held qualifications at least equivalent to A-levels, with six respondents possessing an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. While the survey was open to individuals working in both primary and secondary education, the majority of respondents (73%, n=11) worked in a primary school setting, whereas four respondents worked in a secondary school. Respondents were employed across a range of school types, including Local Authority schools, faith schools, and academies, with 67% (n=10) working in Local Authority schools. Participants had varied levels of experience, with a seemingly even split between those who had worked for fewer than five years at their current setting (n=8) and those who had worked for more than five years (n=7). However, these figures should be interpreted with caution due to certain limitations of the survey design. For example, a Teaching Assistant with exactly seven years of service could have selected either "5–7 years" or "7–9 years," introducing possible inconsistencies. Similarly, multi-choice questions relating to employment setting may have been unclear for respondents working in schools with overlapping characteristics, such as a faith school that is also an academy, meaning the data may not accurately represent the sample's demographic profile.

A comparison of total years spent in the current setting versus all roles revealed that most respondents had remained in their current setting for the majority of their time in the profession. The spread of respondent demographics may reflect the limitations of the survey distribution procedures, which are discussed further in Section 6.3.1.

On average, respondents were contracted to work 29.78 hours per week. Eight

participants worked the hours they were contracted to work in the setting, with one respondent reporting working two hours fewer than contracted and six respondents working over their contracted hours on average per week, with a range from two and a half extra hours to eleven extra hours per week.

While most respondents identified their role as Teaching Assistant (n = 7), others reported titles that included Learning Support Assistant, Learning Mentor, and Senior Teaching Assistant. As outlined in Section 1.3.2, these roles are considered broadly comparable based on the responsibilities typically associated with them. Two respondents identified as HLTAs, a role also described in Section 1.3.1. HLTAs generally perform duties similar to those of Teaching Assistants, but with additional teaching responsibilities. Both HLTA respondents provided data related to their wellbeing during teaching activities, which are included in Section 4.1.3.3; however, this activity was not exclusive to them. One respondent identified their role as an Attendance Officer, a title that would not typically meet the study's inclusion criteria. However, in their responses, they also noted working as an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA), a role that involves direct support work with pupils. As explained in Section 3.3.3, eligible participants were those working directly with pupils in a support capacity. ELSAs, who are trained by EPs to deliver emotional literacy interventions, often also work as Teaching Assistants. For example, in this study, one additional respondent held a dual role as both TA and ELSA. Given the nature of the ELSA role and its alignment with the study's inclusion criteria, this respondent was deemed eligible and included in the analysis.

4.1.2 Deployment

Respondents were asked to identify the types of activities they completed during their previous typical working day. A complete list of activity options can be found in

Appendix 4. As outlined in Section 3.3.2, respondents reported the total number of lessons they supported throughout the day, but they were only asked to provide wellbeing scores for two self-selected lessons. Other reported activities outside of lesson support, referred to as “additional activities”, were recorded only on a binary basis, whether they were completed at least once that day or not. As such, while a respondent may have, for example, led multiple interventions, only the presence of the activity (not its frequency) was captured.

Table 6 presents the number of respondents who reported completing each stage of TA deployed activities. A more detailed breakdown of wellbeing scores associated with each activity is provided in subsequent sections.

Activity	**Frequency (no. participants who completed the activity at least once on the recorded day)**	**Percentage of 15 respondents (%)**
Lesson Support	13	87
Leading an Intervention	9	60
Pastoral Support	3	20
Teaching small groups	5	33
Teaching whole class	1	7
Playground monitoring	6	40
Lunchtime monitoring	4	27
Monitoring arrivals	3	20
Staff meeting	3	20
Marking pupil work	4	27
Admin	4	27
Monitoring Detention	2	16
School assembly	4	27

Leading an extracurricular activity	1	7
Staff Training	1	7

Table 6: A distribution table of the activities scored by n=15 respondents, excluding lesson support.

Lesson support remains a dominant activity that occupies TAs' working day, with 13 out of the 15 respondents reporting they supported at least one lesson on their recorded day. Leading an intervention follows closely, making up the second most common activity at 60%. A significant percentage of TAs reported completing at least one form of non-learning direct support (playground monitoring, lunchtime monitoring, monitoring arrivals, monitoring detention, and school assembly), with the potential for some TAs to be involved in more than one. With all activities except for detention, these roles fell between 27% to 40% of respondents, suggesting that TAs continue to provide direct support outside of lesson time, constituting the third most common aspect of their role.

4.1.3 Wellbeing in activities

The remainder of this Section analyses the wellbeing scores for each of the activities. As described in Section 3.3.2, all wellbeing dimensions were scored on a Likert scale between 1 and 7, with 7 representing very true and 1 representing not at all true. The wellbeing dimensions, which are positive or negative as described in Table 5, are collectively referred to as positive wellbeing dimensions and negative wellbeing dimensions. Scores for some activities are combined into similar groupings based on context. This includes playground monitoring, lunchtime monitoring, and monitoring arrivals, which were combined into “unstructured non-learning” activities. Marking pupil work and admin are combined into “Indirect work.” Some activities have samples of fewer than 5, making them difficult to compare, even descriptively, to other

activities. These are displayed separately.

4.1.3.1 Lesson support

Thirteen out of the fifteen respondents provided lesson support on their recorded day and reported their wellbeing. Respondents also indicated the total number of lessons they supported throughout the day. Primary school TAs (n=10) had a mean average of 3.5 lessons per day (sd= 1.65, range = 5, minimum =1, maximum =6), while three out of four secondary school TAs reported supporting six lessons in one day; the remaining secondary school TA reported supporting none. Ten respondents provided wellbeing assessments for two of the lessons they supported, while the remaining three submitted scores for one, resulting in a total of 23 wellbeing scores for lesson support. Written responses were also provided for 14 of these lessons.

Lessons differ depending on multiple factors which alter TAs' practice and role. Table 7 includes frequency counts of lessons reported by year group, subject, type of support provided and the nature of the lesson. Options with a frequency of 0 were not included in Table 8 for conciseness. See Appendix 4 for a complete list of possible subjects, types of learning activity and types of support options in the survey.

	Label	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Year group	Reception	3	13
	Key Stage 1 (Year 1/2)	5	22
	Key Stage 2 (Year 3/4/5/6)	9	39
	Key Stage 3 (Year 7/8/9)	1	4
	Key Stage 4 (Year 10/11)	5	22
Subject	Phonics/Literacy/English	8	35
	Numeracy/Maths	8	35
	Science	2	9

	Modern Languages	1	4
	Physical Education/Gym	2	9
	Geography	1	4
	Relationship Education/Personal Social and Health	1	4
Type of Learning Activity	Individual work	3	13
	Small group work/Teamwork	6	26
	Whole Class Learning	12	52
	Test/Exam practice	1	4
Type of Support	Supporting a pupil one to one	4	17
	Supporting a small group of pupils e.g. pupils sat at one Table, pupils with identified additional needs	14	61
	Supporting the whole class	5	22

Table 7: Frequency table of lessons observed across year group, subject, type of learning activity, and type of support Summary table of N=23

The higher proportion of responses from primary school TAs naturally resulted in a larger total count. Nevertheless, scores for secondary school lessons were concentrated in Key Stage 4; specifically, five responses related to Year 10 lessons and only one to a Key Stage 3 lesson. English and Maths subjects had a higher reported count than other subjects. Most reported lessons predominantly focused on whole-class teaching, with most TAs providing support to small groups of pupils rather than to individual students or circulating around the classroom to assist those who required it.

Table 8 includes descriptive statistics and the total number of lessons supported by respondents. One respondent only provided wellbeing scores for one of their

lessons but reported having supported five. This data is also included. Data from the 10 respondents who scored wellbeing in 2 lessons was compared with each other using a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for each of the wellbeing dimensions separately. No significant difference was found between the two lessons on any component of wellbeing. See Appendix 10 for Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results. Therefore, Table 9 displays the combined scores from both lessons based on 10 respondents, along with the scores from one lesson from 3 respondents, resulting in a total of 23 individual scores.

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Happy	5.78	1.35	4	3	7
Enjoyed	5.96	1.19	4	3	7
Worried	2.48	1.50	5	1	6
Sadness	2.00	1.41	4	1	5
Freedom	5.00	1.76	5	2	7
Felt Able	5.48	1.68	5	2	7
Satisfied	5.52	1.47	4	3	7
Support	5.70	1.55	4	3	7
Lonely	1.74	1.32	4	1	5
Accomplishment	5.57	1.44	5	2	7
Meaningful	5.70	1.40	4	3	7
Prepared	5.52	1.50	5	2	7

Table 8: Descriptive statistics for wellbeing experienced by 13 respondents across multiple dimensions in Lesson Support. 10 respondents provided scores from 2 lessons, equalling a total of 23 responses. Scores were captured on a Likert scale, with a minimum =1 and a maximum =7.

Positive emotions, “Happy” and “Enjoyed”, scored relatively highly on average at

5.78 (sd =1.35) and 5.96 (sd = 1.19) respectively, while negative emotions, “Worried” and “Sadness”, remained relatively low on average at 2.47 (sd = 1.50) and 2.00 (sd = 1.41) respectively. “Lonely” scored the lowest on average of all activities at 1.74 (sd = 1.32), suggesting that TAs felt they had others around them, which may also align with the average score of 5.69 (sd = 1.55) for “Support”, indicating that TAs felt supported or that they could access support if needed. TAs also reported relatively high levels of “Satisfaction”, “Preparedness”, and sense of “Accomplishment” (mean = 5.52 (sd = 1.47), 5.52 (sd = 1.5), and 5.57 (sd = 1.44), respectively). “Freedom” and “Felt able” scored slightly above neutral with averages of 5.00 and 5.48, both exhibiting high variability with standard deviations of 1.76 and 1.68, respectively, suggesting the level of freedom to support the pupils in the manner they desire can vary depending on other factors.

Among these, three respondents who scored highly on positive wellbeing components and lowly on negative ones connected their wellbeing to their ability to effectively support pupils' understanding in lessons, including those with SEN. Most respondents who reported lower scores on positive wellbeing dimensions cited pupil noise and classroom disruption as the main factors. One reported instances of aggressive pupil behaviour, while others mentioned the class teacher’s inability to manage behaviour effectively. However, in other cases, respondents noted that disruptive behaviour increases when the TA is required to work alone. One TA also shared a lack of autonomy in managing classroom behaviour, while another suggested emotional strain stemming from sadness and frustration at having to raise their voice to manage the class. Finally, a TA who felt overwhelmed by a high SEN workload and insufficient time to assist all pupils reported only moderate wellbeing across the board.

4.1.3.2 Interventions

Nine respondents scored their wellbeing for when they delivered interventions. The mean scores, SD, range, minimum, and maximum scores for each dimension of wellbeing TAs reported for facilitating interventions are detailed in Table 9.

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Happy	5.78	1.20	3	4	7
Enjoyed	5.89	0.93	3	4	7
Worried	1.75	1.39	4	1	5
Sadness	1.56	1.01	3	1	4
Freedom	6.33	1.00	3	4	7
Felt Able	6.33	1.00	3	4	7
Satisfied	6.44	0.73	2	5	7
Support	5.78	1.39	4	3	7
Lonely	1.33	0.71	2	1	3
Accomplishment	5.78	1.39	4	3	7
Meaningful	6.00	1.32	4	3	7
Prepared	5.78	1.72	5	2	7

Table 9: Descriptive statistics for wellbeing experienced by n=9 respondents across multiple dimensions in Interventions. Scores were captured on a Likert scale, with a minimum =1 and a maximum =7.

Overall, respondents scored intervention with relatively high average scores for positive dimensions of wellbeing and relatively low for negative wellbeing dimensions, showing that on the whole, TAs felt positive emotions, and a high sense of competency, autonomy, satisfaction, meaning and achievement during intervention

work with average scores ranging from 5.78 to 6.44. Low average scores for Loneliness, Sadness and Worry further support the notion that intervention work is a highly positive activity overall for TAs. TAs also felt sufficiently supported (mean score 5.78, std = 1.39) and prepared (mean = 5.78, std = 1.72) to deliver the interventions. TAs most SDs scores were less than 1.4, this indicates a good level of consensus among the respondents regarding their wellbeing across the other dimensions.

There were four responses to the open text box question regarding interventions, including one response reflecting on activities throughout the week. One respondent shared that they "Felt good and ok." The other two responses reflected a similar sentiment, noting that their wellbeing was affected due to restricted time. One respondent indicated that they had to fit the intervention in between their other responsibilities and the pupils' breaks, while the other further mentioned that the time allocated for the intervention was insufficient for their pupils to progress, stating that "the intervention is given to us just to say we've done it," and describing it as a "tick box exercise."

4.1.3.3 Teaching

Five respondents reported teaching small groups, while one respondent reported teaching a whole class. Both teaching scenarios require similar skills, although teaching a whole class often demands more time for classroom management. These scores have been combined and displayed in Table 10.

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Whole Class
Happy	5.60	1.14	3	4	7	4
Enjoyed	5.20	1.64	3	4	7	5

Worried	3.20	2.17	5	1	6	1
Sadness	2.40	1.34	3	1	4	4
Freedom	5.20	1.64	3	4	7	4
Felt Able	6.00	1.41	3	4	7	5
Satisfied	5.60	1.52	3	4	7	5
Support	5.00	1.87	4	3	7	4
Lonely	3.20	2.17	5	1	6	4
Accomplishment	5.60	1.52	3	4	7	4
Meaningful	5.60	1.52	3	4	7	4
Prepared	5.00	1.87	4	3	7	4

Table 10: Descriptive statistics for wellbeing experienced by n=5 respondents across multiple dimensions in Teaching Scores were captured on a Likert scale, with a minimum =1 and a maximum =7.

The highest score was for “Felt able,” with a mean of 6 (sd = 1.41), while other positive wellbeing dimensions also scored highly, ranging from 5.00 to 5.60. "Worried" and "Lonely" scored averages of 3.20 (sd = 2.17). While still towards the “not true” about me end of the scale, compared to other activities, these are considered relatively high average scores for negative wellbeing dimensions, with maximum scores of 6, marking the highest score for "Worried" across all activities. One participant reflected on the difference in support between teachers and TAs, commenting, “A teacher has a TA when she teaches, but when TAs are asked to cover a lesson, we are left on our own.” This comment highlights how TAs may feel isolated or receive differential treatment when asked to take on teaching responsibilities without the same level of assistance provided to teachers. Nonetheless, both groups exhibited higher variability, both at 2.17, suggesting this was not a universal experience across all five participants.

Similar to the factors described in Lesson support, terms such as “uninterested”, “busy talking”, or “not paying attention” were used to describe pupil engagement. One respondent expressed a desire for greater respect from pupils, suggesting that their role was undervalued contributing to lower scores. Another respondent shared that children’s understanding was not reflected in their written work and reflected on their competence stating that their “teaching needs a push.”

4.1.3.4 Pastoral Support

Three respondents scored their wellbeing when providing pastoral support to a pupil. This is a small sample size (n<5); however, the nature of the activity does not constructively align with the other activities due to its demand on supporting emotional needs. Therefore, the scores are reported independently in Table 11.

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Happy	5.83	1.6	4	3	7
Enjoyed	6.17	1.6	4	3	7
Worried	3.00	2.53	6	1	7
Sadness	2.33	1.51	3	1	4
Freedom	5.83	1.60	4	3	7
Felt Able	6.33	1.63	4	3	7
Satisfied	6.17	1.60	4	3	7
Support	6.17	1.60	4	3	7
Lonely	1.83	1.33	3	1	4
Accomplishment	5.83	1.60	4	3	7
Meaningful	5.83	1.60	4	3	7
Prepared	5.83	1.60	4	3	7

Table 11: Descriptive statistics for wellbeing experienced by n=3 respondents across multiple

dimensions in Pastoral Support. Scores were captured on a Likert scale, with a minimum =1 and a maximum =7.

The highest mean scores were for “Felt able” (mean = 6.33; sd =1.63), which suggests a relatively high level of confidence in the skills to support pupils with their emotional needs. This was followed by "Enjoyed," "Satisfied," and "Support" (each mean = 6.17), suggesting they felt supported in completing this role and derived satisfaction and enjoyment from helping. However, they exhibited relatively high variability, with values exceeding 1.6, suggesting that this was not a universal phenomenon. “Worried” had a relatively high average score (mean = 3.00) compared to other activities, but, similar to positive emotions, also had a relatively high variability with a standard deviation of 2.53, suggesting that pastoral support can sometimes create worry, although not universally. “Sadness” had a maximum score of 4 and an average score of 2.33 (sd = 1.51). While it can be assumed that the pupils being supported may have exhibited a degree of sadness, this did not affect the TAs.

Three respondents provided comments related to pastoral support. One respondent shared, “I am a lot of children’s trusted adult, so I often get them coming to me with their [problems],” highlighting that pastoral support plays a key role in their daily responsibilities. Most described experiences of supporting pupils who were feeling sad or emotionally distressed, but this did not appear to be experienced by the TAs, as reflected in the scores. Another respondent reflected on the high expectations placed on TAs in relation to pastoral care, noting that while emotional support is valued, they are often not given sufficient time or training to fulfil this role as effectively as they potentially could. As one respondent said, “We just have to do our best,” suggesting they have accepted that the opportunity to do more will not be possible.

4.1.3.5 Unstructured non-learning activities

Six respondents reported scores for their wellbeing after “monitoring on the playground"; four respondents reported scores for “monitoring at lunchtime"; and three respondents reported scores for “monitoring arrivals", totalling thirteen responses overall for unstructured non-learning activities. These three activities have been combined as they are conceptually similar and reflect non-structured learning time for the pupils. This accommodates small sample sizes for lunchtime and arrivals. The descriptive statistics are included in Table 12.

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Happy	5.46	1.39	4	3	7
Enjoyed	5.15	1.57	5	2	7
Worried	2.15	1.77	5	1	6
Sadness	1.85	1.46	4	1	5
Freedom	5.15	1.34	4	3	7
Felt Able	6.08	1.12	3	4	7
Satisfied	6.15	0.99	3	4	7
Support	5.54	1.27	3	4	7
Lonely	1.62	1.33	4	1	5
Accomplishment	5.08	1.55	6	1	7
Meaningful	5.85	1.28	4	3	7
Prepared	6.00	1.00	3	4	7

Table 12: Descriptive statistics for wellbeing experienced by n=13 respondents across multiple dimensions in monitoring on the playground (n=6), monitoring at lunchtime n=4 and monitoring arrivals n=3. Scores were captured on a Likert scale, with a minimum =1 and a maximum =7.

Throughout the activities, Satisfied (sd=0.99) and Prepared (sd=1) maintained consistent scores, whereas Worried (sd = 1.77) exhibited the greatest variation, with a maximum score of 6, which is relatively high for a negative wellbeing component. Felt Able (mean = 6.08), Satisfied (mean = 6.15), and Prepared (mean = 6) were also the highest scoring wellbeing components, while negative wellbeing components (Sadness, mean = 1.84 (sd = 1.77); Worried, mean = 2.15 (sd = 1.77); Lonely, mean = 1.61 (sd = 1.33)) scored the lowest on average.

Most comments reflected positively on wellbeing during non-lesson times, indicating that interactions with pupils were “nice” and they were happy to see them. Another TA reported that pupils behaved well during lunchtime, which contributed to their positive experience. In contrast, one respondent described arrival times as more challenging, highlighting that some parents can be demanding over minor issues. They also noted the difficulty of keeping their demands in mind while ensuring pupil safety. Another respondent expressed concerns about being expected to manage behaviour during lunchtime, as well as assist with serving and cleaning due to a lack of staff, suggesting that the demands placed on TAs during these times can directly impact their wellbeing. These responses collectively illustrate how the nature of interactions and the level of responsibility during non-learning periods can either support or hinder TAs’ overall sense of wellbeing.

4.1.3.6 Indirect work

Four respondents reported scores for completing administrative work, and four respondents reported scores for marking pupils' work. These two activities are analysed together as they conceptually reflect administrative tasks, which may involve solo work, that support pupils indirectly. The descriptive statistics are included in Table 13.

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Happy	6.25	1.04	3	4	7
Enjoyed	5.88	1.25	3	4	7
Worried	1.75	1.49	4	1	5
Sadness	1.25	0.71	2	1	3
Freedom	5.75	1.83	5	2	7
Felt Able	6.38	0.92	2	5	7
Satisfied	6.62	0.74	2	5	7
Support	6.50	0.76	2	5	7
Lonely	1.38	1.06	3	1	4
Accomplishment	6.50	0.76	2	5	7
Meaningful	6.62	0.52	1	6	7
Prepared	6.62	0.52	1	6	7

Table 13: Descriptive statistics for wellbeing experienced by n=8 respondents across multiple dimensions in Indirect work which includes administrative work n=4 and marking pupils work n=4. Scores were captured on a Likert scale, with a minimum =1 and a maximum =7. N=8

Combined scores for administration and marked work followed the pattern of high scores for positive wellbeing components and lower scores for negative wellbeing. Scores for "Satisfied," "Meaningful," and "Prepared" exhibited low variability with sd = 0.74, 0.52, and 0.52, respectively. "Felt able" (sd= 0.91) and "Accomplishment" (sd = 0.76) also achieved high average scores (mean = 6.50) alongside low variability. Similar patterns are observed in the negative wellbeing score. "Freedom" exhibited the highest level of variability at 1.83. Reviewing the breakdown of individual averages for administration (mean = 6.75, sd = 0.5) and marked work (mean = 4.75, sd = 2.22) indicates that only marked work displays high variability, which may reflect the binary

nature of schoolwork having a right or wrong answer, thus leaving little room for interpretation. The four respondents who reported completing administrative work displayed high consistency between their scores, with a mean score of 7 for "Felt Able", "Satisfied", "Support", "Accomplishment", "Meaningful", and "Prepared", and 6.75 for "Freedom", suggesting that TAs perceived these as important and experienced a sense of fulfilment. "Happy" and "Enjoyed" scored mean values of 6.25 (sd = 1.04) and 5.87 (sd = 1.24), which are also relatively high compared to other activities.

Responses to the open text box questions for pupil marking reflected this as a source of positive wellbeing. Terms such as “happiness” and “it felt good” were used to describe the experience of providing positive feedback to pupils, indicating a sense of satisfaction and reward in this aspect of their work. Another respondent described balancing admin duties with teaching support as a core aspect of their job, noting that they "work well under pressure and it rarely gets me down." This suggests that, while administrative responsibilities may negatively impact some, personal resilience or individual coping strategies can mitigate these effects. However, not all TAs reported completing admin work on their given day, so this does not reflect typical deployment in this sample.

4.1.3.7 Structured non-learning activities

Four respondents reported wellbeing scores for “support during assembly” and two respondents reported scores for “monitored detention”. These two activities are presented together as they both reflect structured non-learning times, supporting pupils directly. However, despite its very small sample size, it did have descriptively different scores, potentially reflecting the nature of detention vs assembly, i.e. detention is associated with the consequences of negative behaviours. The

descriptive statistics are included in Tables 14 and 15.

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Happy	6.25	0.96	2	5	7
Enjoyed	6.25	0.96	2	5	7
Worried	2.00	2.00	4	1	5
Sadness	2.00	2.00	4	1	5
Freedom	5.5	1.29	3	4	7
Felt Able	6.25	0.96	2	5	7
Satisfied	6.25	0.96	2	5	7
Support	6.25	0.96	2	5	7
Lonely	2.00	2.00	4	1	5
Accomplishment	6.25	0.96	2	5	7
Meaningful	6.25	0.96	2	5	7
Prepared	6.25	0.96	2	5	7

Table 14: Descriptive statistics for wellbeing experienced by n=4 respondents across multiple dimensions in supporting assembly. Scores were captured on a Likert scale, with a minimum =1 and a maximum =7.

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Happy	3.00	1.41	2	2	4
Enjoyed	3.50	0.71	1	3	4
Worried	3.50	2.12	3	2	5
Sadness	3.50	0.71	1	3	4
Freedom	6.00	0.00	0	6	6
Felt Able	6.00	0.00	0	6	6
Satisfied	6.50	0.71	1	6	7

Support	6.50	0.71	1	6	7
Lonely	1.50	0.71	1	1	2
Accomplishment	5.00	1.41	2	4	6
Meaningful	5.00	1.41	2	4	6
Prepared	5.00	1.41	2	4	6

Table 15: Descriptive statistics for wellbeing experienced by n=2 respondents across multiple dimensions in supervising detention. Scores were captured on a Likert scale, with a minimum =1 and a maximum =7.

Scores reflected the typical pattern observed in other activities, where higher average mean scores were associated with positive wellbeing and lower average mean scores with negative wellbeing. However, with a sample size of fewer than five, comparisons to other activities carry less significance. Happy had a mean score of 5.17 with high variability (sd = 1.94). This variability may indicate a significantly lower happy score when monitoring detention is analysed independently (n=2) from supporting assembly.

The key difference between assembly and detention scores lies in the ratings for Happy and Enjoyed. Assembly exhibits high mean scores of 6.25 (sd = 0.96) for both, whereas detentions have averages of 3.00 and 3.5, respectively, with consistent variability (sd = 1.41 and 0.71) from a very small sample size. This may reflect the nature of the activity, as it serves as an enforced consequence for pupils often due to behaviour, which is generally not perceived as a positive experience. However, caution must be exercised in interpretation due to the limited sample size of 2. Sadness scores remained neutral to low (mean = 3.5, sd = 0.71), suggesting an overall neutral affect during this time.

Three responses to the open-text box questions were provided to support the

assembly. Two reflected positively on the experience, stating, “it went very well” and “it was nice to interact with pupils"; however, another noted that TAs were expected to control behaviour, which could be a somewhat negative experience. Nevertheless, the respondent's scores were 5 for all wellbeing components.

4.1.3.8 Other activities

Finally, this Section provides an overview of the final data collected from activities that received scores from only one respondent: extra-curricular activities and training. Staff meeting responses are also included in this Section; however, only three responses were collected, and conceptually, the staff meeting does not align with the other activities. The descriptive statistics are included in Table 16.

Staff Meetings

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
Happy	4.33	0.58	1	4	5
Enjoyed	4.00	0.00	0	4	4
Worried	2.33	1.53	3	1	4
Sadness	2.00	1.73	3	1	4
Freedom	4.67	0.58	1	4	5
Felt Able	5.33	1.15	2	4	6
Satisfied	5.33	1.15	2	4	6
Support	5.33	1.15	2	4	6
Lonely	2.00	1.73	3	1	4
Accomplishment	5.33	1.15	2	4	6
Meaningful	5.33	1.15	2	4	6
Prepared	5.33	1.15	2	4	6

Table 16: Descriptive statistics for wellbeing experienced by n=3 respondents across multiple dimensions in staff meetings. Scores were captured on a Likert scale, with a minimum =1 and a maximum =7.

Most scores for staff meetings fall within the neutral range between 4 and 5, suggesting little impact on wellbeing. Negative wellbeing scores remain relatively low, suggesting that while strong positive wellbeing was not experienced, this was replaced with negative wellbeing.

Two respondents left comments regarding staff meetings. One notable reflection on wellbeing highlighted that Teaching Assistants were expected to attend all meetings, even when the content was not relevant to their role. This may have contributed to a sense of disengagement, potentially reflected in one respondent's wellbeing scores, which were consistently rated as four across all dimensions. The lack of relevance and purpose in these meetings may have diminished their sense of meaning and value in the activity, thereby impacting their overall wellbeing, making them more neutral.

Extra-curricular and Training

Dimension	Extra-curricular	Training
Happy	2	7
Enjoyed	3	7
Worried	4	1
Sadness	2	1
Freedom	4	7
Felt able	5	7
Satisfied	5	7

Support	6	7
Lonely	1	1
Accomplishment	4	7
Meaningful	6	7
Prepared	4	4

Table 17: Raw scores for each wellbeing dimension for the Extra-curricular and Training. Scores were provided by different respondents.

The scores for extra-curricular overall remained relatively low across all wellbeing components, with the highest scores being 6 for meaningful and support; however, low scores were recorded for happy and enjoyment. No further comments were provided regarding extra-curricular activities. Interpretation of the underlying factors that these scores may reflect cannot be provided due to the singular data point. Training exhibited the expected pattern of high scores for positive components of wellbeing and low scores for negative ones, with a neutral score for prepared. One open-text box entry reflected that the school accommodates training needs, but they felt the training did not always apply to them and was "a waste of time” However, a comment was provided by a different respondent to the scores given in the Table 17.

4.1.4 Additional Factors

Respondents provided additional data from the final two open-text box questions located at the end of the survey, as described in Section 3.3.2. Additional factors that influence wellbeing include workload in general, but also the fact that workload can change daily. Another respondent shared that their colleagues at the school were “mostly friendly and helpful,” highlighting the strong influence relatedness has on their overall wellbeing. One respondent reflected that finances were not great, which could relate to a negative impact on their wellbeing. The quality of management was also highlighted as an influencing factor.

4.2 Phase 2 and 3: Interview Findings and Metainferences

This section presents the key themes from the thematic analysis of four interviews conducted with TAs from both primary and secondary schools. The chapter begins with an overview of the participants and the thematic map of all themes and how they relate to each other. The remainder of the chapter describes each theme and its sub-themes in detail. Each theme includes metainferences (triangulation of survey results and interview findings) and researcher reflexivity as described in section 3.3.1 and 1. 2.

4.2.1 Participants

As aforementioned in Section 3.4.3, two participants were recruited from the same primary school and another two from the same secondary school. Details for the participants are included in table 18.

Pseudonym	Setting	Gender	Years of Experience	Year at current setting
Susan	Primary	Female	6	4
Rosie	Primary	Female	17	17
Aaron	Secondary	Male	4 months	4 months
Lucy	Secondary	Female	21	21

Table 18: Summary table of demographics from the four interview participants identified using a pseudonym.

Demographic details of participants were gathered at the pre-meeting before the interview. Refer to Section 3.4.4 for further information on the pre-meeting. All participants indicated that the week preceding the interview was quite typical, with no substantial disruptions or changes. Topics covered during the interviews included

lesson support, facilitating interventions, pastoral support, monitoring pupils during break time, teaching a class, and performing administrative tasks.

4.2.2 Overview of Themes

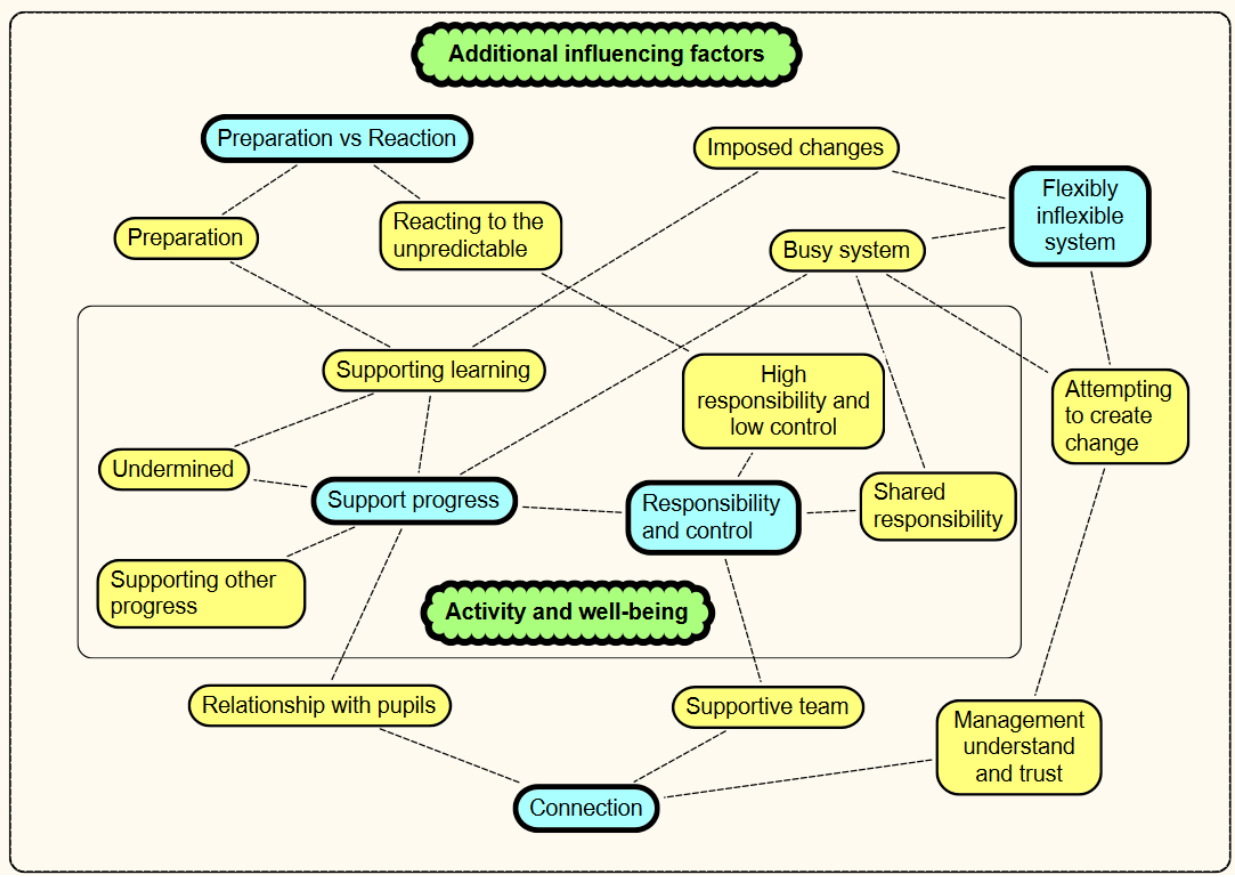

Figure 3: A thematic map showing the Overarching Themes (Green), Themes (Blue) and Sub-themes (Yellow). The lines indicate relationships between the sub-themes.

The interview data from the four participating TAs were analysed using Reflective Thematic Analysis. Two overarching themes, Activity and Wellbeing, and Additional Influencing Factors, encompass five themes and thirteen sub-themes. Each theme and sub-theme reflects factors that link TA activities to multiple dimensions of wellbeing. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to describing each theme with supporting quotes. Accounts of the researchers' reflexivity are also included within the themes.

4.2.3 Activities and Wellbeing

"Activities and wellbeing" is an overarching theme that reflects how wellbeing is directly impacted by TA activities. It includes two themes: "Support Progress" and "Responsibility and Control", which broadly encompass TA tasks that support pupils directly and the responsibility to maintain a safe and effective learning environment.

4.2.3.1 Support Progress

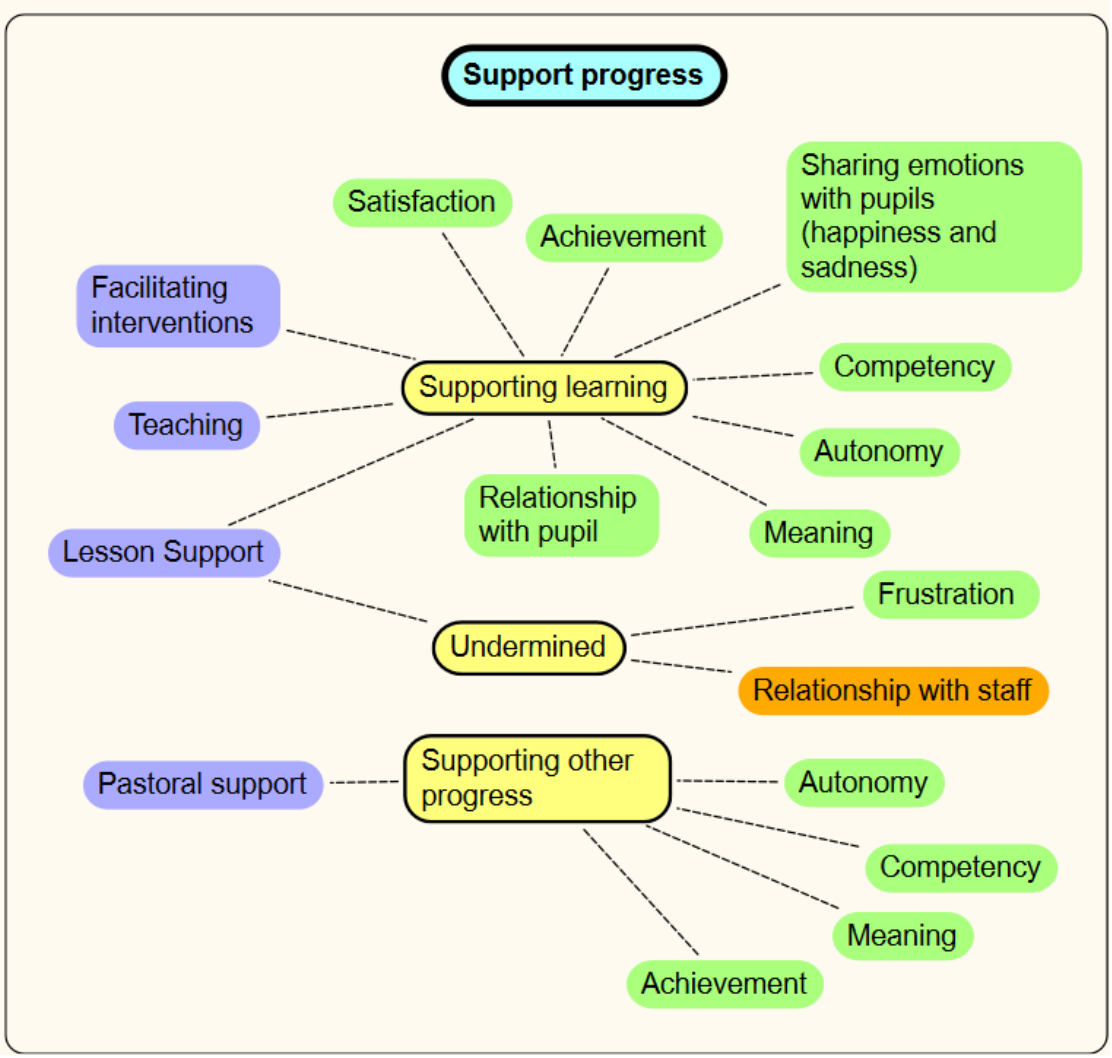

Figure 4: A diagram showing how the connecting factors (sub-themes) in the data connect TA activities (purple box) with dimensions of wellbeing (green box and orange boxes) as presented in section 3.3.2.3. Wellbeing dimensions highlighted in green are increased by the connecting factor while those highlighted in orange are decreased.

The theme **"Support Progress"** is divided into three sub-themes: *"Supporting Learning"*, *"Supporting Other Progress"*, and *"Undermined"*. It reflects how the responsibility to support pupils in making progress, a core part of the TA role, influences their wellbeing.

"Supporting Learning"

All participants conveyed a sense of achievement and satisfaction when they observed improvements in pupils' understanding or skills, progress they felt they had directly supported, as expressed by "I want to make a difference for those children." (Rosie). Even a small step of progress or a "small win" was sufficient to "make my whole day." (Aaron). These moments frequently resulted in a general feeling of happiness, with one participant stating, "I felt really happy when I got the sheets back, because the child had actually done it right." (Susan). When pupils' enjoyment of the activity the TA is providing also enhances their sense of achievement, "If I walk into the class in the morning and I've got a certain class first, they always go, "Yes." So, that makes your achievement. You're already like, "Woohoo, they love me." (Rosie).

When the pupils experience positive emotions as result of making progress, TAs share in this experience. "I'm all about the energies. So, when I know that someone's leaving the room in a happy little jumpy way, that to me is like, it gives me a good boost." (Aaron). However, sometimes positive emotions do not always last from certain pupils, "Probably have a meltdown tomorrow. In that moment it felt really good. He made me smile." (Lucy) suggesting that TAs feel they must capture and enjoy the positive emotions while they can in some circumstances. When pupils become upset from difficulties making progress, TAs also share in the pupils' negative emotions too. "I feel a little sad when one of the children, when he doesn't know anything, he starts

crying. And you don’t want the child to feel upset.” (Susan)

Participants consistently associated pupils' academic progress with their own sense of competency. Even those with less experience reported feeling skilled and effective in their support roles. For example, one TA shared, “I felt that confidence, because they could work out and read it in that lesson. Like we have about one hour. And in that one hour, they actually did two lessons.” (Susan), while another noted, “I do feel very confident in what I do, and I know I do things well because I've put in 100% here” (Lucy). Furthermore, competence was enhanced through relevant training, enabling them to support learning more effectively.

One primary TA shared that they felt a strong sense of autonomy in selecting the methods they believed worked best for their pupils. For one TA autonomy was achieved by working collaboratively with a class teacher to problem solve in an intervention; “we can kind of go around and change the planning and find another approach and different things.” (Susan) while for another it can be from being the one who planned it themselves; “I’d obviously feel more confident in my intervention, because it’s mine and I've planned it.” (Rosie). When autonomous strategies proved effective, it reinforced not only a feeling of competence but also a sense of control in their role as shared in “I feel very much in control, no matter what. And I know how to swerve around things [the pupil] is having a bad day, I know what to do.” (Aaron). One TA described their interventions as “It’s like my own group, my own space and everything.” (Susan) suggesting that having autonomy in an activity often leads to a sense of ownership too.

Supporting learning gave TAs a strong sense of purpose and was viewed as a

core part of their role. When asked to carry out tasks which took them away from direct learning support, such as managing behaviour or providing general classroom work, many reported feeling their skills were not fully utilised. Tasks like keeping pupils quiet on the carpet or supervising them during lunchtime were viewed as necessary, but they provided a lesser sense of purpose; “I'm on the carpet and I'm keeping you quiet. Which I don’t mind. That’s fine. But if not, I could be doing an intervention and be purposeful.” (Rosie). Another TA described being with a pupil at break time as “babysitting,” noting that the activity didn't challenge them. Furthermore, academic support can produce tangible positive “results”, while behaviour support does not yield the same sense of shared progress which provides a sense achievement, satisfaction, and meaning. When these less “purposeful” tasks became too prevalent, TAs reported feeling frustrated at not being able to do what they want to do. “Where I was more intervention based, I'm now being put into a class. So, wellbeing wise, I find that frustrating. Because even though I want to help, I know I'm not doing my interventions”. (Rosie). They can also feel guilty that the pupils they were previously supporting are no longer getting that experience; “When [the pupils] come and they go, “Are you taking me today?” I'm like, “No, sorry. I can’t.” I feel so guilty, so guilty”. (Rosie). TAs want to help in other ways but not at the expense of activities where they believe they can make the most difference:

“Supporting Other Progress”

While learning progress was regarded as central to the role, some TAs also reflected on their experiences in supporting pupils’ emotional and mental wellbeing. For one TA, this involved mentoring a pupil in anxiety management techniques, an activity that was not formally assigned but was initiated during a free period. This TA regarded such support as a meaningful, personal aspect of the role she had

incorporated into her practice of her own accord, “I'm bringing value into it for myself” (Lucy).

This type of spontaneous support gave rise to similar feelings of autonomy, competence, and achievement with the reflection, “just knowing that I’m helping someone else. That gives me great satisfaction.” (Lucy). It also felt deeply personal, as the TA drew on her life experiences and applied strategies she had previously learned. “I can use my experiences to support them, so that's really good for my wellbeing. I can go home feeling really positive.” (Lucy) This also created a strong sense of relatedness, as the TA could connect with pupils facing similar emotional challenges and apply her knowledge in a helpful, empathetic way. Doing so may also have encouraged similar feelings of achievement as supporting learning, as pupils make progress in developing new skills and techniques, “as soon as they gain a little confidence, they start making more friends, playing around. So yeah, you just feel like, “Okay, they're making progress.” (Lucy). While all participants reported that “Supporting Learning” was the main component of the role, the evidence in this sub-theme suggests wellbeing is positively impacted by any sense of progress the pupil has made as a direct result of TAs involvement.

“Undermined”

The final sub-theme, “Undermined,” describes experiences from the secondary school interviewees. Both participants shared experiences in which interactions with teaching staff left them feeling undervalued and dismissed. They perceived certain comments and behaviours as diminishing the importance of their role, positioning it as subordinate to that of the teacher. These experiences were attributed to hierarchical views that regard TAs as less qualified, even when that is not always the case; “There

was never this understanding or expectation that you had a degree, and you were educated. There was always this kind of underlying “oh you know, you're just an LSA” you know, so lesser than.” (Lucy) Participants described moments when their decisions and autonomy in practice were criticised, where some teachers “like to overpower and just like contradict whatever I say” and “undermined the way I was teaching one of the students” (Aaron). While these interactions did not necessarily diminish their sense of competency, they did cause frustration and a decreased sense of relatedness with these staff members. TAs felt that their role in directly supporting learning was not fully recognised and instead a few staff viewed their role as primarily supporting classroom management, such as “oh, can you just hand out these papers? 'Cause that's what you're meant to do” (Aaron), rather than as paraprofessionals with specific skills that contribute directly to pupil progress. This disconnect led to feelings of isolation and a lack of respect. TAs also shares feeling undermined when their expertise on pupils learning and required support is not valued or listened to, “you know what's going to happen a few months down the line with this particular [pupil], but they can't see that. We almost have that insight but that's not valued," (Lucy). Having been dismissed in the past, TAs can feel demotivated to share their predictions about future outcomes: "Now I just sit back and watch it happen." (Lucy). However, it is important to note that these described behaviours were not reported as universal among all teachers and senior staff members and that “it's gotten better over time” (Lucy), indicating a slow change in perception, perhaps among the newer teachers.

Metainferences, reflexivity and summary

The theme “Supporting pupil progress” manifested across direct learning activities (lesson support and facilitating interventions), indirect learning activities (marking pupils’ work and administration), and also in pastoral support, where they

facilitated positive change in mental health. Supporting lessons was the most common TA activity, with 87% of survey respondents reporting they supported at least one lesson on their recorded day. Subsequently, supporting learning is set to be a key skill within their practice.

Survey scores and comments support the sub-theme “Supporting Learning” and “Support Other Progress” and the positive impact such acts have on wellbeing. On average, facilitating interventions and pastoral support were scored highest for positive affect, autonomy, competency, and purpose across all activities measured. During these interventions, TAs in interviews attributed positive wellbeing in these dimensions to the act of seeing pupils make progress. TAs shared a sense of accomplishment with their pupils, such as when they transferred learning to the classroom. TAs are free to make their own decisions within the activity, adapting it to the needs of individual pupils to further support progress while also boosting autonomy. TAs then attributed pupil progress to their own actions, enhancing competency. Even small steps of progress are enough to boost competency. Interventions were described one-to-one or in small group activities without direct teacher input, meaning TAs can attribute this progress directly to their own input rather than another, leading to increased competency compared to lesson support.

When providing pastoral support, a positive sense of meaning, competency, autonomy, and accomplishment was attributed to observing the pupil take on the advice or new skills the TA supported them with and complete the activity in a positive mood. TAs derived wellbeing from seeing pupils make progress with their mental health or from resolving their problems. A negative sense of accomplishment came from experiencing no change.

Administration and marking pupils' work scored highly, with comments linking

this to providing positive feedback on pupils' learning progress. Admin was described as an activity to do less of by TAs when it detracted from learning support. This suggests that the personal perception of whether an activity connects to supporting learning influences the relationship between the activity and wellbeing.

Supporting learning and other forms of pupil progress were strongly identified as core aspects of the TA identity. TAs experience negative wellbeing primarily in terms of affect and relatedness when undermined in their roles by a senior member of staff, suggesting that their job encompasses more than merely supporting learning, such as distributing pieces of paper, which leads to frustration and annoyance. Such comments illustrate the disconnect between TAs' perceptions of their responsibilities (to support pupil learning directly) and those of certain staff members (to assist the teacher with logistical tasks), which can create tension that impacts relationships. While not explicitly conveyed in the survey, such experiences emerged in the interviews as having a significant effect on wellbeing. This evidence reinforces that the responsibility of supporting pupil progress manifests across a range of different tasks, both scheduled and unscheduled, serving as a connecting factor between TAs' positive wellbeing across nearly all dimensions and their work.

The researcher found the theme of “Support Progress” particularly resonant, as it prompted reflection on past experiences of both supporting pupil learning and witnessing peers who felt undermined. Because every interviewee and many survey respondents described supporting learning as a core TA responsibility, this sub-theme was clearly presented in the data rather than from the researcher’s own bias. In fact, the consistency of these accounts validated the notion that facilitating student progress is a broadly shared norm among TAs.

The researcher reflected more on the sub-theme “Feeling Undermined” as it

echoed the researcher's prior experiences with TAs in various contexts, but it was reported solely by secondary-school participants. Since the scope of this thesis does not extend beyond that setting, the researcher does not believe this theme represents a ubiquitous occurrence. Nevertheless, as both participants described being undermined unprompted and in detail, this suggests that, at least in this context, such experiences are significant.

4.2.3.2 Responsibility and control

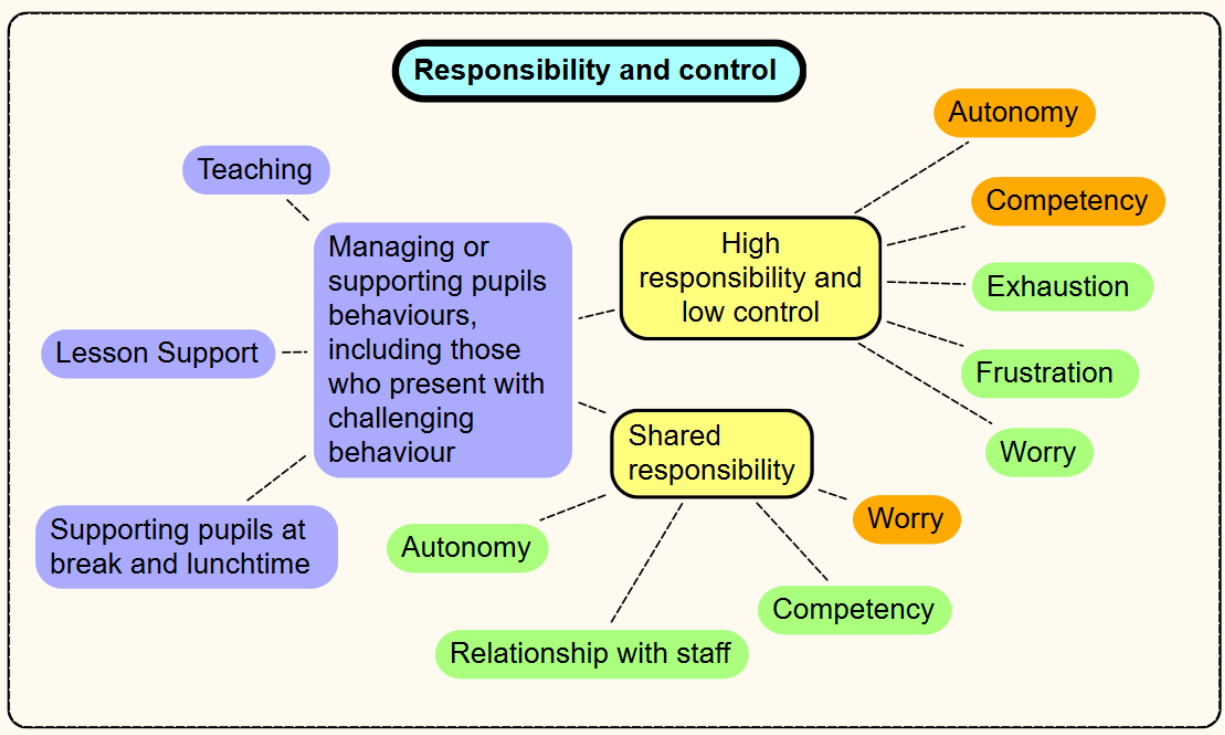

Figure 5: A diagram showing how the connecting factors (sub-themes) which emerged in the data connect TA activities (purple box) with dimensions of wellbeing (green box and orange boxes) as presented in section 3.3.2.3. Wellbeing dimensions highlighted in green are positively impacted by the connecting factor while those highlighted in orange are negatively impacted. The box labelled "what helps?" highlights specific strategies which help to mitigate against the negative impact to wellbeing described in in the subtheme "High responsibility and low control"

Behaviour management and ensuring pupil safety are another two core

components of the TA role that span multiple activities, both in and out of lessons. These responsibilities are important, as failing to fulfil them can lead to negative outcomes, such as excessive noise that disrupts learning and potentially unsafe behaviours that put pupils at risk. The theme “High responsibility and low control” encompasses the impact these responsibilities have on wellbeing. This theme included two sub-themes “Low control” and “Shared responsibility.”

“High responsibility and low control”

TAs reported experiencing challenging behaviour from pupils which not only disrupt the learning environment but can also put both the pupil and TA at potential risk of harm. As part of their role, TAs reported that they are expected to manage such situations by taking control and responsibility. One TA perceived this act as a “battle for control” of sorts between themselves and the pupil, through their use of combative language such as “front lines”, “punched by insults,” and “you feel more and more defeated” (Aaron). This language reflects the conflict and stress that the TA experiences. However, to manage the situation effectively, another TA reflected “go in there and almost pretend I'm confident because I don't want that [pupil] to think that I'm not in control of the situation.” (Lucy) on the need to appear confident and in control in front of the pupil, even when they do not feel that way.

Anticipating these negative experiences and the battle for control that is to follow, lead to increased anxiety before the activity starts; “I felt, just really in a heightened state of anxiety, if I'm honest with you, you know? It's that fight or flight, that adrenaline before I'd even come in the room” (Lucy). This anxiety stems from the uncertainty towards how pupils may behave and what the TA is expected to do to manage the situation; “you never know what his mood is going to be, what's going to happen? Will he run off? It's all those "what ifs" playing in your head. So, you almost prepare yourself mentally, for those what ifs, before you go in there”. (Lucy).

Having to remain regulated and in control can lead to exhaustion “then after that you go away, and it hits you how much you've had to try and maintain control and calmness. [whispers] it’s so exhausting.” (Lucy). Furthermore, the TA shared the level of challenging she is experiencing is increasing, resulting in less opportunities for a break from it resulting in the levels of exhaustion being maintained; “I think it's more of the typical. There's less respite from the challenge now. It's like every week I'm encountering numerous challenges, which can be extremely exhausting.” (Lucy). Another TA shared that managing an incident in the morning can result in poor mood for the remainder of the school day “Yesterday straight away one kid put another kid in a headlock. That was the first thing I walked into in the morning, and I thought, “It's just not the day”. Yeah, it stayed that way.” (Aaron) In fact, having an interaction with a child or an activity where the TA is not required to manage behaviour can even provide a sense of relief as stated by another TA “it's like a little break because we're not constantly having to be over kids or constantly having to like, say, “don't do this. Don't do that. Don't do this.” It's a nice breather” (Aaron).

When, despite the TAs actions, these behaviours continue this can lead to a sense of frustration (negative affect); “I guess it was also frustration as well because no matter how much I tried It wasn't working, wasn't getting through.” (Aaron). It can also result in a reduced sense of competency in their own skills. “He's shouting, he's aggressive. Defiant in those moments. I don't feel confident,” (Lucy). When this sense of feeling deskilled is targeted by the pupil that can produce further negative affect as one TA reflected, “when [a pupil] goes, 'oh, you don't do anything right, stuff like that.' It hits you at first because you're doing your best.” (Aaron) meaning that the state of feeling deskilled may be maintained in some TAs if they question whether they acted appropriately.

One TA shared that receiving training had alleviated uncertainty about the boundaries of their role in these situations, stating, “I'm not overstepping my role and keeping him safe at the same time” (Lucy). Having effective procedures for TAs to follow during such situations limits their autonomy. However, it can also enhance feelings of safety by providing a buffer between the responsibility to manage the pupil's behaviour and the TA’s sense of self. “It will help wellbeing. It's kind of like a protection sheet - so I'm not always constantly getting punched by insults.” (Aaron). Adhering to a predefined action list means the TAs actions are not based solely on their own judgment, directly linked to their sense of competence. Instead, they are linked to the decisions of others, reducing the level of responsibility placed on the TA.

A few approaches were shared which boost wellbeing during or after encounters where TAs feel less in control. Sense of competency can be supported through positive re-framing or reflection after the incident, such as “I'm not doing anything wrong, it's just he doesn't like it. He doesn't want to see himself as the issue. He's going to make other people the issue.” (Aaron). The TAs remind themselves that the pupils' comments are a defence mechanism rather than an actual reflection of their skills. Taking a break after an incident to calm and regulate following an enlightened emotional encounter also helps, “You can have that cup of tea and quiet time, you know,” (Lucy), but, as described in the sub-theme, “Too busy”, this is not always an option for busy TAs. Finally, of note, while such approaches described can maintain TAs wellbeing, no TA suggested that successfully managing the situations resulted in a positive boost to their wellbeing, compared to the when a pupil makes progress. Instead, one TA reflected that their wellbeing remains the same when the pupil is calm, “If he's not talking and just being nonverbal and ignoring me then my wellbeing stays the same.” (Aaron). This suggests that managing behaviour, especially challenging

behaviour such as this, is not an activity that TAs may be as motivated to engage in.

"Shared responsibility"

Having the support of colleagues during demanding activities can mitigate the negative impact on wellbeing described in "High responsibility and low control." Firstly, having a colleague present alleviates anxiety: "another member of the team came and sat with me so that alleviated a lot of my anxiety." (Lucy) and "I didn't have to feel like I was dealing with that on my own; that really helped" (Lucy), which made the TA feel safer. One TA reported that having a colleague can help generate alternative strategies to manage the situation, as the TA no longer has to maintain sole charge, allowing more capacity for considering alternatives. The TA described their colleague as, "She's a really calm person as well, so [whispers] "so great. She's really calm" (Lucy). This leads to reduced anxiety and fear, increased safety in managing the situation, and a heightened sense of control because they have the support of another person with whom they are sharing the responsibility, meaning the burden is not placed on one sole TA. However, due to the logistical factors described in "Flexible, inflexible system," TAs are well aware that sharing responsibility with a colleague is not always feasible, given competing demands on their time and other responsibilities.

Metainferences and Summary

Managing behaviour to provide a suitable learning environment and to maintain pupils' safety is another core TA responsibility that manifests across all tasks involving direct interaction with pupils, with the notable exception of intervention work. However, it is solely the responsibility for non-learning, unstructured activities such as monitoring the playground, school arrivals, and the lunch hall. On average, positive affect (happiness and enjoyment) scored lowest for these three activities, which could be attributed to the lack of support for pupil progress. Comments sharing negative

reflections focus on the need to manage pupils' behaviours in addition to other responsibilities, such as cleaning tables and communicating with parents.

During learning activities, where negative factors affecting wellbeing were reported, these were attributed to pupils' behaviour. As described in the “Supporting progress” sub-theme, TAs were predicted to score “Teaching” with relatively high scores for wellbeing, considering they support the learning progress of a large group of children. However, teaching, on average, scored relatively low for enjoyed, meaningful, and supported, and scored relatively high for feeling worried and lonely compared to other activities. This phenomenon is illustrated through comments such as “A teacher has a TA when she teaches, but when TAs are asked to cover a lesson, we are left on our own,” and describing pupils as “not paying attention” and uninterested. Notably, pastoral support also scored similarly in “worry” to teaching but had higher levels of support. This suggests that, unlike the class teacher, TAs face the challenge of delivering learning while managing behaviour without support, leading to a higher level of sole responsibility and the need to maintain control.

Interview data supports this theme. As the level of challenging behaviour increases (i.e. becomes more disruptive or aggressive), the stressors associated with the responsibility of managing this situation also escalate. During these times, TAs have to regulate their emotions and remain in control when experiencing a pupil's negative emotions, despite their own fear and anxiety. Reflections on their own sense of competency, such as “He's shouting, he's aggressive. Defiant in those moments. I don't feel confident.” The consequences of failing to manage the challenging situation could have more severe consequences, such as significantly disruptive learning for others over an extended period, or even physical harm to the pupil or TA. However, TAs also highlighted that clearly defined roles and procedures decreased feelings of

uncertainty by providing the security of boundaries, despite also decreasing autonomy. This further suggests that high levels of autonomy could negatively impact overall wellbeing by increasing negative affect. This combination of high responsibility, without sharing it with others (i.e. working alone), combined with a high level of freedom, leads to an overall sense of negative wellbeing during these types of activities.

4.2.4 "Additional influencing factors"

"Additional influencing factors" is the second overarching theme. It encompasses themes which reflect factors that influence wellbeing during activities indirectly i.e. systemic factors that either boost or hinder the experience of wellbeing in activities described in the overarching theme "Activities and wellbeing". This overarching theme is made up of three themes: "Preparation vs Reaction", "Connection" and "Flexibly Inflexible System"

4.2.4.1 “Preparation vs Reaction”

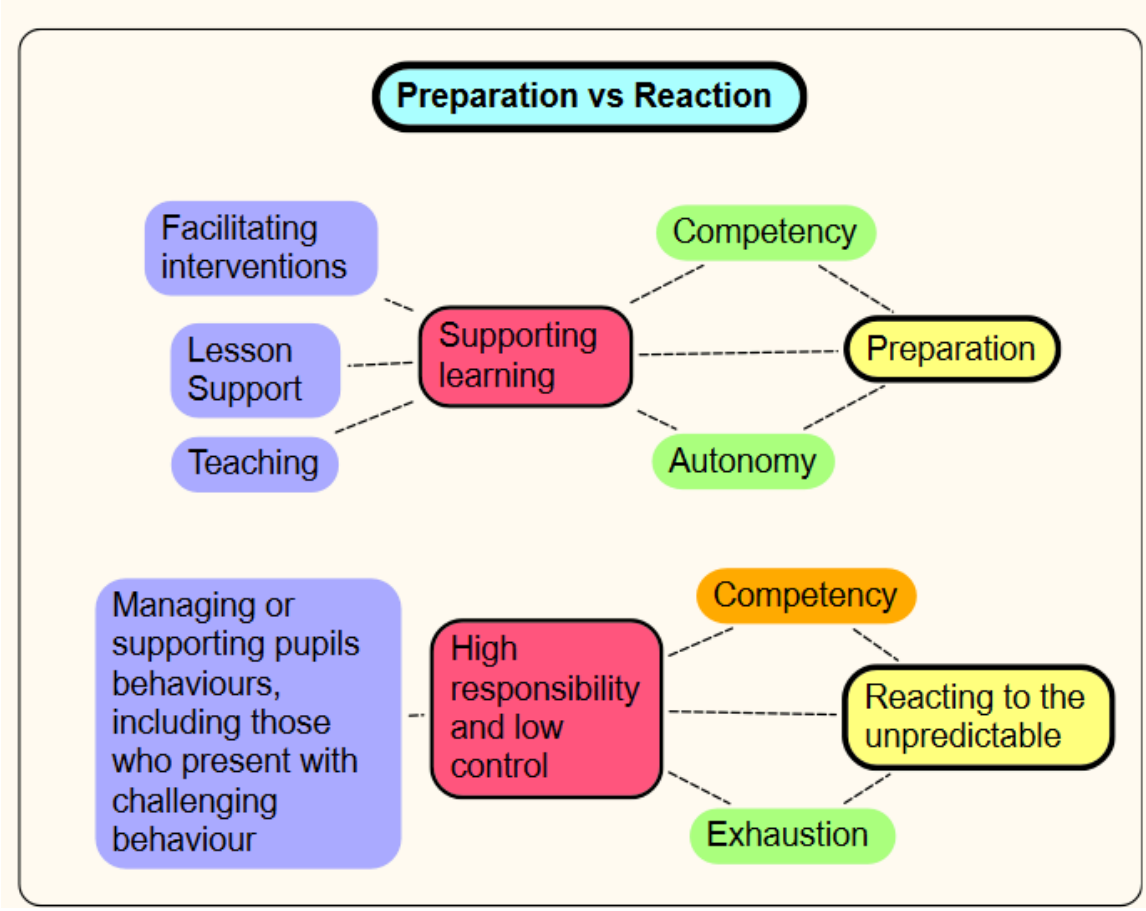

Figure 6: A diagram showing how the connecting factors (sub-themes; yellow box) which connect TA activities (purple box) with dimensions of wellbeing (green box and orange boxes) as presented in section 3.3.2.3. Wellbeing dimensions highlighted in green are positively impacted by the connecting factor while those highlighted in orange are negatively impacted. The dark pink boxes reflect sub-themes from other themes which are relevant to the relationship that the sub-themes in this theme influencing.

Preparation vs Reaction comprises two sub-themes: “Preparation” and “Reacting to the Unpredictable”. These themes overlap, resulting in some repetition. This theme pertains to nearly all activities described by the TAs, including lesson support, interventions, managing behaviour, and teaching.

“Preparation”

Preparation refers to planning for an upcoming activity, such as setting up a lesson, organising tasks for an intervention, and familiarising oneself with the lesson content in advance. While this may seem self-explanatory, the time and capacity to prepare are common factors that significantly influence TAs’ wellbeing. Having scheduled preparation time within their routine enhances their sense of competence, allowing TAs to contemplate their tasks thoroughly beforehand, particularly for interventions and teaching sessions; “It’s already been planned beforehand. So, I'm ready to go in, I know what equipment I need, I know where it’s going to go, what’s going to be done on that equipment. So, everything’s ready.” (Rosie)

Planning for potential situations can also foster a sense of calm, as the situation feels more predictable; “Like I prepare my lessons, so I know them in advance before I deliver them. So, I know what’s coming up.” (Susan) If this prep work leads to pupil progress as described in the theme “Support Progress”, then it also results in an increased sense of achievement; “Having to plan, assess, teach something, and seeing it fall into place for me makes me feel really good. You know that I've worked on that - And the children are having fun” (Rosie).

However, preparation time is not always possible due to related logistical factors as described in “Flexibly inflexible system”. When there is insufficient time to prepare, this can lead to an increased sense of stress as the TA attempts to “cram everything in” to the limited time available, which also hinders performance: “I feel like I can’t deliver my lesson how well I know I can” (Rosie). With experience, prep time becomes less essential for maintaining TAs’ sense of competency and control, as they are able to just show up and get on with it because they have done it many times before. For example, one TA shared that they did not know what the lesson content was beforehand, but “Luckily, I've been in year one so long I know the curriculum. - I know

it’s going to be plants.” (Rosie). Still, this example may not reflect the experiences of TAs who are newer to the role.

“Reacting to the unpredictable”

Reacting reflects the need for the TA to adapt to the situations they encounter. As reflected upon in “preparation”, when there has been no capacity to prepare, this can make activities more uncertain as they have not had the chance to mentally work through them beforehand, thus leading to “reacting”; “So, it's constantly having to deal with one thing after another and another as they happen, in the moment, constant in the moment.” (Lucy) Furthermore, some activities are described as being hard to prepare for because the pupils’ reactions are unpredictable: “I know what I'm doing. I know because I have been given time to look at the things that I'm going to go through. But it’s just that because you don’t know how the child’s going to react.” (Susan) Therefore, the prep work does not actually lead to more successful outcomes. The impact on wellbeing arises when “reacting” occurs over a prolonged period of time and can “just been so exhausting. Because you're dealing with things as they happen.” There's no lead up to them, so it's constantly having to deal with one thing after another and another as they happen” (Lucy). This results in a reduced sense of competency, with little opportunity to improve skills.

One-way TAs shared for improving the sense of competency comes from the recognition that “adaptability” is a skill in its own right, such as “Cause what's been thrown at me over the years, what situations I've had to manage and adapt to, I've done it. I suppose it's made me feel more confident” (Lucy), which can come from experience. Adaptability could also be described as “preparing to react,” where anticipating how the pupils may behave allows for mental preparation regarding how to approach the situation: “I have to be in the zone, not taking anything that he says

personally to try and get, like, clear mind basically" (Aaron). These circumstances appear to be less tiring compared to constantly reacting to unpredictable behaviour.

Metainferences and Summary

Preparation vs Reaction reflects how the level of preparation the TA is able to experience influences wellbeing. This level can range from dedicated time scheduled into their weekly timetable to ad hoc time to communicate with staff members, to minimal preparation time requiring TAs to react to situations as they occur. Reacting "all the time" can lead to feelings of exhaustion, especially when the behaviours are unpredictable, whereas preparation boosts competency by allowing time to problem-solve and develop new skills. Most preparation occurred through planning content and collaborating with other staff members, rather than through formal training. Formal training was scored in the survey once, and the few comments referred to the training they experienced as irrelevant to their practice. However, TAs can learn to prepare to react to the unpredictable by developing their own adaptability, a skill set in its own right, and drawing on previous experiences working with other pupils.

4.2.5 Connection

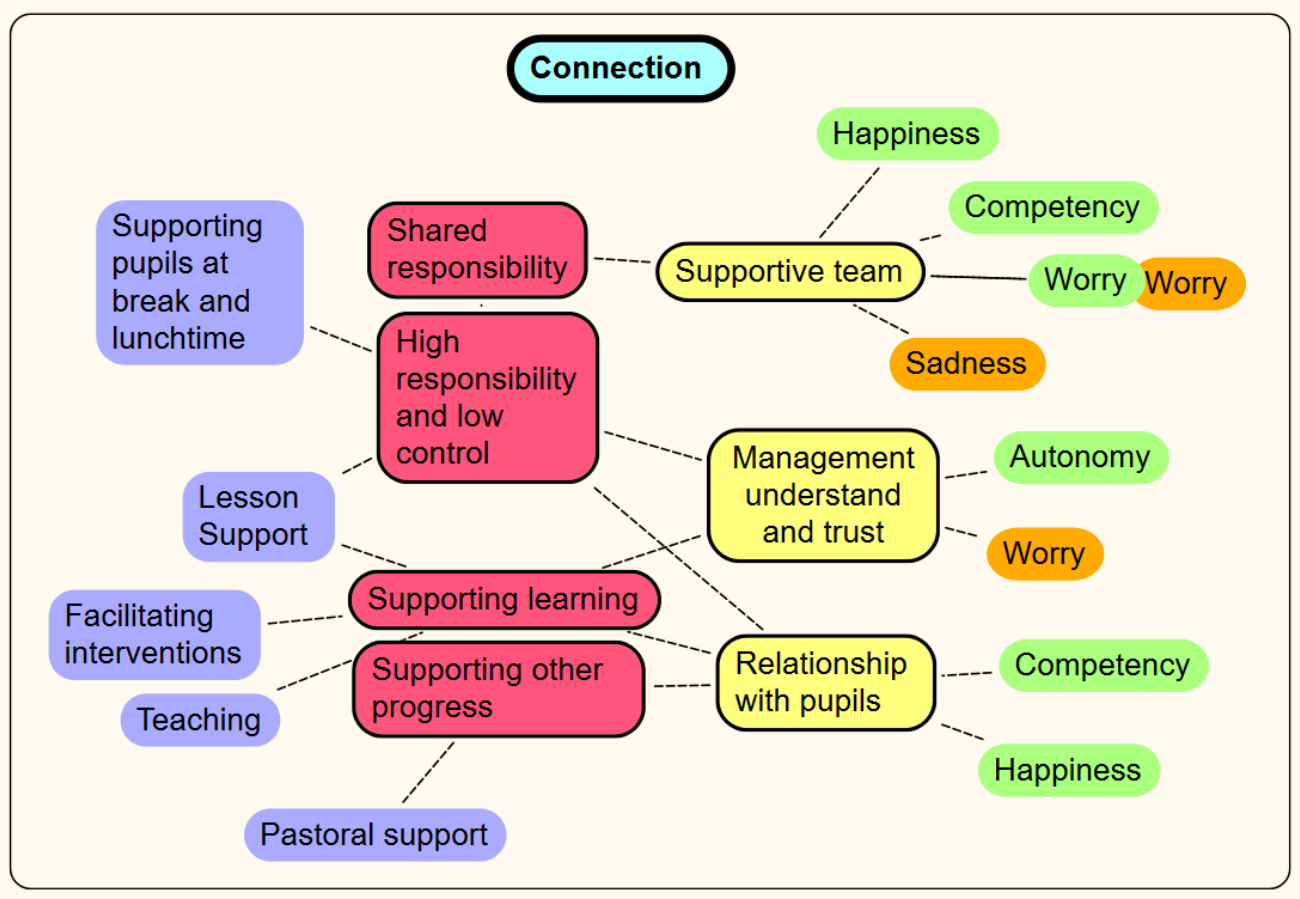

Figure 7: A diagram showing how the connecting factors (sub-themes) which emerged in the data connect TA activities (purple box) with dimensions of wellbeing (green box and orange boxes) as presented in section 3.3.2.3. Wellbeing dimensions highlighted in green are positively impacted by the connecting factor while those highlighted in orange are negatively impacted.

Connection was a major theme expressed by all four participants, generally reflecting the positive impact that connections with pupils and their colleagues have on their wellbeing. This theme examines how relationships with others contribute to wellbeing and support TAs in their work. Relationships with pupils foster a sense of purpose and drive, while supportive team members help TAs feel regulated and develop a sense of belonging in the workplace.

The theme "connection" consists of three sub-themes: "relationship with pupils,"

"supportive team who listens and values," and "dismissed and undervalued."

“Relationship with pupils”

All TAs shared the importance of building relationships with the pupils they support and the positive effect this has on their wellbeing. One TA expressed their love forgetting to know the pupils and hearing what they share: "you'd be surprised by what they share with you, and they share so much with you. It's really, really—I love it." (Susan). The longer TAs remain at the same school, the better they come to know their pupils by watching them grow up; “Luckily for me, being here so long, I've known most of these children since year one and reception anyway. So, I've been able to see them grow." (Rosie).

Working one-to-one or with small groups offers private time to develop deeper bonds and become more familiar with pupils' moods: "Because it's one-on-one, I think I've gotten closer to him as a teacher as well. I know if he's having a bad day, I already know, and he's telling me." (Aaron) These relationships are often reciprocal, with pupils demonstrating they value the connection, which improves TAs' mood: "knowing that he respects our relationship and he trusts and values our relationship, that makes me feel happy in that moment." (Lucy). For some TAs, the relationships developed with pupils during interventions become central to their working life: "They're just a part of my life. I can't imagine my day without them. I miss them." (Susan) This connection could promote a greater sense of purpose and meaning behind their work.

Furthermore, once a TA has developed a positive relationship with a pupil, they may recognise that incidents of challenging behaviour do not reflect every interaction nor define them, an understanding that aligns with reframing described in “Responsibility and control”; “I know there is respect there despite what he's done in the past. Which to me has been 'Why have you done this? That's totally disrespecting me at that moment.' But that's not him. That's his needs." (Lucy), which helps to

mitigate against the negative impact that managing challenging behaviour has to wellbeing.

"Supportive Team"

All four TAs emphasised the importance of having a "supportive" and "nurturing" team to maintain their wellbeing at work "We've got a good team. That's what I would say. And I think that makes a major difference" (Susan). For one TA, it is the primary reason they remain in the role; "I think if I didn't, I would have been gone a long time. Really would have been gone because I need that." (Lucy) while another TA shared "actually I'm going in because I want to support the staff. I want to be there for them. I want to be there for everyone." (Aaron) suggesting a desire to support the team was a key motivator for attending work. Another TA reflected "I've been blessed to be here." (Susan) which could imply that having a supportive team is not necessarily the norm and should not be taken for granted.

TAs shared that being part of a supportive team includes listening to and sharing experiences with one another, such as when TAs have managed challenging behaviours which can result in high levels of worry and fear as described in "Responsibility and control"; "Like if you want to cry about something, you can cry, but then you come back and you're like good. That's off my mind now I can focus on my job." (Lucy) and "I think having other staff members know my frustration and being able to air it" (Rosie). Sharing experiences with each other acts as a release for emotions helping the TA to feel regulated and carry on with their job. This includes for experiences occurring outside of school as highlighted by, "I think we've all had our own life experiences. We've all cried at some point from stuff that's been going on outside of school, but we've always been there to support each other." (Lucy). While circumstances outside of school are beyond the remit of this thesis, this quote suggests that ongoing effects on wellbeing could influence work-related activities as

well. However, sharing with a supportive team reduces the severity such factors can have.

More experienced colleagues can also provide reassurance to TAs newer to the role through listening and saying that they “did a good job”. One TA shared “you feel that confidence. Like okay, I am doing it right. Because somebody’s looked at your work and told you that this is fine” (Aaron), which can further improve competence following an activity such as supporting learning or managing a challenging situation. Being listened to can also increase feelings of being valued; “I felt very valued, very listened to by older colleagues" (Aaron), boosting a sense of belonging in the team as well as a sense that their work is meaningful.

While sharing negative experiences can lead to positive outcomes for the TA, through listening and reassurance, it can have a negative impact on the wellbeing of team members who are receiving these emotions. Absorbing the emotions of colleagues in a collective space can also diminish the collective mood of the TA team, “And then Tuesday, I think it just went down. Too many incidents were happening this week where there was just anger everywhere. So, feeling really drained.” (Aaron). Being aware of what experiences colleagues are having can also lead to anticipation of further negative experiences, resulting in anxiety around activities that require managing pupil behaviours; “And obviously I knew he wasn't in a good way because there'd been a message on our WhatsApp group - I felt, just really in a heightened state of anxiety, if I'm honest with you” (Lucy).

While all participants spoke extensively about the positive impact being a part of their team had on them, some reflected that doesn’t not always come with a sense of security to share all experiences, “a couple of years ago I would have been too scared

to say that. Do you know because you don't want people to think badly of you." (Lucy). This suggests that developing trust with colleagues can take time and that some TAs may be anxious of being their competency being judged especially for less experienced team members. However, this appears to reflect individual circumstances, as one less experienced TA shared "Being able to talk about it makes a massive impact. I thought, going in, if I was to hold it all in, I'd have a bad time." (Aaron) suggesting they already felt comfortable to express themselves openly in the team from the outset which may reflect the non-judgemental culture present with their team

"Management understand and trust"

Being listened to and supported by senior staff members and managers is also important. Managers were described as caring for their staff; "because in the end [Managers] are looking after us and they do it really well." (Aaron). Across both schools, the TAs indicated that managers and members of the senior leadership team are open and receptive to feedback from the staff, which was really helpful. This includes insights into the reality of the challenges they face: "The department knows what we go through on the front line of everything, and they really help out." (Aaron). Managers create a safe space for feedback: "I really do feel like it's a safe space, so anything that's on my mind or anything, I'm not holding it in. I see them. I sit down and I have the conversation" (Aaron). While managers are open to hearing about TAs' experiences and empathetic, this doesn't always lead to actual change due to constraints in the school's system relayed in "Flexibly inflexible system"; "Absolutely, they were receptive to what I was saying and understood. But I couldn't tell the outcome." (Rosie)

One TA shared "[management] can almost leave me to my own devices as well."

(Lucy), and that it “it’s easier for me in a way before I have been here a long time, so I know I'm valued for what I do, you know, not just based on the time I've been here, but people know me well enough” (Lucy). Furthermore, the TA reflected that if they were to leave for another position, they would not experience the same level of freedom in their work as they built new relationships and trust: “people know me well enough. I think if you leave a workplace and go somewhere else, it takes you a long time to get that again because you've got to build that up.” (Lucy) This experience suggests that being valued for their work and having more autonomy develops over time as the relationship with management is built.

Metainferences and summary

Connection reflects the relationship between TAs, pupils, colleagues, and arrangements. These connections are not just a dimension of wellbeing in their own right (relationship) but also interact with other wellbeing dimensions (affect, competency, and influencing factors). Connection as a theme manifest across all activities and influences, including indirect activities such as administrative work.

On average, TAs rated their support for pastoral care the highest, with only slightly lower scores in other activities, excluding teaching. This indicates that TAs generally feel well supported by their colleagues. Furthermore, a relatively consistent low average score for loneliness reinforces this, again with the exception of teaching. Most TA-deployed activities require a degree of interaction, which may account for the consistently low loneliness scores. The higher loneliness score in teaching is more likely to reflect a lack of support from colleagues when facing significant responsibility, rather than the TA actually being alone.

These scores were supported by a wide range of experiences shared by survey respondents and interview participants. TAs described the positive relationships they

have with the pupils they support as having a beneficial impact on their wellbeing. Positive relationships lead to a happy affect, where both the pupils and TAs are pleased to see each other. Relationships also add further meaning to their work; the TA supports the pupil not only to fulfil their job responsibilities but also because they want to “do the best” for a pupil, almost akin to that of a parent. Furthermore, relationships help mitigate negative wellbeing during challenging times by enhancing TAs’ ability to empathise with pupils who may be exhibiting demanding behaviour, reframing the experience in a way that supports wellbeing, such as recognising that the behaviours a pupil may display are not a personal reflection of their skills.

Management that provides understanding and listens to TAs' concerns is also described as supportive of TA wellbeing, as reflected by at least six respondents and interview participants. However, most TAs turn to their colleagues for support, both in terms of wellbeing and their practice. Support comes through sharing experiences with one another, helping to manage emotional regulation, providing reassurance that their practice is good, or being able to directly share the responsibility of managing challenging situations, such as those described in Responsibility and Control. However, while shared negative experiences can be positive for the TA who is sharing, fellow TAs may feel residual effects from empathising with the challenges their colleagues are facing, particularly if such occurrences are more commonplace in their setting.

4.2.6 Flexibly Inflexible System

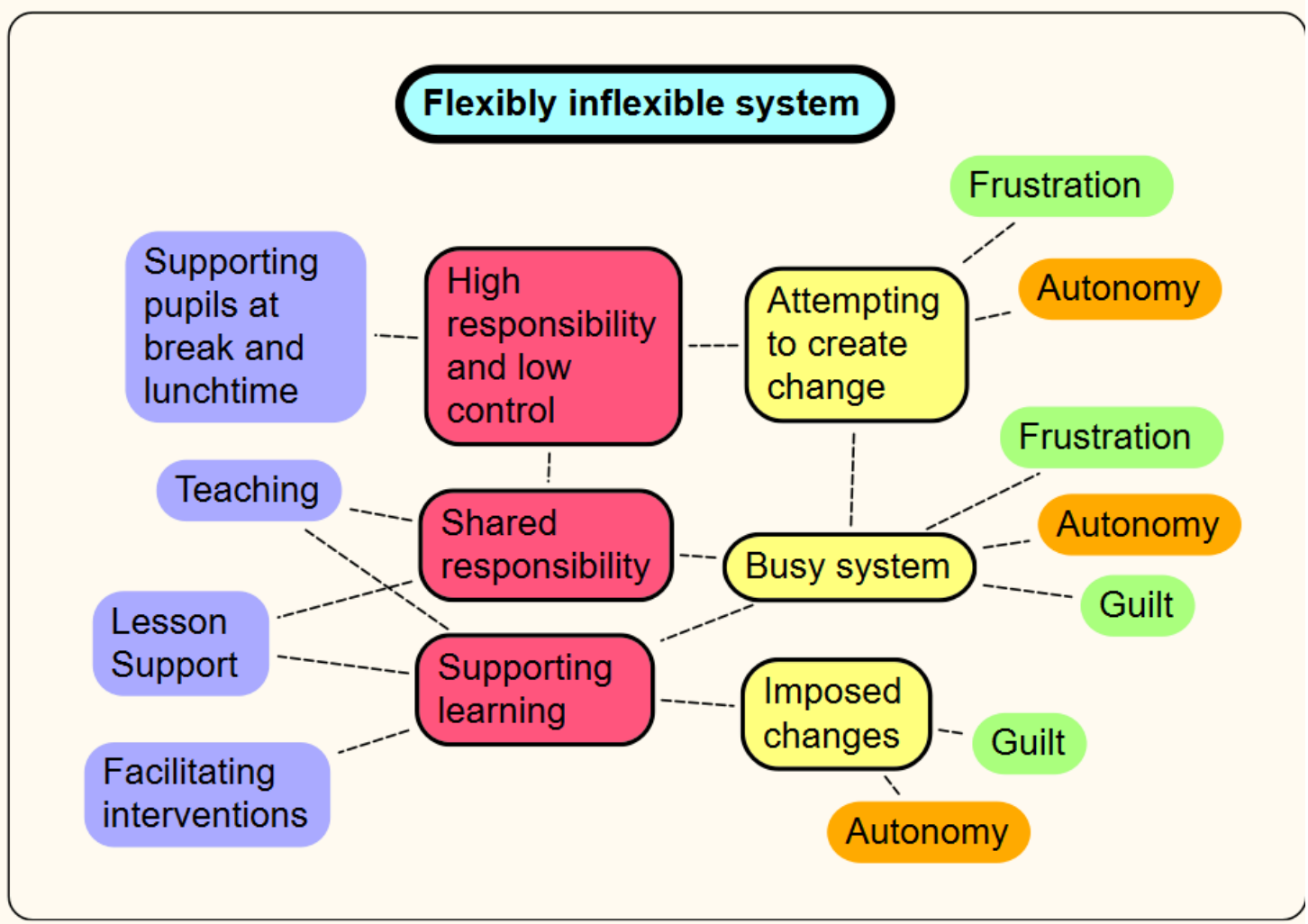

Figure 8: A diagram showing how the connecting factors (sub-themes) which emerged in the data connect TA activities (purple box) with dimensions of wellbeing (green box and orange boxes) as presented in section 3.3.2.3. Wellbeing dimensions highlighted in green are positively impacted by the connecting factor while those highlighted in orange are negatively impacted.

This theme encompasses the deployment of all activities and how both changes and a lack of changes in the system can further impact TA wellbeing. The name of the theme emerged from the seemingly paradoxical school logistic system where TAs' deployment can be altered swiftly to meet the needs of the school and the pupils but cannot always be readily adjusted to meet the needs of the TA.

“Busy system”

TAs operate in a perpetually busy system: “To find that little time you can get from somewhere. Because it’s so busy. It’s so busy that you need time.” (Susan). All activities are conducted in a non-stop manner with little time for breaks: “It's usually like what 9:10 till 3:20 non-stop, just different lessons, in class support with about a 30-minute break in the middle.” (Aaron). One TA shared about the constant need to rush to set up their lesson and tidy up afterwards; a logistical constraint they managed multiple times a week, causing the lesson to be rushed too: “I think again because you’re taking up so much time with that stress of doing everything beforehand, you’re then rushing to get it all in, you know?” (Rosie). The TA shared about wanting more time to get their work done to the best of their abilities and that they feel they could do better: “I feel like I can’t deliver my lesson how well I know I can, so. But you can only do your best” (Rosie). However, logistical constraints are an embedded and accepted part of this system: “It’s impossible. But it’s understood that it’s impossible. It’s a do what you can.” (Rosie). There is a sense of getting on with it and doing their best with what they can do which, while acknowledged as stressful and frustrating, reduces the urgency to demand change.

TAs do not work alone in the busy system; they function as part of a team. As described in “Connection”, TAs’ support each other, which is a core component of maintaining wellbeing throughout all activities. This also includes logistical assistance. Having extra support releases the time pressure of the individual TA: “especially just for the setup and stuff. Honestly, that would make a complete difference.” (Rosie). It also helps to provide cover for the TA when flexibility is required. However, direct support can vary depending on the system's constraints. Some TAs shared that their colleagues were available to assist whenever needed, stating, “I can approach them any time and they're ready to help me and support me” (Susan). Conversely, other

TAs mentioned that while support from colleagues is offered, it is not always feasible, as they too have their own responsibilities to manage, “But obviously they’ve got their own classes as well” (Rosie). Awareness of this reality can lead to a reluctance to impose further demands on them, even when a TA is unwell, necessitating coverage by someone else: “If I'm ever sick, obviously somebody has to cover” (Rosie). This can lead to a sense of guilt generated from perceived selfishness or “letting people down,” including towards pupils who miss out on learning opportunities as interventions are not delivered due to a lack of cover; “I feel like if I'm not there, they're missing out.” And I don’t want to miss out any days, because I feel like they would miss out more if I'm not in.” (Susan).

“Imposed changes”

TAs have to respond to the changing needs of the system. This may include a change in deployment to cover additional responsibilities, including maintaining safety measures such as adult ratios in classrooms; “Where I was more intervention based, I'm now being put into a class” (Rosie). While this change is understood, it also impacts wellbeing due to the sudden shifts in responsibilities because of its effect on her routine: “I got myself where I need to be, know what I'm doing. And then it just changes.” (Rosie) This creates greater uncertainty and diminishes autonomy throughout the TAs day as they have little control over the change. However, TAs’ may experience a sense of being an essential cog in the system, which can result in pressure to just accept the change despite its impact on their personal wellbeing.

“Attempting to create changes”

All TAs shared that when they have requested changes to their schedule of activities or level of responsibility to support their wellbeing, they feel listened to by managers who understand their needs; “They don’t want you to come into school dreading work.” (Aaron). Sometimes, feedback from a sufficient number of TAs can

lead to change, as reported by one TA: “they feed it back not only to the head teachers, but they also feed it back to other staff members as well, and they'll find a way to get around it,” (Aaron). However, this may not always occur, as managers also operate within the same constrained system as the TAs, and change is reported to be infrequent: “I think they understand the frustration. But it’s a bit of a “What can we do?” (Rosie). TAs seem to share an understanding that managers cannot fulfil all requests for changes, with phrases such as “obviously - never going to happen” (Rosie). Ultimately, this sense of the system being inflexible means the negative impact to wellbeing described in “Supporting pupil progress”, where TAs are unable to promote pupils learning due to other demands, and “Responsibility and Control”, where pupils are managing demanding situations persistently or with low support, can persist, leading to a sense that this is how things will remain, and that they have little autonomy to effect positive change.

Metainferences and summary

The theme of the “flexibly inflexible” system emerged organically across interviews and was echoed by some survey respondents. Senior leaders dictate TA deployment, preparation time, and the level of autonomy TAs possess, shaping both their deployment schedule and flexibility for these aspects to change. When pupils' learning felt deprioritised due to limited TA time, it led to reports of guilt and frustration, with TAs describing their work as a “tick-box” exercise. TAs also continually adapt to the shifting needs of the school, being redeployed to cover classes for which they feel unprepared, which often disrupts their core duties, provoking stress and further guilt over missed pupil learning opportunities. Time for emotional regulation, such as short breaks or colleague check-ins, becomes rarer in this busy environment, so a single morning incident can overshadow their entire day (or week).

Although management generally listens to TAs, the system’s deep inflexibility

means that only extreme incidents (e.g., verbal aggression from pupils) prompt change. For more moderate concerns, such as insufficient time, TAs broadly feel that "nothing was going to change." They recognise that leaders are equally constrained, which creates a sense of resignation. Yet, the system demonstrates its own flexibility when TAs are abruptly redeployed to meet urgent school needs, highlighting the paradox.

4.2.5 Which activities have the greatest impact?

Comparing the average scores across activities reveals which activities exert the most significant impact on the various dimensions of wellbeing. The interview findings further substantiate this survey data. It is important to note that these conclusions are drawn from activities of differing sample sizes, with a high likelihood of individual differences affecting the data presented. Consequently, survey data should be interpreted in conjunction with the interview findings.

Pastoral support and facilitating interventions appear to have the greatest positive impact on wellbeing, with pastoral support scoring the highest in positive affect (happy, enjoyed), while intervention work led to the highest eudaimonic scores (competency, satisfaction, and meaning). Pastoral support had slightly higher scores for accomplishment; however, there was little difference between the two, and both scored equivalent autonomy scores. This aligns with the interview findings, where delivering interventions and providing pastoral support were also associated with positive wellbeing and were chosen by the participants for discussion. Facilitating interventions often occurs one-to-one or in small groups with just the TA present. The TA has a direct role in the learning progress made, and the private space allows for relationships to develop. High competency and autonomy align with findings that TAs take ownership over the interventions and can adapt them to suit the needs of the

pupils as they get to know them. When a pupil succeeds, the TA succeeds as well, linking back to their efforts. Pastoral support reflects similar sentiments of aiding progress, but in this case, it addresses non-learning issues. As mentioned in Section 2.2.2, this contradicts the trend in the literature suggesting TAs feel deskilled in this area; instead, they may now be beginning to view it as a key part of their role in which they can make a difference and which brings them joy.

Pastoral support, however, was associated with one of the highest levels of concern. While still averaging below 4, thus leaning towards the not true end of the scale, this was significantly high compared to most other average scores, which fell below 2. Nonetheless, the increased concern scores in pastoral support were coupled with one of the highest support scores, indicating that colleagues and SLT recognise this worry, and that measures are implemented to address it. Indeed, TAs in the interviews conveyed that they felt well supported when managing challenging situations that demand a great deal of emotional resilience. This does not seem to be true for teaching. As discussed in Section 4.1.3, teaching received some of the lowest support scores despite also experiencing heightened worry scores. This is further evidenced by the lowest ratings for feeling prepared and reduced scores for enjoyment. The interview findings do not clarify this pattern, as only one participant, who shared teaching classes, reflected positively on the experience. Comments from respondents underscore the increased level of sole responsibility, without assistance, and the differing behaviours that pupils exhibit towards the TA compared to the class teacher, which may illuminate the underlying issues.

Admin work and marking pupil work surprisingly emerged with the highest average scores based on eight responses, despite involving no direct interaction with pupils. Interestingly, admin work also recorded some of the lowest average scores for

worry and sadness, suggesting that it is a low-demand and stress-free task. This aspect was hardly mentioned in the interview, except for one negative remark indicating a preference against it. The comments in the survey highlighted how they viewed the work as important, particularly emphasising that, for marking tasks, TAs linked it to supporting pupil learning progress by offering feedback—either positive to boost self-esteem or constructive to help them learn from their mistakes. These scores might also indicate a structured and low-pressure task, which could serve as a respite from the more demanding elements of the TA role encountered throughout much of a TA's day.

In conclusion, activities that blend promoting pupils' progress, managing behaviour, fostering pupil connections, encouraging a sense of responsibility, ensuring preparedness, and providing team support impact multiple dimensions of wellbeing. Promoting pupils' learning or wellbeing, particularly for those with whom the TA has a strong connection, along with high levels of team support, produces the greatest positive effect, occurring directly in intervention and pastoral work and indirectly in administrative tasks. However, high levels of sole responsibility with little opportunity for preparation and minimal support, such as when required to teach classes for which they are not necessarily qualified, are linked to the most significant negative effect on wellbeing.

4.3 Summary

The findings from the thematic analysis and the results from the survey, combined to form metainferences, revealed how wellbeing is influenced across multiple activities and the key connecting factors that link them. Wellbeing is often influenced by supporting pupil progress and managing pupil behaviours, both considered core TA responsibilities. Supporting pupil progress gives meaning to the

role and offers TAs a sense of competency, autonomy, and accomplishment. In contrast, managing pupil behaviours typically has a negative impact on wellbeing when required, mainly due to negative affect and, occasionally, a poor sense of competency. Time allocated for preparation also enhances competency in supporting learning. Furthermore, managing pupil behaviours detracts from learning opportunities, resulting in a confounding impact on wellbeing. Connections with colleagues, management, and the pupils themselves enhance wellbeing through supportive relationships and enjoyable interactions, adding greater meaning to the role beyond fulfilment of job responsibilities. However, TAs operate within a busy, flexible system where time constraints hinder their capacity to deliver interventions, and they can be redeployed to new activities with little warning or consultation, which may lead to pupils missing out on opportunities. The nature of the system prioritises TAs completing activities that benefit the majority of pupils and the school system itself, yet this leaves little room to prioritise the needs of TAs.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

TAs experience both positive and negative impacts on various dimensions of their wellbeing within their role, with each dimension manifesting across different tasks and responsibilities (activities). Chapter 5 contextualises the results and findings of this thesis within the current literature. How TAs experience wellbeing is explored in turn to answer the research questions: “What is the relationship between TA activities and wellbeing?” and “Which activities have the greatest impact on TAs’ wellbeing?”

5.1 Meaning

Meaning, which can also be defined as a sense of purpose, is a dimension of wellbeing outlined in Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model as feeling part of something larger than oneself or serving a higher purpose. TAs are often described as supporters to teachers who fill in where they are needed (Geeson & Clarke, 2023). However, TAs appear to derive meaning from their actions that clearly show pupils making progress from their support. Most of this progress comes from pupils learning, which is unsurprising given that supporting pupil learning is considered a core part of the TA role (Geeson & Clarke, 2023; Vardy et al., 2025). The activities TAs undertake are dictated by teachers and senior staff, with direct learning activities, such as facilitating interventions and providing lesson support, comprising the largest proportion in this thesis. Meaning may stem from learning support being a stipulated activity required to fulfil their contractual responsibilities, also known as External Regulation, according to SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Instead, TAs expressed frustration and guilt for the pupils missed learning opportunities when they have been redeployed elsewhere, despite it not being an autonomous decision. Similarly, survey comments negatively attributing an intervention to “often felt like a “tick-box” exercise” further reinforce the theory that

TAs wish to make a real impact through their work. TAs are experiencing integrated regulation, placing personal value on the act of supporting (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Furthermore, Ryan and Deci (2000) suggest that for personal value to manifest, TAs need to synthesise the purpose of the activity and relate it to their own values. While other factors may impact different dimensions of wellbeing, the sense of purpose derived from supporting pupils to progress in their learning has remained stable.

Since 2003, the TA role has evolved from supporting teaching staff with administrative and logistical tasks to, for many pupils with SEND, being the primary adult who delivers or supports their learning (DfE, 2003; Webster et al. 2011). More recently, Hall and Webster (2023) suggest that the TA role is shifting towards greater pastoral care, particularly since the Covid- 19 pandemic, which profoundly impacted the mental health of many pupils (NHS Digital, 2023). TAs expressed mixed feelings about whether this change is welcome, especially as it detracts from what they see as their primary purpose - to support learning (Hall & Webster, 2023). However, when pastoral support is linked to significant positive progress in pupils' emotional states, mental health, and well- being, as outlined in the sub- theme “Supporting other progress” and the scores for meaning in “Pastoral support, " TAs reflected similar feelings of fulfilment to those experienced when supporting learning. This suggests that if and when the TA role shifts again, a sense of meaning can be preserved as long as pupil progress continues in some capacity as a direct consequence of their role. Nevertheless, this sense of meaning stems from TAs' self- determined perceptions of their role, which are often not clearly defined (Clarke & Visser, 2019; Geeson & Clarke, 2023). In fact, this is significant, as tensions arise from the disconnect between TAs' perceptions of their responsibilities (to directly support pupil learning) and those of certain staff members (to aid the teacher with logistical tasks,

as reflected in the role 20 years ago) (Hall & Webster, 2023; Lewis, 2023). This disconnect was reported in this thesis, leading TAs to feel undervalued or to perceive their purpose as less meaningful than staff members further up the hierarchy do. This situation resulted in frustration and reduced relatedness or sense of belonging (Ryan & Deci, 2000), highlighting the importance of ensuring a shared perception of role purpose.

5.2 Competency, Positive Affect & Accomplishment

Accomplishment, a component of the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011), refers to the sense of success when goals are achieved. Additionally, Competency, a component of the SDT model (Ryan and Deci, 2000), refers to the TAs' perceived level of ability or skill to complete a task. While these dimensions belong to separate models, both are highly related conceptually, as competency is necessary to achieve accomplishment in a skill, and alternatively, accomplishing a task can influence one's sense of skill. "Preparedness" in the WPR model supports competency and accomplishment by providing the training and planning required to utilise skills to the best of their abilities, which promotes success and achievement. Affect, or the emotions experienced across different situations, is also a component of wellbeing. Positive affect refers to emotions such as happiness and enjoyment, while negative affect includes worry and sadness. Both positive and negative affect can be experienced simultaneously and are considered their own constructs (Diener et al., 1999). PERMA also includes positive emotions within its model, describing them as crucial for wellbeing (Seligman, 2011), whereas negative affect should be low or occur less frequently for wellbeing (Huppert et al., 2009). Affect is often experienced alongside other eudaimonic dimensions of wellbeing. Positive affect is frequently reported alongside feelings of competency and accomplishment and thus is described

together.

Practice

A sense of competency is most naturally associated with the TA practice. The perceived direct impact of their actions on pupil outcomes alters their sense of competency, depending on whether such outcomes are positive or negative. Pupil success enhances a sense of accomplishment too, as the TA shares in the pupils' achievements, having helped them get there. Participating TAs report that signs of success need not be limited to objective attainment scores but can also manifest through behavioural indicators, such as a pupil using what they have been taught in different contexts. TAs reported a boost to their sense of competency and accomplishment even from small steps of progress, suggesting that the relationship between TA wellbeing and pupil outcomes may not be proportional. Some TAs' practices may not be the most optimal for pupil progress (Blatchford et al., 2006), but for pupils, particularly those with SEND, whose progress may vary from day to day (DfE, 2024b), any progress is important to TAs. It is important to note that this may only apply in certain environments and does not imply that TAs are not benefiting pupils at all. Rather, competency is linked to visible, perceived signs of success from the pupils and forward progress at a rate respective to those pupils' needs.

However, this also suggests that the reverse may occur, where pupils are making progress, but it is not immediate. In this thesis, TAs expressed competency when sharing their experiences of pastoral support, which differs from the literature where TAs are requesting further training as they feel deskilled (Hall & Webster, 2024; Neaum & Noble, 2023). While the survey reflects the act of helping pupils as the positive factor, an interviewed TA felt confident in supporting a pupil to manage their anxiety due to their own prior training in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

techniques (Beck & Beck, 2011), suggesting that feeling “prepared” does support competency. However, the TA also shared that her confidence had led to a positive difference for the pupil by the end of the session, and that her input had resulted in proactive change. While training and previous experience likely contribute to the sense of feeling deskilled, at times, it may stem from perceiving no immediate progress change.

TAs appear not to feel a reduced sense of competency when no progress is attributed to external barriers such as pupil behaviour or time constraints, which hinder both the pupils' ability to access learning, for example, becoming distracted, and the TAs' ability to support learning to the best of their capabilities if, for example they are required to manage behaviours instead. Since competency reflects an intrinsic phenomenon (Ryan and Deci, 2000) related to their own skills, TAs leave such scenarios feeling they can still support learning under more optimal conditions. Furthermore, when pupil progress is not evident and cannot be attributed to external factors, some TAs may reframe this as an opportunity for learning and adapting their process, resulting in it not having a long-term impact on their sense of competency. Reframing, a CBT technique also known as cognitive restructuring, refers to actively challenging negative thoughts and replacing them with more realistic interpretations (Beck & Beck, 2011). TAs shared that they reevaluated situations where they felt deskilled and out of control, with positive self-belief that they did the best they could in the circumstances and that they cannot control all factors. Self-belief is connected to increased autonomy (Frazee, 2023), which is highly interlinked with a sense of competency, as SDT postulates that the two, while separate constructs, require each other to exist (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Ultimately, a TA's sense of competency appears to be connected to their perceived sense of pupil progress rather than actual progress

(both may be the same), and how much progress is needed to enhance competency may reflect individual factors.

The only activity in which TAs expressed a lower sense of competency was in managing behaviours, particularly challenging behaviours such as a pupil being verbally aggressive and highly disruptive. Such actions negatively impact a higher number of people, i.e., the whole class compared to just one pupil and may involve higher levels of risk in some cases, depending on the nature of the behaviour (Rae et al., 2017). For generally disruptive classroom behaviours, TAs reflected low competency only when solely responsible for managing a class. TAs noted that pupils are less responsive to behaviour management techniques employed by teachers, which may reflect pupils' recognition of the hierarchy within the school system and indicate that TAs covering classes is not the norm (Williams & O'Connor, 2012). For extreme challenging behaviours, TAs assume the responsibility of reducing this risk, which places high demands on them, requiring them to remain regulated and in control while drawing on soft relational skills and emotional regulation strategies (Rae et al., 2017). Unlike learning, this responsibility is considered high stakes because the potential consequences of failure are more severe, leading to increased pressure to perform well, often resulting in anxiety, as expressed in this thesis (see Section 5.3; Paris et al., 2021; Rae et al., 2017). Such scenarios are highly emotionally charged and can be unpredictable, requiring TAs to react and alter their approach frequently, which leads to TAs second-guessing their decisions and impacting their sense of competency. TAs report feeling reassured when colleagues affirm, they did well, which may mitigate the self-pressure experienced by providing an alternative perspective (see Section 5.4). However, TAs are more likely to feel deskilled or question their abilities as the level of responsibility increases.

Successful behaviour management appears to not provide TAs with a sense of accomplishment; it merely maintains the status quo. One TA even remarked that when the pupils' behaviour was managed and calm, their wellbeing was not affected at all. The only positive aspect of wellbeing associated with the success of managing behaviours was the relief that the negative experience had concluded, rather than a sense of achievement at the class being quiet. Instead, managing class behaviours diminishes opportunities for accomplishment through shared learning; therefore, motivation for success in this responsibility is to ensure that learning continues.

Preparedness

Competency was enhanced through preparedness for the activities that TAs undertake, primarily via formal training and informally through support from experienced staff. The literature indicates that TAs sought additional formal training when unsure of their skills (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Neaum & Noble, 2023; Vardy et al., 2025). In this thesis, formal training was not extensively reported but was acknowledged, with some TAs stating that training was accessible and beneficial when needed, while others described it as often irrelevant, suggesting that TAs' experiences with training are not universal. The level of training TAs receive likely varies across settings, as the needs of pupils, funding, and staffing levels can all affect how much training a TA receives (National Education Union, 2023). Importantly, for TAs to feel more prepared and to enhance their competency, as per SDT, the training must be perceived as directly relevant (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Colleagues serve as a primary source of knowledge and experience, often enabling TAs to learn from them (CFE, 2024; Neaum & Noble, 2023; Vardy et al., 2025), which is also reflected in this thesis, despite recommendations that formal training is required to maximise academic outcomes for pupils (Webster et al., 2011). With one exception, TAs did not

differentiate between formal or informal training, but their reflections support calls for a review of TA training opportunities (CFE, 2024; Neaum & Noble, 2023; Vardy et al., 2025).

In summary, TAs derive a sense of competency and accomplishment from small steps of progress indicated by clear, tangible signs. When it comes to supporting learning, they may feel secure enough in their skills that, when progress does not occur, they are more likely to attribute it to external factors that have hindered their ability or the pupils' ability to advance. However, as the level of responsibility and demand of the task increases, TAs are more likely to internalise their sense of competency or at least become more sensitive to questions about how well they are performing, requiring additional support and reassurance that they are on the right track, especially if their sense of success is lacking.

5.3 Autonomy & Negative Affect

Autonomy is a component of the SDT model (Ryan and Deci, 2000) that refers to the sense of control and freedom that TAs experience in their role. Negative affect, as described in section 5.2, is often reported alongside feelings of autonomy and is therefore discussed below.

Deployment

Although their responsibilities can vary by setting, one constant is that TAs generally follow the direction of classroom teachers or management. Early in the role, TAs are reported to have less autonomy over the tasks they perform on a day-to-day basis. However, over time, as they build trust and foster stronger relationships with managers, they typically earn greater flexibility. Redeployment is a standard practice

in schools to accommodate the changing needs of pupils and cover for staff changes (Lewis, 2023; Webster, 2024). Nevertheless, TAs often have little control over where and when they may be redeployed or are consulted, which further hinders their sense of autonomy.

Across all activities, TAs shared that the main negative affects they experienced were guilt, frustration, and anxiety. Although sadness was measured, no clear patterns or interacting factors were reported. Surprisingly, working in a consistently noisy and disruptive environment was not described as “annoying” or “frustrating” (Axup & Gersch, 2008). Instead, frustration was reported to manifest when the autonomy to complete activities is limited by restrictions in the system that require TAs to take on multiple responsibilities, while guilt emerged from feeling unable to provide pupils with the best experience because they have been required to work elsewhere. Recently, TAs in Vardy et al. (2025) reported similar experiences when discussing facilitating interventions. They appreciated the autonomy received and felt meaning in their work but were not given the time, resources, and space to fulfil this responsibility to the best of their abilities. Similarly, Webster (2024) highlighted how sudden redeployment to cover classes for which they are ill-prepared can significantly disrupt their normal duties, leading to stress, anxiety, and guilt. The frequency of such experiences suggests that TAs may often remain in this affective state.

Participants shared that extreme circumstances lead to proactive change, such as the need to protect staff. However, in milder to moderate negative experiences, such as limited time to complete work, change is less forthcoming. TAs suggested that SLTs are “trapped” within the same inflexible system as them and appeared resigned to the fact that nothing will change, a message which was shared widely, stressing how embedded the difficulties of creating change are in the system, a message

previously proclaimed (Barker, 2008; Granoulhac, 2024). However, the system appears surprisingly flexible when TAs are required to be redeployed elsewhere to meet the needs of the pupils and other teachers. While TAs approach this experience with understanding, there may be only so much that a TA can manage when their needs are not prioritised.

Preparedness/Practice

Autonomy and a sense of competency are often linked, as the level of autonomy a TA desires varies with the nature of the activity and their confidence in completing it. For some TAs who are confident in their skills, they seek more autonomy in their practice, as highlighted by comments such as “I don’t like being micromanaged”. With experience comes trust from managing members of staff, enabling them to work more autonomously and take on the responsibility for decision-making (CfE, 2024). When autonomous decisions are undermined or dismissed by other staff members higher up in the school hierarchy, it can lead to conflict, especially when such comments also appear to question their level of competence. However, in this thesis, TAs appear to find this experience to be annoying and frustrating rather than feeling inferior or that they cannot question the teacher as expressed in other studies, suggesting that such acts do not diminish their competency (Jardi et al., 2022; Watson et al., 2013).

TAs perceive themselves as skilled workers and are seeking the ability to engage in more decision-making, drawing on their expertise. However, autonomous decisions do not always have to be made individually; they can also be made collaboratively with another member of staff. Webster et al. 2011 and Clarke and Visser 2015 recommended that TAs’ pedagogical work, including intervention work, should be supervised by a qualified member of the teaching staff to ensure their practice remains suitable for pupils' learning progress. Contrary to Clarke and Visser (2019), one

participant shared that they had a significant degree of autonomy in adapting and delivering the intervention alongside the teacher, drawing on each other's respective skills rather than following the teacher's lead. Support does not have to be dictatorial in nature, and where there is capacity for the TA to share in the decision-making, it can also serve to provide the autonomy that TAs appreciate. Shifting the nature of this supervision to a collaborative process enables the TA to feel part of their process and that their views matter and are important. This may further increase their sense of ownership over the intervention- an activity that connects to a greater sense of purpose beyond merely doing as they are told. TAs in Vardy et al. (2025) also reported that they appreciated the sense of autonomy that delivering interventions brings.

High autonomy, however, does not always lead to positive outcomes in all activities. In situations with high responsibility where the TA must maintain control, it can lead to negative effects of uncertainty, insecurity, and anxiety when experiencing a high level of autonomy (Anderson et al., 2019; Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Clarke & Visser, 2019). For example, when TAs teach independently, managing the behaviour of a relatively large group of children on their own, their worries and self-reported anxiety increase, coinciding with the heightened level of sole responsibility (Webster et al., 2024). Such experiences are also reported when TAs manage challenging behaviours, another high-stakes responsibility where safety may be put at risk. When the TA assumes this responsibility, it means that any negative outcomes, such as harm caused to the pupil or themselves, are placed on the TA as the adult in the situation; either directly by management or just as likely by the TA themselves. As described previously in Section 5.2, the stakes of failure are higher, i.e. pupils are harmed; therefore, TAs perceive more pressure to do the right thing. Competency is impacted through questioning of their skills; however, if this is coupled with a high level

of autonomy to make the “right” decision, it can further exacerbate feelings of uncertainty, pressure, and anxiety (Paris et al., 2021). When autonomy is shared with another person, this also reduces anxiety as the sole responsibility of managing potentially negative consequences is not solely placed on their competency.

What helps?

TAs shared the benefits of having opportunities throughout their day to share experiences with their colleagues as described further in section 5.4. These opportunities appear to serve as a form of emotional preparedness, allowing time to regulate between activities so that an individual's experiences do not adversely affect overall wellbeing throughout the day. Other caring professions, such as nursing, offer opportunities for breaks, reflective spaces, and supervision, which have been linked to reduced anxiety and stress, as well as increased confidence (Cutcliffe et al., 2018; Mann et al., 2009). Teachers have valued chances to reflect, offload, and feel emotionally contained when provided supervision by EPs (Rae et al., 2017). However, such experiences remain uncommon within the education system, particularly for TAs.

As Clarke and Visser (2019) noted, clearly defined roles and procedures reduce feelings of uncertainty and other negative effects while enhancing a sense of agency by providing the security of boundaries within which TAs can navigate independently. Such sentiments were reflected by one TA, who shared that they felt more secure following safe handling training, which taught the legalities around being hands-on with pupils to maintain safety.

In summary, the level of autonomy that a TA may experience is influenced by both individual and systemic factors. Individually, as levels of competency increase, often with experience, TAs express a desire for greater autonomy or at least more collaboration with adults. However, when competency is low, TAs may seek safety in

sharing decision-making with another person, or even minimal autonomy, seeking the predictability of policy. Overall, though, TAs' levels of autonomy are often confined within the needs of the system, which may not permit as much autonomy as they desire.

5.4 Relationships - Relatedness

As a dimension of wellbeing, Positive Relationship, as defined in the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011), and Relatedness in SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2000), refers to the positive and supportive connections with others that provide a sense of belonging. TAs experience positive relationships with pupils and colleagues in all activities, making this a core part of the TA experience, even if it is not regarded as a responsibility or activity in its own right.

Most TA activities involve interaction with pupils, providing ample opportunities to develop positive relationships with them. Considering that learning is a social process and occurs within interactions between staff and pupils, it is not surprising that this theme presented strongly (Black & Halstead, 2021; Conboy, 2021). TAs cultivate relationships over time, especially in interventions where they work one-to-one or with small groups, enhancing the opportunity to forge stronger connections. Some pupils prefer one-to-one TA support over that of a class teacher due to this relational bond (Pinkard, 2021; Frelin & Grannäs, 2015). Without the responsibility for classroom learning, TAs can concentrate on these pupil connections. Findings show that when TAs miss these pupils, they report feelings of guilt and frustration, underscoring the depth of the bond. For many TAs engaged in non-learning activities, where supporting learning progress was not a factor, improvements to their wellbeing were attributed solely to the positive interactions they had with the pupils.

Unsurprisingly, the strength of relationships with colleagues was also a

prominent theme of this thesis, portrayed as a positive experience overall, supporting the well-described phenomena (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Hall, 2023; Jardí et al., 2022). When poor experiences of relationships were reported, it was often due to a lack of availability of colleagues stemming from system demands or tensions between perceptions of the role with select members of staff. The importance of collegiate relationships is underscored by comments which suggested that the main reason they remained in the role was the motivation to support and the assistance they receive from their colleagues.

The importance of relationships also stems from the impact it has on boosting positive wellbeing and mitigating against negative wellbeing in other dimensions. Colleagues can enhance competency through reassurance and informal training (Jardí et al., 2022; Geeson & Clarke, 2023). They can provide emotional regulation both during and after challenging experiences, thereby reducing anxiety (Rae et al., 2017). Ultimately, TAs' connection with the pupils adds to the meaning derived from supporting them. In this sense, relationships serve as one of the main influencing factors on dimensions of wellbeing operating within TA activities. These results emphasise the importance of team belonging and a supportive culture in maintaining all aspects of TA wellbeing.

Systemic changes in the current education system place greater pressures on the job; from a reported rise in challenging behaviours, more time taken away from supporting learning to manage behaviours, to covering lessons for teacher absences, where the learning potential is limited by altered pupil behaviours (Hall & Webster, 2024; Webster et al., 2024; Williams & O'Connor, 2012). This jeopardises strong collegiate and pupil relationships, which serve as the main source of positive wellbeing for TAs, as opportunities for competency, autonomy, meaning and accomplishment

are diminished. However, while this may alleviate some demands and potentially encourage job retention (CFE, 2024; Hall & Webster, 2024), without addressing these systemic pressures, even the strongest team bonds may merely act as a scaffold supporting wellbeing rather than driving genuine change.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Implications

This final chapter offers a synthesis of the main findings from Chapter 5, situating them within the current educational context of the UK. Reflections on the strengths, limitations, and representativeness of the results are also included. The chapter closes by discussing implications for theory, schools, and EPs, and proposes directions for future research.

6.1 Summary of findings in context

Most literature on TAs focuses on how best to maximise the effectiveness of their practice, however less direct emphasis has been placed on their wellbeing during these activities. This results of this research suggest potential differences across activities in multiple dimensions of wellbeing, adding needed context and nuance to the claims presented in global surveys (Education Support, 2023; Ravalier er al., 2021). The emphasis on staff support and the quality of relationships that TAs form with pupils corroborates previous research showing that TAs are ideally positioned to build strong, effective connections with the students they support one-to-one or in small groups (Black & Halstead, 2021; Conboy, 2021; Hall, 2023). However, other dimensions of wellbeing, including competence, autonomy and meaning, have been comparatively under-explored.

TAs' wellbeing may be primarily enhanced by supporting pupils' learning, which provides them with a sense of meaning, accomplishment, skill, and ownership, contingent upon sufficient training to feel competent and recognise progress (Cockroft & Atikinson, 2015). Facilitating interventions fosters these dimensions while also maximising their potential to build strong relationships with pupils through one-on-one

or small group interactions. Furthermore, the DISS project findings advise that with standardised effective training, sufficient preparation time, and regular dialogue with qualified teachers, TAs can effectively promote pupil outcomes by delivering interventions (Webster et al., 2013), suggesting that prioritising the delivery of interventions in TAs' daily workload can bring dual benefit to TA wellbeing and promoting pupils' outcomes. However, reports of a national shortage of teachers (UNISON, 2024) suggests an increasing demands for TAs to fulfil more duties which may divert them away from intervention work.

TAs may find themselves providing pastoral care, either through formal keyworker roles or informally through their close relationships with pupils and their families, even more so since the COVID-19 pandemic (Hall & Webster, 2023). The few TAs who shared their experiences in pastoral care reported positive effects on their wellbeing through problem-solving and upskilling pupils with techniques to support their own wellbeing and mental health. Receiving proper training and gaining experience may foster feelings of competency and accomplishment that can match similar experiences in supporting pupils' learning. However, the inconsistency of support, along with previous studies indicating that TAs may feel deskilled (Conboy,2021; Hall & Webster, 2023), suggests that the increasing responsibilities remain demanding. Nevertheless, if signs of progress are evident, or if TAs are reassured that their work positively impacts others alongside training, such reframing of the TA role may enable pastoral support to boost wellbeing in a manner similar to supporting learning.

Managing behaviours, although an important responsibility for maintaining effective learning environments and ensuring pupil safety, does not appear to provide the same boost to wellbeing as learning support. On average, TAs reported feeling

less competent, thus seeking less autonomy corroborating previous accounts (Clarke & Visser, 2019). Furthermore, TAs in this study reported being diverted from directly supporting learning to managing pupil behaviours or may be placed in disruptive environments that inhibit opportunities for pupil learning, restricting experiences which provide meaning as well as causing frustration. Such occurrences may become more frequent in line with reports of rising disruptive behaviour in the classroom (DfE, 2024c).

The TA role today is varied yet still undefined (Butt,2016). TAs in this research appear to define their role as primarily supporting pupils to make progress notably in their learning, reflecting the priorities of the education system, but also, with training and competence, pastoral needs too. However, the reality is that TAs are often deployed where the school system requires them most, potentially detracting them from this preferred role where they feel they can make the most difference. With the tightening of school budgets reducing opportunities for schools to hire new TAs, coupled with the cost-of-living crisis, fewer individuals may pursue these roles, thereby stretching the workloads of TAs currently in post further away from this ideal (UNISON, 2024) which may further negatively impact their wellbeing. Positive connections with pupils and colleagues appear to mitigate negative influences on TA wellbeing, making their jobs easier and more enjoyable, which has already been widely acknowledged in models of teacher wellbeing (Dreer, 2023) and emerging TA studies too (Black & Halstead, 2021; Conboy, 2021). However, this study also highlights the importance of other dimensions of wellbeing, including a sense of meaning, competence and autonomy, in TAs' work, which also needs to be recognised.

While the systemic factors that influence deployment decisions are complex and beyond the scope of this thesis, the findings echo calls from the DISS project (Blatchford et al 2012) and Clarke and Visser (2019) to clearly define the TA role. By safeguarding the activities that most enhance TAs' sense of competency and accomplishment, provide opportunities for autonomy and are considered meaningful, and that research shows most effectively support pupil outcomes (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021) schools could promote a healthier, more stable workforce and improve educational success for all.

6.2 Strengths and limitations of the findings

The strengths and limitations of the methods are detailed in the relevant sections throughout Chapter 2. According to Yardley (2000), high-quality research is characterised by reflexivity, coherence, transparency, transferability, and credibility. The following section outlines the strengths and limitations of the conclusions drawn.

6.2.1 Strengths of the findings

This study demonstrates reflexivity throughout all stages, from topic selection and literature review to the application of reflexive thematic analysis, as outlined in Braun and Clarke (2019). During the analysis, the researcher used reflexivity to ensure their prior beliefs did not dominate the study, such as cross-checking findings to ensure the interpretation was also informed by existing literature and direct participant quotes. Where appropriate, the researcher acknowledged how their own professional experiences may have influenced the interpretation and generation of themes, maintaining transparency.

Moreover, one of the unique strengths of this research is the perspective that the researcher brings as a TEP. EPs possess academic knowledge of psychological

research and theories and work closely with school systems and inside classrooms. During the interviews, as a TEP, the researcher was able to relate to the participants' experiences, and the researcher's professional experience enriched the vaguer survey comments. For example, the researcher has a constructive understanding of what disruptive behaviour in the classroom looks like, meaning less elaboration was necessary. However, this does increase the risk of the researcher imparting their own experiences onto the data when evidence is lacking, requiring the researcher to engage in considerable self-reflection.

Coherence was maintained by designing the study in alignment with the research questions and objectives, which centred on investigating TA wellbeing and its relation to specific professional activities with both factors considered throughout. Although the interview themes often related to TAs' broader responsibilities, these were consistently linked to distinct timetable tasks, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of TA roles. Additionally, a model of wellbeing was defined at the beginning and used to structure both the survey and interview schedule, ensuring consistency throughout the research process. The mixed methods research design kept the study focused on TA tasks and responsibilities, as well as their wellbeing, while also providing added depth to explore how other extraneous factors influence this relationship, either by altering the activity or wellbeing. Previous studies may have examined these factors individually but exploring them together reveals the more complex web of how they link. The findings from this thesis are not new and have been discussed previously, yet they have never been targeted directly by design. By addressing this question directly to elicit similar responses from TAs, further evidence is added that these connections are present.

While these findings may not possess the academic rigour of a statistical model,

qualitatively they align with the emerging theoretical framework being developed throughout the literature, providing much-needed evidence to this picture. It would be shortsighted to suggest that personal factors outside of the TA work experience are not having an impact, but by maintaining the focus of the study also on wellbeing factors solely within the workplace, the results are streamlined towards elements that can be more readily promoted or altered, in accordance with EPs' motivation to foster positive change in the schools where they work.

6.2.2 Representation of the findings

Recent UK government-commissioned research provides up-to-date evidence of the TA role and patterns of deployment, which can be used to check how representative the thesis sample is (CFE, 2024). Of the 2715 TAs surveyed, 90 to 93% reported that they provided general teaching and learning support, either with the whole class or targeted one-to-one support within the classroom, either most of the time or some of the time (CFE, 2024). This reflects the 87% of 15 respondents in this thesis' survey who supported in lessons at least once on their recorded day, with most reporting having supported in more than one lesson on that day. Additionally, 87% of the 2715 government survey respondents indicated that they delivered interventions at least some of the time, with 50% stating they completed interventions most of the time, suggesting higher numbers compared to this thesis's sample (CFE, 2024). However, in this sample, leading an intervention was the second most common activity after lesson support. Similarly, 40% of this thesis' respondents reported that they taught small groups or the whole class, which is comparable to the government figures for acting as a cover supervisor, although it is uncertain if these government figures reflect only whole-class cover. Furthermore, only primary school TAs indicated that they had taught classes or groups. However, the sample size of secondary school TAs

was smaller compared to that of primary school TAs, as evidenced in Section 4.4.1. Nonetheless, the government data suggested that primary school TAs are more likely to cover lessons than secondary school TAs. Despite the small size of the final data samples, there is a broad range of experiences that reflect the multifaceted nature of the TA role today. This is not a like-for-like match, as this survey reflects one day, while CFE (2024) reflects deployment generally. However, it is close enough to suggest that the range of activity scores captured in this survey is not dissimilar to typical deployment for a TA today.

6.2.3 Limitations of the findings

The study's credibility is supported by the alignment between TAs' experiences, feelings, and reflections, the researcher's professional observations, and themes found in the broader literature. While the thematic interpretations were informed by the researcher's perspective, they were grounded in experiences that appeared to be widely shared among interviewees rather than unique to individuals or settings. Nevertheless, the research's credibility could have been further enhanced by employing member reflexivity, allowing participants to review themes and engage in reflexive dialogue about how well these reflected their own experiences (see Braun & Clarke, 2023). However, due to the limited sample size and scope, the transferability of these findings is reduced. Results may not be directly applicable across all school settings, as contextual differences and external community factors may shape experiences of wellbeing in ways not captured by this study. Consequently, while the findings are credible and coherent, their applicability may be limited in some contexts. Such conclusions could not be drawn from comparing the relationships between wellbeing and TA activities across different demographics. Although this data was collected, the sample size prevented any analysis of differences. To encompass

multiple activities would have required all TAs to complete wellbeing scores for each activity, which would have either increased the survey's size or reduced the number of activities that could be compared. To address this issue, a significantly larger sample size would have been necessary, potentially on the scale of a national survey, which was beyond the researchers' capacity to achieve.

While the sample broadly reflects the TA demographic, it primarily focuses on female TAs working in London and the southeast of England in primary schools. The findings from this research concentrate almost exclusively on the experiences of individuals who fit this demographic. Male TAs do not constitute the majority of the TA workforce (DfE, 2024), and consequently, their voices are often underrepresented, with only two male TAs included across both the survey and the interviews in this thesis. Similarly, the education systems across the UK vary, and the devolved nations of Scotland and Wales, which have different education systems, are not represented at all. Pupil behaviour and needs are often influenced by their home and community experiences (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000), meaning that the level of need may also vary depending on these broad factors. While exploring the link between these broad factors and behaviour was not the focus of this study, if wellbeing is connected to behaviours as these findings suggest, it would have provided key evidence for the model. The interview data were further limited by sampling from only two schools. Although the themes generated aligned with evidence from other research studies in different schools, there is a possibility that the weight of these experiences is variable, and that, for example, the strength of the connection between striving to improve learning outcomes for pupils and wellbeing may not be as strong in other settings as it was in this sample.

Finally, the survey was conducted over a period of two months during the spring

term of 2025, and wellbeing may reflect this time frame. Academic years are known to have pressure points of increased demand for staff, such as examinations in the summer term, or school plays in the winter term (IFF Research & IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, 2025). These differences were not accounted for. Therefore, the findings of this research represent wellbeing during activities this point in the academic year.

6.3 Reflections on data collection

6.3.1 Reflections on survey data collection

It has been well documented throughout this thesis that the survey sample size was relatively small compared to its potential. This is most likely due to the length and complexity of the survey. Great effort was made, as documented in Chapter 3, to balance data collection with the length and complexity of the established design; however, reducing complexity would have required narrowing the study's scope. Increasing survey responses may have necessitated more proactive engagement with potential respondents to encourage completion. However, doing so would have still resulted in a narrow focus on the immediate NW area of London, where the researcher has direct contacts with schools and could have fostered stronger connections, thus increase participation rates through personal relationship (Gillham, 2008). Further piloting may have also generated additional solutions for reducing the survey's length and improving accessibility

Piloting could have identified and clarified ambiguous survey items noted in Section 4.1.1, such as the overlapping response categories for the demographic question on years of experience, as well as the limitations of multi-choice questions regarding employment setting, which prevented the capture of intersecting

characteristics. Addressing these issues during piloting would have enhanced the clarity and richness of the data collected.

To achieve a larger and more diverse sample size in future research, the survey period could be extended, providing greater opportunity to raise awareness and encourage participation among TAs from a broader range of backgrounds. More frequent and strategically timed social media posts, including reminders, could help reach TAs who may have missed earlier for participation. While this would not fully address limitations related to geographic diversity, a longer timeframe would also allow for more opportunities for in-person promotion in professional settings, such as distributing QR codes after engaging directly with potential participants and explaining the survey's aims and benefits.

6.3.2 Reflections on the interview data collection

Firstly, the researcher acknowledges they are a novice interviewer, which may have influenced the quality of the interview data generated, particularly for the first two interviews, as the interviewer operationalised the interview schedule fully with real participants. Consequently, opportunities for fluent follow-up questions were missed. More piloting work may have alleviated some of this anxiety and fostered a more natural flow more quickly. Secondly, a couple of participants opted to discuss their wellbeing across a range of activities, straying from the focus of the activity at hand. While relevant to the research questions, this also risked reducing the opportunity to explore a single activity in more depth. The researcher was able to employ gentle redirection and conceptual linking to refocus the TA and mitigate tangents, but the rapport-building may have subtly influenced responses, as it took the interview away from the strict neutrality recommended by Gillham (2008). Finally, a few participants wished to customise their responses to what would be most helpful for the researcher.

While their reflections on wellbeing during activities appeared genuine and were not merely an attempt to tailor their own self-image, they seemed to prefer knowing which activities would matter most to the researcher, rather than what would be most meaningful to them. The researcher had to attempt to actively reduce the demand characteristics.

6.4 Implications for Theory

While the small sample size means that theoretical understanding must be interpreted with caution, the findings provide a more nuanced perspective on TA wellbeing, suggesting that it may be influenced differently depending on specific activities undertaken in the role. One such contribution is the identification of momentary wellbeing used outside of hedonic wellbeing frameworks (Scollon et al., 2003). While this does not constitute a systemic approach for developing a new wellbeing model, it offers an example of how alternative and emerging conceptualisations of eudemonic wellbeing may surface in specific contexts, even within a small sample (Heshmati et al., 2023). This adds value not by revising overarching theory, but by illustrating how differences in wellbeing conceptualisation might emerge in practice.

However, transferability of this theory may be limited to the London area and Southeast of England, and the survey does not represent a diverse sample. School environments may differ considerably across regions. Some experiences resonated with the researcher's own professional experiences across settings both within and out of London which adds credibility to the theory. However, these experiences also do not reflect the full diversity of TA experiences. Momentary wellbeing across

activities appears to be influenced by the systemic and environmental factors which may vary in their intensity and existence in other settings which are not accounted for in this thesis.

6.5 Implications for school practice

The findings of this thesis result in implications for schools' recommendations that could be implemented to promote wellbeing for TAs. These implications are mapped onto the WPR model, which provides recommendations for operationalising TAs to improve outcomes for pupils.

6.5.1 Deployment

TA roles could be formally recognised in a manner that promotes their wellbeing, with a focus on activities that directly support pupils in some manner to progress and improve. This thesis supports other studies that call out the inconsistency and confusion that arise from unclear job descriptions (Geeson & Clarke, 2023; Ravalier et al., 2021). Formal recognition of the role could still allow for flexibility to accommodate the evolving needs of pupils. However, TAs may need some protections from taking on responsibilities outside their remit. TAs could also have a stronger voice to advocate for their own interests and negotiate their roles, thereby reducing feelings of merely following orders.

While studies such as Blatchford et al. (2006) question the actual impact TAs have on pupil outcomes in general, they supported the idea that TAs can facilitate evidence-based interventions when properly trained. Intervention work appears to offer a positive boost to various dimensions of TA wellbeing compared to other activities and thus aligns with this recommendation. TAs could be allowed to do impactful work that directly supports pupil outcomes, i.e. evidence-based, which could

be prioritised in their deployment and not removed for logistical purposes without full consideration of the impact.

When change is needed, the TAs' perspectives could be considered and adequate notice provided. Schools could recognise the need TAs may have to continue to have ongoing positive interactions with the pupils they support, and that forming new relationships with pupils will take time. The nature of TA-pupil relationships appears to have a significant impact on TA wellbeing as well as potentially pupil outcomes (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015). Therefore, their importance should not be undervalued. Additionally, schools could aim for stability in deployment changes rather than frequent, short-notice alterations.

In some schools, these implications may already be standard procedure, emphasising the need to promote good practice from a positive psychology perspective. All staff could be informed of or even receive training about the TA role and how best to operationalise TAs in classrooms, which may be a gap in teacher training preparedness.

6.5.2 Preparedness

To reiterate, as recommended by Webster et al. (2011) and Cockroft & Atkinson (2015), TAs could be provided sufficient opportunity to prepare for interventions and work in lessons. This may only be a 5-minute chat before the class or at least should be provided for newer TAs who are less familiar with the curriculum and are still developing their skills. Opportunities to prepare for interventions through talking with experienced colleagues or a teacher regularly could be provided alongside the needed training to ensure that the practice continues to follow the evidence-based practice (Webster et al., 2011). Interactions with experienced colleagues could potentially help

TAs recognise and work through any problems that may occur. TAs could be encouraged to take ownership of the interventions they do and work in collaboration with their colleagues rather than just being directed. Their expertise in the pupil could be included in discussions. Formal recognition of the role could also connect to more formal training. The researchers recognise this may be outside the school's capacity to provide. Therefore, the implication may require changes to the government policy and recommendations.

6.5.3 Practice

TAs could be provided with reflective feedback spaces and meetings with fellow TAs to encourage professional growth, learning, and emotional reflection. This is more likely to be standard practice in secondary schools, where TAs spend more time together in learning support departments. However, such meetings could also be included in primary schools, where TAs often spend more time in individual classrooms. While such meetings may already occur on an informal basis, they could be formalised and included in the weekly timetable. It is recommended that these spaces be peer-led rather than involving more senior colleagues (Jackson, 2008). This separation could facilitate regulation and allow for the reframing of practice without concerns about job security. Senior leaders who could implement change are best informed confidentially (Willis & Baines, 2018).

TAs should receive training and support for pastoral needs that also include ways of recognising the small steps of improvement to pupil mental health and wellbeing, similar to small steps of learning progress. Pastoral support could be recognised as having the same importance as learning support. TAs appear to want to support learning and may not be comfortable returning to a more indirect role, such as managing behaviours and general classroom management. They may wish to adopt

more of a pedagogical role, especially as teaching pupils is reported to become more demanding. Therefore, schools could ensure that TAs have the appropriate skills to meet this demand and facilitate pupil progress. This coincides with the formalisation of the role. However, this doesn't mean that the researchers are suggesting TAs take over all teaching responsibilities for pupils with SEND, but with supporting learning appearing to be a core part of the TA identity, they could be trained up to fulfil this potential. The researcher recognises the difficulties schools face in recruiting and attracting TAs when budgets do not allow for higher salaries (Alston, 2023).

6.6 Implications for EP practice

EPs can play a significant role in supporting TA wellbeing through structured check-ins, staff forums, and supervision sessions. TA wellbeing must be part of the consultation process, especially in schools facing challenges with retention or staff morale. EPs might consider offering consultation spaces specifically for TAs or providing training for schools on how to facilitate such reflective spaces themselves. EPs could also assist schools in establishing effective TA reflection sessions. Rather than adopting a top-down approach to feedback, these could be collaborative spaces centred on celebrating small progress and acknowledging challenges in a balanced manner. This could help TAs reframe their experiences and recognise their impact more directly.

EPs could invite TAs who work directly and regularly with the CYP they are involved with to all meetings and encourage schools to release them from their other responsibilities to enable their participation. EPs could promote TAs' knowledge, expertise, and soft skills as valuable insights for how best to support CYP, ensuring they are captured while simultaneously promoting their wellbeing. If this is not

possible, EPs could still ensure they gain opportunities to speak with TAs during school visits, even if this occurs on the playground, in the staff room, or in the corridor if necessary. This demonstrates that TAs' knowledge is important to EP work as well, boosting a sense of purpose in their role and providing them with new tools to promote learning.

EPs could allocate time for informal follow-ups after delivering training or interventions. Simple five-minute check-ins could spark conversations about what TAs have learned, how they have adapted interventions, and how effective they feel their efforts have been. This approach may foster a greater sense of autonomy and ownership of their skills. Moreover, it potentially acknowledges TAs as co-creators in pupil success rather than merely passive deliverers of the program.

6.7 Future research directions

Future research may build on the foundations provided in this study and aim for a larger-scale survey to enable more rigorous conclusions to be drawn. This may need to focus on either specific activity to ensure comprehensive coverage or those activities that the vast majority of TAs will undertake to facilitate easier comparisons. Qualitative diaries could also be employed to explore individual activities in greater depth. Additionally, the findings of the study could be tested using real-world examples and observational work through case studies, concentrating on the balance between managing behaviours and promoting pupil progress, and examining the impact this has on wellbeing.

Action research could seek to formalise the TA role, incorporating the perspectives of TAs, to provide much-needed clarification and expectations across settings. TAs and a researcher could collaborate to design a framework that is

presented to other TAs for further review and expansion. This could be supplemented with research capturing the views of staff on TA wellbeing, including those of teachers and other senior leaders, to assess their awareness of how TAs experience their responsibilities and whether this aligns with the TAs themselves. Ensuring the views of all staff members align may enhance the ongoing recognition of TAs' inclusion in the school environment, address their needs, and promote greater prioritisation of their role.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Application

Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified **you must be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office before you submit your ethics application for review**. To do this, email the complete ethics form to the UCL Data Protection Office. Once your registration number is received, add it to the form* and submit it to your supervisor for approval. If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

Please note that the completion of the UCL GDPR online training is mandatory for all PhD students.

Section 1 – Project details

a. Project title: The impact of Teaching Assistant's activities on their subjective well-being in mainstream schools.

b. Student name and ID number (e.g. ABC12345678): Rebecca Lewis, 22240117

c. ***UCL Data Protection Registration Number: Z6364106/2024/06/206 social research**

   a. Date Issued: 17.06.24

d. Supervisor/Personal Tutor: Dr Amelia Roberts & Dr Chris Bagley

e. Department: Psychology and Human Development

f. Course category (Tick one):

PhD ☐
EdD ☐
DEdPsy ☒

g. **If applicable**, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.

h. Intended research start date: 30.06.24

i. Intended research end date: 31.08.25

j. Country fieldwork will be conducted in: UK

k. If research to be conducted abroad please check the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be required before ethical approval can be granted: *UCL travel advice webpage*

l. Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?

Yes ☐
External Committee Name: Enter text
Date of Approval: Enter text

No ☒ ***go to Section 2***

If yes:

- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 - Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

☒ Interviews
☐ Focus Groups
☒ Questionnaires
☐ Action Research
☐ Observation
☐ Literature Review
☐ Controlled trial/other intervention study
☐ Use of personal records
☐ Systematic review **– if only method used go to Section 5**
☐ Secondary data analysis ***– if secondary analysis used go to Section 6***
☐ Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups
☐ Other, give details: Enter text

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination. Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work

can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

Purpose & Aims of the Study

The daily activities of Teaching Assistant (TA), Learning Support Assistant and equivalent roles in the UK have evolved since the early 2000s (Lewis, 2023). However, daily activities were often decided based on school needs rather than on evidence-informed understanding of greatest impact for pupils. To address this gap, Blatchford et al. (2009) implemented The Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project and subsequently produced the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model (Webster et al., 2011) to understand the effectiveness of TAs on a range of pupil outcomes including learning and behaviour. The WPR model scaffolded the DISS project's results onto components of the TA role (Webster et al., 2011, 2013). Other studies have since highlighted interpersonal and intrapersonal factors, such as effective collaboration with teachers, that can act as facilitators or barriers to TA's supporting pupil outcomes using the WPR model and other practices (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Geeson & Clarke, 2023; Jardí et al., 2022; Neaum & Noble, 2023). Many of these factors could be directly and indirectly linked to the TA's well-being.

The few studies that explore TA well-being directly have been large-scale surveys (Education Support, 2023; Ravalier et al., 2021). These studies do not consider the daily routines, responsibilities, and tasks TAs engage with, such as those outlined in the WPR. The aim of this research is to provide a better understanding of the relationship between subjective well-being and the day-to-day activities which make up the TA role.

The study will use the WPR model (Webster et al., 2011) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2013) model of subjective well-being to structure the methodology and analyse the results. There are many different types of well-being within the literature, such as emotional, physical and spiritual. However, there is no clear consensus on a definition or one universal model of well-being (Lambert et al., 2015). This research will adopt the OECD model of Subjective Well-being as it incorporates both hedoinic and eudiamonic concepts which cut across other models of well-being (Lambert et al., 2015; OECD, 2013). Furthermore, the OECD model was constructed upon other models of well-being such as Huppert et al. (2009) and Ryff & Singer (1998) which expands the range of well-being concepts further. Therefore, the OECD model provides a flexible but structured framework of well-being to explore the variety of factors which may be related to TA activities. Going forward, "Well-being" will be defined as "Subjective Well-being". While all well-being can be considered subjective in nature, the use of the term "Subjective Well-being" is in direct reference to the adoption of the OECD model of Subjective Well-being (OECD, 2013) to distinguish it from other models (Lambert et al.2015). Both the hedonistic and eudaimonic concepts of subjective well-being will be measured to provide a comprehensive overview.

The research aims to address the following research questions.

1. What is the relationship between TA activities and subjective well-being?
2. Which activities have the greatest impact on TA's subjective well-being?

Methods

The research will use an exploratory two-stage mixed methods approach. Stage one will collect quantitative data via online surveys following the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM; see Data collection for more details). The second stage will collect qualitative data via semi-

structured interviews. The aim of the second-stage interviews is to explore and expand upon the data collected in the first-stage surveys to provide further context and explore additional psychological and environmental factors. This research will follow a critical realism paradigm. Critical realism upholds both positivist and constructionist epistemology, both research lenses can be considered in an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. Subjective well-being will be measured across multiple participants at different schools, which implies a form of objective reality that unifies them all. There is an inherent assumption in this research that all TAs will have similar work-related activities. The quantitative survey data reflects a research assumption of objective reality across all participants. As aforementioned, participants' knowledge of their own well-being in relation to their work will be influenced by their own subjective insight and recollection. The purpose of the qualitative interviews is to gain a deeper understanding of this inner reality to explain and explore underpinning factors within the quantitative data.

Participants

Participants will most likely be recruited from primary and/or secondary schools in the UK and employed by the school as Teaching Assistants, Learning Support Assistants, or equivalent roles through snowball sampling. The senior leadership team at participating schools will likely be approached first to contact all potential participants within their setting. Additional recruitment approaches such as advertising on professional forums and social media will also be considered. An advertisement poster may be designed to promote interest and engagement in the research. All participants will complete the DRM survey modules in stage one, however involvement in the two follow-up interviews will be opt-in.

Data Collection

The DRM will be used as a framework to structure data collection. To address the research questions, as close to real-time data on the impact from TAs' daily activities to their subjective well-being is required. DRM requires participants to complete several daily survey modules, which will be known as "Diaries" to the participants. Participants would be required to break down their own working day into individual activities selected from a list to ensure consistency. Afterwards, for each activity, participants will fill out an identical survey module including items related to multiple components of subjective well-being dimensions as guided by OECD (2013). Each day's worth of recording should take no longer than 30 minutes at most with the aim for the average completion time to be shorter. Each participant will complete up to 5 days' worth of recording. The exact number of days has yet to be determined. The suitability of the survey may be determined through a pilot study. Survey items will most likely follow a Likert scale or similar scale-style format. Open text boxes may also be included to enable the participants to provide additional context to their survey responses. These open-text responses may also be used to inform the follow-up interview questions for participants who consent to both research stages.

DRM has been selected for its ability to capture participants' subjective well-being as related to daily activities in a manner which minimises recall bias. The gold standard for this type of data collection would be the "Experience Sampling Method" (ESM), which requires participants to record subjective well-being in real time, either immediately after the task or at set intervals (Kahneman et al., 2004). However, this places a high demand on the participants and is highly impractical in a busy school setting. Recalling activities at the end of the day provides participants the flexibility to record at a time that is suitable for them while also producing similar results to ESM (Kahneman et al., 2004).

Participants will be invited to a follow-up semi-structured interview to explore their responses in further detail. Semi-structured interviews have been selected as they provide consistency across all participants to explore factors influencing the relationship between subjective well-being and TA activities as identified in the literature, while also enabling flexibility to account for the different activities the TA may have recorded in their survey (Mann, 2016). Also, compared to structured interviews, participants have the opportunity to share new insights (Mann, 2016). Participation in the interview will be opt-in. The interview questions will be derived based on the participant's survey responses. Each interview will follow the same framework and aims but the questions themselves will be adapted based on the activities recorded in the participant's survey modules.

Procedure

Participants will be issued a private online link to a secure online platform such as Qualtrics. This will enable the participant to re-access their data at a time that is suitable for them. Participants will be required to complete all survey modules within a set timeframe of the day being reconstructed. Please see the attached DRM Survey schedule for further information.

The interviews will most likely be conducted face-to-face in a private room on location at the participating school or via an online video call. If face-to-face interviews are highly impractical, the participant will also be offered the option to conduct them online through a secure platform such as Microsoft Teams. Each interview will last up to one hour and will be audio recorded. Written notes will also be taken during the interview to support analysis but are not intended for publication.

Analysis

The scales that comprise most of the survey modules' questions will be analysed quantitatively. Open text box responses will most likely be used to provide further context to their responses and inform the interviews. Follow-up interviews will be analysed qualitatively through Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis will allow for both inductive and deductive reasoning. For this research this will include deductively analysing the data in relation to predetermined factors which can influence subject well-being derived from the literature, such as staff working relationships, self-confidence, and workload. Inductive reasoning will be required to explore new insight which may be generated not in relation to predetermined themes.

Reporting and Dissemination

The study's results will be shared with the participating schools' participants and senior leadership teams via a research briefing. Verbal feedback may also be provided. The research project will be written up in Thesis format for submission. It may also be written up for journal and practitioner publication.

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Section 3 – Research Participants (tick all that apply)

☐ Early years/pre-school

☐ Ages 5-11
☐ Ages 12-16
☐ Young people aged 17-18
☒ Adults please specify below
☐ Unknown – specify below
☐ No participants

Teaching Assistants and equivalent roles in UK schools including but not limited to primary, secondary, and special schools.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC).

Section 4 - Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call; involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a. Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

b. Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

c. Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 5 – Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

a. Will you be collecting any new data from participants?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

b. Will you be analysing any secondary data?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) **and** if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 8 Attachments.***

Section 6 - Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

a. Name of dataset/s: Enter text

b. Owner of dataset/s: Enter text

c. Are the data in the public domain?

Yes ☐ No ☐
If no, *do you have the owner's permission/license?*
Yes ☐ No* ☐

d. Are the data special category personal data (i.e. personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation)?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

e. Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

f. **If no**, was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

g. **If no,** was data collected prior to ethics approval process?

Yes ☐ No* ☐
** Give further details in* ***Section 8 Ethical Issues***
If secondary analysis is only method used ***and*** *no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to* ***Section 9 Attachments.***

Section 7 – Data Storage and Security
Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a. Data subjects - Who will the data be collected from?

Participants - Teaching Assistants

b. What data will be collected? Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected

Full name, gender, years of experience in the role and at current employment setting, name of employment setting, and individual work email address

Is the data anonymised? Yes ☐ No* ☒
Do you plan to anonymise the data? Yes* ☐ No ☒
Do you plan to use individual level data? Yes* ☒ No ☐
Do you plan to pseudonymise the data? Yes* ☒ No ☐

** Give further details in* ***Section 8 Ethical Issues***

c. **Disclosure –** Who will the results of your project be disclosed to?

Rebecca Lewis (Doctoral Student), Dr Amelia Roberts (Academic Supervisor), Dr Chris Bagley (EP Supervisor). Participants will be able to access their own data upon request.

Disclosure – Will personal data be disclosed as part of your project?

Participant gender and years of experience will be disclosed in the final report. Participants' names and employment settings will not be disclosed

d. Data storage – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick**, encrypted laptop** etc. The Data will be stored on a password-protected computer within a secure file or on UCL OneDrive within a password-protected folder.

*** Advanced Encryption Standard 256 bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS*

e. **Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution)** – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?

Yes ☐ No ☒

f. How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format?

Data will be kept for ten years beyond the end of the project. Participants will be made aware of this prior to consenting. Anonymised data will then be kept in accordance with UCL GDPR policy and stored securely within the UCL network.

Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with GDPR and state what these arrangements are)
No

Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.)
No

g. If personal data is used as part of your project, describe what measures you have in place to ensure that the data is only used for the research purpose e.g. pseudonymisation and short retention period of data'.

Results generated from the interview data will be written up and discussed using some direct quotes. These quotes will be linked to a participant through gender and years of experience. This data will be kept alongside interview transcripts for analysis. Other personal data will be stored in a separate password-protected file. This data can only be linked to individual transcripts and quotes through the use of personal IDs containing numbers and letters. Gender and Years of Service will be used to identify confidential participants in the report. Pseudonyms will be used to differentiate the participants within the report. Other personal data such as names, working settings and contact details will only be used for the purposes of communicating with the participant during and following data collection and will not form part of the analysis.

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 8 – Ethical Issues

Please state clearly the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

All issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below, further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*

- Methods
- Sampling
- Recruitment
- Gatekeepers
- Informed consent
- Potentially vulnerable participants
- Safeguarding/child protection
- Sensitive topics
- International research
- Risks to participants and/or researchers
- Confidentiality/Anonymity
- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality
- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)
- Reporting
- Dissemination and use of findings

<u>Informed Consent</u>

Informed consent will be sought from all participants. Information sheets (please see attached document) will be distributed to all TAs at participating schools who are eligible for recruitment prior to consent being obtained. My contact information will be provided on the information sheet so potential participants can ask questions prior to consenting if they wish to. Due to the high time demands on the participants and the autonomy required from them, this will provide an opportunity for a full explanation of the data collection demands and to ask further questions. Participants will be made aware that they can withdraw at any time.

<u>Sensitive Topics</u>

Discussing well-being could be a sensitive topic for some participants. To mitigate this, I will be transparent with the topics discussed ahead of data collection and prior to the interview before receiving consent. I will build rapport with the participant ahead of the interview. I

will offer breaks to participants, and I will remind participants that they may withdraw at any time without explanation. The survey modules can be completed at the participant's own pace, allowing for breaks if required. Participants can provide as much detail as they choose to for the questions.

Confidentiality/anonymity

Multiple participants may be recruited from a participating school therefore, participants may be concerned about being identified. While the identity of the participants will be known by senior leadership and possibly other colleagues at the school, all interview transcriptions will be anonymised, and no individual will be identifiable from data analysis or dissemination of the findings.

Data storage and security

Survey data will be collected via a secure online platform such as Qualtrics. Each participant will be issued with a private link that enables access to their personal survey. The data collected will be linked to my UCL online account and only accessible via a password. It will only be accessed on a secure Wi-Fi connection. Individual participant responses will be identifiable via confidential participant IDs.

All interview audio recordings and transcripts will be stored on a password-protected laptop within a password-protected folder or in a password-protected UCL OneDrive folder. All participants' personal data will be stored in a separate password-protected document. Interview data will only be identifiable by confidential participant ID numbers. Interviews will take place in a private room. Transcription will be conducted in a private room using headphones to prevent others from overhearing. All identifiable details will be anonymised in the transcript.

Disclosure/Limits of Confidentiality

Participant confidentiality will be maintained at all times, with the exception of the participant reporting actions or behaviour which may constitute a safeguarding concern for children, young people or other vulnerable groups.

Please confirm that the processing of the data is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to an individual

Yes ☒

Section 9 – Attachments.

Please attach your information sheets and consent forms to your ethics application before requesting a Data Protection number from the UCL Data Protection office. Note that they will be unable to issue you the Data Protection number until all such documentation is received

a. Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research (List attachments below)

Yes ☒ No ☐

Information Sheet

Consent Forms

b. Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee Yes ☐

c. The proposal ('case for support') for the project Yes ☐

d. Full risk assessment Yes ☐

Section 10 – Declaration
I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.
Yes ☒ No ☐
I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.
Yes ☒ No ☐

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:
The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.
Name Rebecca Lewis
Date 31.05.24

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor for review.

Notes and references

Professional code of ethics
You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:
British Psychological Society (2018) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*
Or
British Educational Research Association (2018) *Ethical Guidelines*
Or
British Sociological Association (2017) *Statement of Ethical Practice*
Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the Institute of Education Research Ethics website.

Disclosure and Barring Service checks
If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE.

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

Further references
Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.
This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook.* London: Sage.

This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Wiles, R. (2013) What are Qualitative Research Ethics? Bloomsbury.
A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

Departmental Use
If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor must refer the application to the Research Development Administrator via email so that it can be submitted to the IOE Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. If unsure please refer to the guidelines explaining when to refer the ethics application to the IOE Research Ethics Committee, posted on the committee's website.
Student name:
Student department:
Course:
Project Title:

Reviewer 1
Supervisor/first reviewer name: Amelia Roberts
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?
No
Supervisor/first reviewer signature:
Date: 17th May 2024

Reviewer 2
Second reviewer name: Chris Bagley
Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?
No
Second reviewer signature:
Date: 29.5.24

Decision on behalf of reviewers
Approved ☐
Approved subject to the following additional measures ☐
Not approved for the reasons given below ☐
Referred to the REC for review ☐

Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC:

Comments from reviewers for the applicant:

Once it is approved by both reviewers, students should submit their ethics application form to the Centre for Doctoral Education team: IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk.

Appendix 2: Information Sheet (Survey)

The impact of Teaching Assistant's activities on well-being in mainstream schools.

Information sheet for Teaching Assistants

My name is Rebecca Lewis, and I am a 3rd year Trainee Educational Psychologist at the Institute of Education (IOE), UCL. I am inviting you to take part in my thesis research project, "The Impact of Teaching Assistant's Daily Activities on Well-being in Mainstream Schools."

This information sheet will try to answer questions you might have about the research, but please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know.

Who is carrying out the research?

I am the main researcher on the project. My supervisors are Dr Amelia Roberts (Associate Professor, UCL IOE) and Dr Chris Bagley (Educational Psychologist).

Why are we doing this research?

Maintaining well-being is essential for Teaching Assistants (TA) to effectively support children and young people, as well as to sustain a positive quality of life. While surveys like the Teacher Wellbeing Index provide some insight into the general well-being of school staff, they often do not delve into the impact of TA's day-to-day activities. As a TA, you are highly adaptable and flexible, taking on various activities that require multiple skills, from supporting classes to working one-on-one with pupils and delivering interventions. This research aims to explore the relationship between TAs' daily activities and psychological factors such as emotions and well-being. Your contribution to this research, based on your own experiences, will greatly enhance the collective voice of TAs in mainstream schools, highlighting what is working well and what needs to be changed.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you choose to participate, you will complete an online survey asking you to select the activities you have completed over the course of your previous typical working day from a list and to answer relevant questions related to well-being during those activities. The survey should only take between 10 to 20 minutes to complete depending on how many activities you engaged in during your previous working day. Most of the questions will be multi-choice responses or scales. Optional open text boxes are also included for you to provide further detail which you feel is relevant. Your responses will be received upon submission at the end of the survey. You may withdraw from the survey at any time prior to submission.

Will anyone know I have been involved?

No will know of your involvement in the survey. Your responses will be kept anonymous, and your personal details will not be requested. The raw data will only be accessible to my supervisors and me which will not be identifiable.

Could there be problems for me if I take part?

I am highly aware of how precious your time is. The survey is streamlined to minimise the time required to complete as much as possible. However, please note that the survey can take up to 20 minutes to complete, so please consider if this is something you can fit into your other commitments.

While having the opportunity to share your views is often a positive experience, sometimes talking about well-being can lead to discomfort. You can take a break from completing the survey and return at any time as long as you continue to use the same device (phone, PC, tablet etc) which you started the survey on and have not submitted your response at the end of the survey. You may also withdraw from the survey at any time up until the data has been electronically submitted at the end of the survey. Your responses up until this point will not be stored.

What will happen to the results of the research?

Survey data will be analysed and summarised into a thesis report, which you will be able to access from UCL Discovery portal. The results may also be used in research publications and presentations.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information from research studies can be found in our 'general' privacy notice for participants in research studies here.

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices. The lawful basis that will be used to process any personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data and 'Research purposes' for special category data. We will be collecting personal data such as: full name, gender, place of employment, years of service, years in current school and contact information.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data, you provide we will undertake this and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data- protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Contact for further information.

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at [redacted]@ucl.ac.uk.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 3: Survey Branching

Below is the revised outline ready for Word. Apply Heading 1 to each "Show Block" line and Heading 2 to each "Branch If" line; use normal text for the indented bullets.

Show Block: Introduction (1 Question)

- Branch If
    - If Hello, I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the Institute of Education, University College… "I do not agree to take part in this survey" is selected
    - Then: End of Survey

Show Block: Demographics (12 Questions)

Show Block: Mainstream Details/Activity Selection (7 Questions)
Heading 2
Branch If (no lesson & no other activities)

- If Did you provide support in at least one lesson on "Date of recorded day"? – No is selected
- And Please select any of the following additional activities … – None of the above is selected
- Then: End of Survey

Branch If (Primary, ≥ 2 lessons)

- If Did you provide support in at least one lesson on "Date of recorded day"? – Yes is selected

- And Which education stage do you currently work in? – Primary Education is selected
- And Please select any of the following additional activities … – None of the above is selected
- And How many lessons (including free play) did you support on “Date of recorded day”? – Text response ≥ 2
- Then:
    - Show Block: Well-being Primary Lessons (12 Questions)
    - Show Block: End of survey Open Q (2 Questions)
    - End of Survey

Branch If (Primary, exactly 1 lesson)

- If Did you provide support in at least one lesson on “Date of recorded day”? – Yes is selected
- And Which education stage do you currently work in? – Primary Education is selected
- And Please select any of the following additional activities … – None of the above is selected
- And How many lessons (including free play) did you support on “Date of recorded day”? – Text response = 1
- Then:
    - Show Block: Well-being Primary 1 Lesson (11 Questions)
    - Show Block: End of survey Open Q (2 Questions)
    - End of Survey

Branch If (Secondary, ≥ 2 lessons)

- If Did you provide support in at least one lesson on “Date of recorded day”? – Yes is selected
- And Which education stage do you currently work in? – Secondary Education is selected
- And Please select any of the following additional activities … – None of the above is selected

- And How many lessons did you support on “Date of recorded day”? (Please enter a number…) – Text response ≥ 2
- Then:
    - Show Block: Well-being Lessons Secondary (12 Questions)
    - Show Block: End of survey Open Q (2 Questions)
    - End of Survey

Branch If (Secondary, exactly 1 lesson)

- If Did you provide support in at least one lesson on “Date of recorded day”? – Yes is selected
- And Which education stage do you currently work in? – Secondary Education is selected
- And Please select any of the following additional activities … – None of the above is selected
- And How many lessons did you support on “Date of recorded day”? (Please enter a number…) – Text response = 1
- Then:
    - Show Block: Well-being 1 Lesson Secondary (11 Questions)
    - Show Block: End of survey Open Q (2 Questions)
    - End of Survey

Branch If (no lesson, but did other activities)

- If Did you provide support in at least one lesson on “Date of recorded day”? – No is selected
- And Please select any of the following additional activities … – None of the above is not selected
- Then:
    - Show Block: Leading question (1 Question)
    - Show Block: Well-being additional (10 Questions)
    - Show Block: End of survey Open Q (2 Questions)
    - End of Survey

End of Outline

Appendix 4: Survey

Below is an outline of the survey adapted for the write up. The survey was created and distributed using Qualitrics.

Participant Information & Consent

Introduction

Hello, I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the Institute of Education, University College London. I am researching the role of Teaching Assistants and how different activities they complete over the course of a working day may impact on their well-being. By taking part in this research, you will be contributing to the growing research base on the TA role. This survey is intended for Teaching Assistants, Learning Support Assistants, Classroom Assistants and other equivalent roles who provide direct face-to-face learning or pastoral support for pupils in a mainstream primary or secondary school in the United Kingdom. Further information can be found in the Information Sheet.pdf.

During this survey, you will be asked to reflect back on your past normal working day and to answer questions relating to your well-being during the different activities you completed. Questions include multiple-choice, rating scales and optional open text entries.

This survey should take approximately 10–20 minutes. Your responses will remain anonymous. You may pause and continue at any time from the same device up to seven days through the original link.

If you have any questions, please email [redacted]@ucl.ac.uk.

Consent

- ○ I agree to take part in this survey
- ○ I do not agree to take part in this survey

Demographics

Age

Please select your age range:

- ○ 18–25 years
- ○ 26–35 years
- ○ 36–45 years
- ○ 46–55 years
- ○ 56–65 years
- ○ 66+ years
- ○ Prefer not to say

Gender

Please select your gender:

- ○ Female
- ○ Male

- ○ Non-binary
- ○ Prefer not to say

Ethnicity
Please select your ethnicity:
- ○ Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh
- ○ Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African
- ○ Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
- ○ White British, White Irish or any other White background
- ○ Other ethnic group
- ○ Prefer not to say

Region
In which region are you located?
- England – North West
- England – North East
- England – Yorkshire and the Humber
- England – East Midlands
- England – West Midlands
- England – East of England
- England – South West
- England – South East
- England – London
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland
- Prefer not to say

Highest Qualification
Please select your highest formal qualification:
- ○ Below Level 2 or no formal qualifications
- ○ Level 2 – GCSEs/O-levels/NVQ-2
- ○ Level 3 – A-levels/NVQ-3/Advanced apprenticeships/IB/T-levels
- ○ Level 4–5 – HNC/CertHE/HND/NVQ-4 or 5
- ○ Level 6 – Bachelor’s degree/Graduate Diploma/NVQ-6/Degree Apprenticeship

- ○ Level 7 – Master's/Postgraduate certificate/Postgraduate diplomas/NVQ-7
- ○ Level 8 – Doctorate or PhD
- ○ Prefer not to say

Employment Context
Education Stage (required for branching)
Which education stage do you currently work in?

- ○ Primary Education
- ○ Secondary Education

School Type
Which type of school are you currently employed at?

- ○ Local Authority/Maintained School
- ○ Academy/Academy Trust
- ○ Independent/Private School
- ○ Faith school/Voluntary aided schools
- ○ Other: _____
- ○ Not sure/Prefer not to say

Job Title
What is your job title for your current role? (e.g. Teaching Assistant, Learning Mentor etc.)

- [Text entry]

Hours per Week
On average, how many hours a week:

- Are you contracted to work? [Numeric entry]
- Do you actually work? [Numeric entry]

Years at Current School
Please select how long you've been at your current school:

- ○ less than 1 year
- ○ 1–3 years
- ○ 3–5 years
- ○ 5–7 years
- ○ 7–9 years
- ○ 10+ years

Total TA Experience
Please select how long you've worked as a TA (all settings):

- ○ less than 1 year

- ○ 1–3 years
- ○ 3–5 years
- ○ 5–7 years
- ○ 7–9 years
- ○ 10+ years

Your Most Recent Normal Working Day (required for branching)
Reflect
Please think back on your most recent normal working day. Consider all activities and any notable incidents.
Date
Enter the date of that day (dd/mm/yyyy):

- [Text entry]

Lesson-Based Support (required for branching)
Did you provide support in at least one lesson on that day?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

If No → skip to "Additional Activities."
How many lessons did you support on that day?

- [Numeric entry]

Reflection on Two Chosen Lessons *(Repeat for **Lesson 1** and **Lesson 2**)*
Intro
You shared that you supported {N} lessons on {date}.
Please take some time to think back on each. Identify two that stood out to you (positive or negative). You will be asked questions about each.
Please answer the following questions in relation to the _____ of your two chosen lessons you supported on {date}.
- *(This block is repeated twice: once for the first chosen lesson, once for the second.)*
Subject taught

- (Primary list) Numeracy/Maths · Phonics/Literacy/English · Science · Topics · Art & Design · Computing · Modern languages · Music · PE/Gym · RSE/PSHE · Free Play · Other
- (Secondary list) English · Maths · Science · Art & Design · Citizenship/Health · Classics · Computing · Cooking/Home Ed · Design & Tech · Drama · Geography · History · Modern Languages · Music · PE · RE · Other

Which year group did you support?

- (Primary) Reception · 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 6

- (Secondary) 7 · 8 · 9 · 10 · 11 · 12 · 13

Type of learning activity

- If not PE or Free Play: Individual work · Whole-class learning · Small-group work · Practical activities · Test/exam practice · Other
- If PE/Gym: Non-competitive exercises · Competitive individual games · Team sports · Other

Type of support provided

Supporting a pupil one-to-one · Supporting a small group · Supporting the whole class · Administrative support

Main area(s) of pupil need

- If one-to-one (single-select): Speech/language · Learning difficulties · Emotions/mental health · Behaviour · Autism · Physical/medical/sensory · Not sure
- If small-group or whole-class (multi-select): same list, multi-choice

Well-Being Ratings *(1 = Not at all … 7 = Very much)*

I felt happy · I enjoyed my work · I felt worried · I felt sad · I had the freedom to support the lesson how I felt best · I felt able to support in this lesson · I felt satisfied with my work · I had the required level of support from my colleagues · I felt lonely · I felt a sense of accomplishment · My work was meaningful · I felt prepared to support this lesson

Factors affecting your well-being *(optional)*

Please briefly list any factors (e.g. pupil needs, interactions, environment, personal/logistical) that affected your well-being. (250-character max)

Additional Activities

Please select any additional activities you completed at least once on {date}:

- lead an intervention
- provided pastoral support outside the classroom
- delivered small group teaching
- delivered whole class teaching (e.g. PPA cover)
- monitored on the playground
- supported breakfast club
- provided support at lunch
- monitored pupil arrivals
- lead or supported an extra-curricular activity
- marked pupils' work
- attended a school assembly
- monitored detention or equivalent

- attended a staff meeting
- engaged in an administrative task (lasting over 15 minutes)
- attended staff training
- Other: _____
- None of the above

If "No lessons" AND "None of the above" → show confirmation prompt "Are you sure?" and prevent continuation if unanswered.
If survey continued then display the following the message
Thank you for taking the time to consider this survey.

Please share this survey with any of your colleagues, friends or family who are employed as a Teaching Assistant, Learning Support Assistant, Classroom Assistant or equivalent role who may be interested in taking part in this research.

Reflection on Each Additional Activity *(Repeat for **each** activity ticked)*
Intro
You will now be asked questions related to each additional activity you completed on {date}. These will repeat for each activity.
For each activity, you first see any subtype question (if required), then the well-being matrix and text box.

Lead an intervention
On {date}, did you lead an individual, small-group or whole-class intervention?
- ○ Individual intervention
- ○ Small group intervention (2–5 pupils)
- ○ Large group intervention (5+ pupils)

Which type of intervention did you lead?
- ○ Phonics/Reading
- ○ Numeracy/Maths
- ○ Social skills
- ○ Emotional skills
- ○ General learning skills
- ○ Forest School
- ○ Other: _____

Delivered small-group teaching
(Primary) Which subject did you teach? *(same primary list as lesson loop)*
(Secondary) Which subject did you teach to a small group? *(same secondary list)*

Delivered whole-class teaching
(Primary) Which subject did you teach?
(Secondary) Which subject did you teach to the class?

Attended staff training
Which type of staff training did you attend on {date}?

- ○ Learning intervention (e.g. phonics, numeracy)
- ○ SEN-specific (e.g. autism awareness)
- ○ Whole-school initiatives (e.g. healthy schools, trauma-aware)
- ○ Supporting pupil mental health and well-being
- ○ Other: _____

Lead or supported an extra-curricular activity
Which type of extra-curricular activity did you lead or support?

- ○ Sports (e.g. football)
- ○ Reading (e.g. book club)
- ○ Games (e.g. chess club)
- ○ Subject-related (e.g. science club)
- ○ Cultural (e.g. cultural identity)
- ○ Homework club
- ○ Other: _____

Engaged in an administrative task
(No subtype question.)
Provided pastoral support, breakfast club, lunch support, playground monitoring, pupil arrivals monitoring, detention monitoring, school assembly, marked work
(No subtype questions.)

Well-Being Ratings for Each Activity *(1 = Not at all … 7 = Very much)*
I felt happy · I enjoyed my work · I felt worried · I felt sad · I had the freedom to support as I felt best · I felt able to support · I felt satisfied with my work · I had the required level of support from colleagues · I felt lonely · I felt a sense of accomplishment · My work was meaningful · I felt prepared
Factors affecting your well-being *(optional)*
Please briefly list any specific factors that affected your well-being during this activity. (250-character max)

Optional Closing Boxes

Working-Week Moment *(optional)*
Were there any activities from your previous working week which had a notable impact on your well-being? Please briefly describe. (250 chars)
Additional Intersectionality Factors *(optional)*
Are there any additional factors which impact your well-being at work that you would like to share? (250 chars)
Examples: personal identity, financial, school environment, culture, policies, life experiences.

Thank you for completing this survey!

You have reached the end of this survey, and your responses have been recorded.

I know how long it can take to complete an in-depth survey such as this, so I wish to express my appreciation for taking the time out of your day to share your experiences. Your insight will enhance our collective understanding of how to improve the working lives of Teaching Assistants for yourself, pupils, and school communities.

If you have been affected by any part of this survey, please take care of yourself and engage in activities that help you feel well-regulated, or seek out a friend or family member to talk to. If you feel you need additional resources, please see a list of additional organisations at the following link: Additional resources.pdf

If you have any further questions or comments about this survey, please get in touch with me at [redacted]@ucl.ac.uk. Your email will not be linked to your survey responses.

Links to Additional Resources and Support

General Resources

Self-care

https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/wellbeing/wellbeing/
https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/
https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/ - originally created by young people to support young people, many of these strategies are helpful for people of all ages.

Professional Support

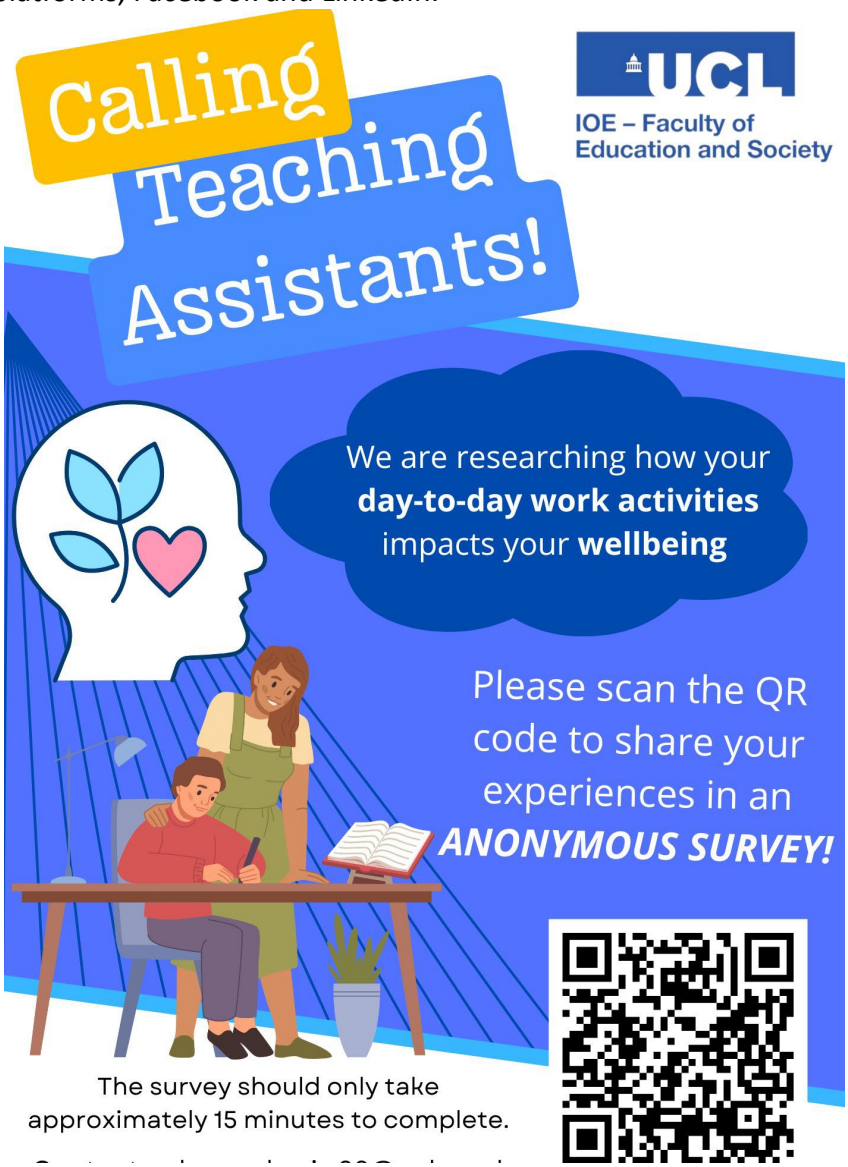
If you are concerned about your mental health, please speak to your GP.
https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/talking-therapy-and-counselling/about-talking-therapies/
https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-NHS-talking-therapies-service/
For support in your local area, you can also seek out links to services through you local authority website, which can be found by entering your postcode at the following link
https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council

For Education Staff

https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/looking-after-each-other-and-ourselves/
https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/

Appendix 5: Survey Flyer

This flyer was attached to the survey distribution email to schools and was posted on the social media platforms, Facebook and LinkedIn.



Appendix 6: Information Sheet (Interview)

The impact of Teaching Assistant's activities on well-being in mainstream schools.

Information sheet for Teachers and Teaching Assistants

My name is Rebecca Lewis, and I am a 3rd year Trainee Educational Psychologist at the Institute of Education (IOE), UCL. I am inviting you to take part in my thesis research project, "The Impact of Teaching Assistant's Daily Activities on Well-being in Mainstream Schools."

This information sheet will try to answer any questions you might have about the research, but please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you would like to know.

Who is carrying out the research?

I am the main researcher on the project. My supervisors are Dr Amelia Roberts (Associate Professor, UCL IOE) and Dr Chris Bagley (Educational Psychologist).

Why are we doing this research?

Maintaining well-being is essential for TAs to effectively support children and young people, as well as to sustain a positive quality of life. While surveys like the Teacher Wellbeing Index provide some insight into the general well-being of school staff, they often do not delve into the impact of TA's day-to-day activities. As a TA, you are highly adaptable and flexible, taking on various activities that require multiple skills, from supporting classes to working one-on-one with pupils and delivering interventions. This research aims to explore the relationship between TAs' daily activities and psychological factors such as emotions and well-being. Your contribution to this research, based on your own experiences, will greatly enhance the collective voice of TAs in mainstream schools, highlighting what is working well and what needs to be changed.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you choose to participate, you will be invited to take part in a 60 minute interview with myself to discuss your day-to-day role as a teaching assistant, what you do over the course of a working week and how it impacts your well-being; either positive or negative.

As part of this process, you will be encouraged to record your own personal thoughts and reflections throughout the course of the working week prior to the interview. These will include what you did during each activity (lesson support, intervention etc), how you felt during those times and what may have influenced your wellbeing. These notes will be for your personal use only and will not be recorded as part of the research. You will be provided with a template to use but you can capture your notes in any way that feels most effective to you. I will meet with you at the beginning of the week to outline what to expect in more detail and to answer any questions you have.

At the end of the working week or at the start of the following week, you will be invited to take part in an interview with myself to chat about your experiences from the week, These will take place at your school in a private room or online. The interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription. You can skip any questions and withdraw from the interview at any time. You will receive a copy of the interview transcript afterwards.

Will anyone know I have been involved?

Your school leaders may know of your participation in the project, but all your

responses will be kept confidential and only accessible to my supervisors and me. I will share a copy of the interview transcript directly with you. Quotes from the transcript may be used in my report; however, these will not include identifiable details.

Could there be problems for me if I take part?

While having the opportunity to share your views is often a positive experience, sometimes talking about well-being can lead to discomfort. You are welcome to take a break at any time or skip questions. You may also withdraw from the project at any time up, without further explanation needed, until the data has been electronically submitted.

What will happen to the results of the research?

Generated themes and selected quotes from the interviews will be analysed and summarised into a thesis report. The results may also be used in research publications and presentations, which will be shared with you.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information from research studies can be found in our 'general' privacy notice for participants in research studies here.

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices. The lawful basis that will be used to process any personal data is: 'Public task' for personal data and 'Research purposes' for special category data. We will be collecting personal data such as: full name, gender, place of employment, years of service, years in current school and contact information**.**

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data, you provide we will undertake this and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data- protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Contact for further information.

If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can reach me at [redacted]**@ucl.ac.uk.**

If you would like to be involved, please complete the following consent form and return to [redacted]**@ucl.ac.uk.**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 7: Interview consent form

The impact of Teaching Assistant's activities on subjective well-being in mainstream schools.

Interview Participant Consent Form

If you are happy to participate in this study, please complete this consent form by ticking each item, as appropriate, and return to the research team via the contact details below:

1) I confirm that I have read and understood this information sheet, and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these questions adequately answered. ☐

2) I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. ☐

3) I know that I can refuse to answer any or all of the questions and that I can withdraw from the study at any point. ☐

4) I agree for the interview to be recorded, and that recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the at the end of three years. I know that all data will be kept under the terms of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). ☐

5) I agree that small direct quotes may be used in reports (these will be anonymised). ☐

6) In understand that in exceptional circumstances anonymity and confidentiality would have to be broken, for example, if it was felt that practice was putting children at risk, or there were concerns regarding professional misconduct. In these circumstances advice would be sought from a senior manager from another local authority who will advise us as to the appropriate course of action and as to whether we need to inform the authority of what you have told us. ☐

Name:……
……

Signature: ……. Date: ……..

Name of researcher:……..

Signature: ……. Date: ……..

Appendix 8: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

One week prior to the interview

Meet with each participant individually or in a group if from the same school.
During the meeting, introduce the study and include the following

- Let them know I will ask questions about your well-being during different work activities they have done over the course of the week. This will include support in lessons and different lessons such as playground monitoring, extracurricular activities, facilitating interventions, staff meetings and training. (See Introduction and Set up)
- The interview will not ask about every single activity they complete instead will focus on the most notable activities or ones that stood out to them.
- Encourage them to record their reflections on the activity shortly after it occurred to support recall. These will include how they felt and why they felt that way (influencing factors). Reassure them I will not be collecting these as part of the study, this is purely for their own use.
- The interview will last approximately one hour and will take place at school.
- [Go through the points on the consent form here if not already done so and sign it.]

Introduction & Set up

(This serves as a reminder. Most of this will have been introduced in the set-up meeting).
So, just as a reminder, during this interview, I will ask you to think back on your past week of work (using your notes as you need) and consider the different activities that you did during this time.
So an activity reflect any task or assignment that you did as part of your role, so this could include lesson support but also interventions, playground monitoring, one-to-one work office work et cetera think of each task that you did as its own entity.
Don't worry, we are not going to explore every single activity that you did last week.
Instead, I will be asking you to pick out activities which you feel impacted your well-being in some way and think about how you felt during that time, considering why you felt that way and what might have been influencing it. This is not just emotions such as happy or sad but

can also other include other experiences such for example your confidence, satisfaction the sense of meaningfulness of the work.
The interview should only take approximately one hour and can be stopped at any time. You don't have to provide a reason if you don't want to. Nor do you have to answer every single question, just let me know and we can move on or stop, which ever you prefer.
[Go through the points on the consent form here if not already done so and sign it.]

Introduction Questions

To start, just briefly, how was your week overall?

- How many days did you work last week?
- How many hours did you work? Were these your contracted hours?
- Would you describe this week as a typical week for you?

I would like to ask if you have kept any notes since the last time we spoke.
[If yes] **How was this experience for you?**
[if not] **Do you think you have a good sense of what happened last week?**

Individual Activities x3

[The aim is to have a free-flowing conversation regarding each activity and how it is related to wellbeing covering these topics. Use these questions as prompts if the topic has not been covered.]
So, for the next part, I would like to discuss a few activities that you completed during the past week, as I described earlier. Please think back to all the various activities that happened.
Could you select three activities which had an impact on your well-being?

Well-being

So I would like for us to explore each of these in more detail. You first said [insert activity here] stood out to you. **Could you tell me a bit more about what happened?**

Well-being Prompts

Prompts encourage the participant to expand on their experience using why and how questions. These will be weaved into the conversation at appropriate moments in response. Not all will be used. Replace [#] with the activity.

- How did you feel during [#]?
- Did you feel you had the freedom to do [#] how you felt best?
- Did you feel like you had the support of your colleagues
- Did you feel well supported by your colleagues? Had you asked for it, did you feel you would have been well supported by your colleagues?
- Did you feel lonely?
- What's his activity meaningful or not?
- How prepared did you feel to [#]?
-
- Do you feel confident in your skills during [#] or did you feel unsure or deskilled?

Influencing Factors

[These questions will be asked one after the other.]
What, if anything, was helping your well-being at this time? [OR] What, if anything, was not helping your well-being at this time? [if just once]
Was your experience similar to previous times you have [#]?

What may help to change the experience for you in the future?
[Repeat for the other two. Be prepared to weave in all 3 if the conversation goes that way]

Changes over the week

Did your well-being change throughout the course of the week?

- **Why do you think that was the case?**

Additional Factors

Are there any additional factors which impacted your well-being during your work activities, such as we have to discuss, which you would like to share? [Same question as in the survey]

Prompts

- Personal identity e.g. ethnicity, gender, age, religion, culture, etc
- Financial e.g. salary, school budgets
- School environment e.g. buildings
- Emotional climate
- School policies and procedures
- Life experiences e.g. your own school experience.

Appendix 9: Sample coding

INT: **Yeah. So, is that enough time to feel prepared?**

RES: Yeah. I get time for that. I've been given time for that every week, yeah.

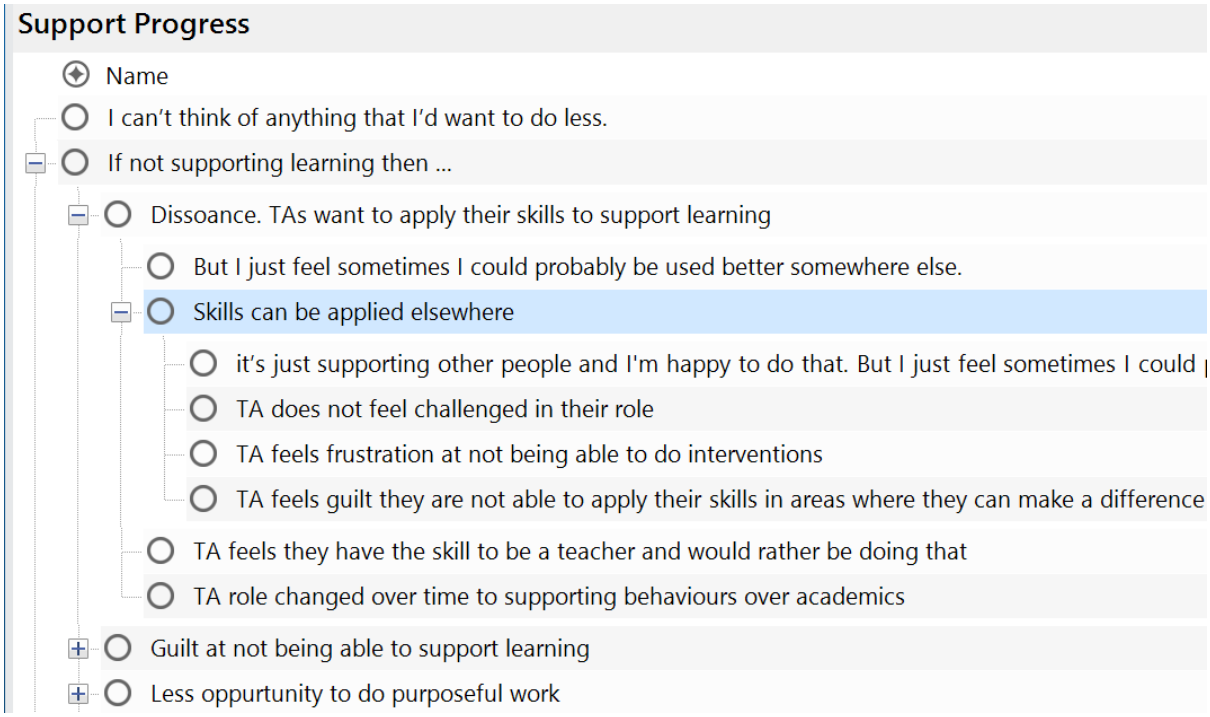
INT: **So, that's really helpful to you and it's the right amount of time and you can come in feeling prepared. Yeah, absolutely brilliant. To what extent do you feel confident in your skills during that time?**

RES: Sometimes it makes you think whether you- Because there's nobody else in that room apart from me. So, I don't know if I'm doing right or wrong. But sometimes yeah, I ask her- You know, I show her the books. I show my teacher the books. I show the head the books. Like this is what I've done, is this okay? Is that approach okay? If there are some changes, they do tell me, "Okay, why don't you do it this way or this way?" And because the planning has been discussed a week in advance, they have an idea and I have an idea, like where we are going and what we are looking at. So, it's more about like the mutual understanding between us and how we are going to get the whole thing done.

INT: **So, in a way, if they weren't there, that would've impacted your confidence a lot more. But because you can talk it through, you feel prepared, that supports your confidence and you feel more confident that way.**

RES: Yes, it does. Because you know, you feel like somebody's backing you, kind of thing. So, you feel that confidence. Like okay, I am doing it right. Because somebody's looked at your work and told you that this is fine.

A screenshot of an interview transcript as captured in Nvivo, qualitative analysis software. The yellow highlights reflect extracts of the interview transcript that were coded.



Codes were sorted into hierarchical themes and subthemes using the built-in feature of Nvivo.

Appendix 10

Wellbeing Dimension	**P-score**
Happy	0.783
Enjoyed	0.458
Worried	0.786
Sadness	0.269
Freedom	0.785
Felt Able	0.105
Satisfied	0.257
Support	0.245
Lonely	0.131
Accomplishment	0.931
Meaningful	0.854
Prepared	0.227

Table 9: Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test scores comparing the scores for lesson support for difference.