Thwarting Teaching behaviors is crucial to ensure students' educational journeys are not negatively impacted (Ahmadi et al., 2023; Howard, Slemp & Wang, 2024; Reeve & Cheon, 2021). For these reasons, understanding how different teaching styles influence students' autonomous motivation is crucial for acquiring deeper insights into how they develop and persist in their educational journey.

2. THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study is part of a broader longitudinal research conducted in several secondary schools in Rome (Germani, 2023). The general aim of the research was to evaluate how students perceive their teachers' (*de*)*motivating styles* and how these perceptions affect their psychological needs over time within the school context. The specific aim of the present study was to investigate the relationships between need-supportive and need-thwarting teaching, students' intrinsic motivation, and their intention to drop out. This is a cross-sectional quantitative analysis involving a convenience sample of 1,092 students (mean age = 15.70 years; 60.80% male; 39.20% female) from a high school. Students participated by completing a digital questionnaire distributed through the *Qualtrics* platform during school hours.

2.1. Measures

The questionnaire administered to the students included, in addition to questions related to sociodemographic aspects, the following scales:

- *Need-Supportive Teaching and Need-Thwarting Teaching:* these constructs were measured using a previously validated scale (Germani, 2023) based on teachers' motivational behaviors (Ahmadi et al., 2023). The scale evaluates the extent to which students perceive their teachers' interpersonal behaviors as either supportive of or obstructive to their psychological needs. The scale consists of two dimensions: *Need-Supportive Teaching* (Example item: "They try to understand my point of view"), and *Need-Thwarting Teaching* (Example item: "They interrupt me while I am speaking"). It includes a total of 18 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = very often). Students were asked to indicate how frequently the behaviors described in the statements occurred.
- *Intrinsic Motivation:* this construct was measured using the *intrinsic regulation* subscale of the Italian version of the Academic Motivation

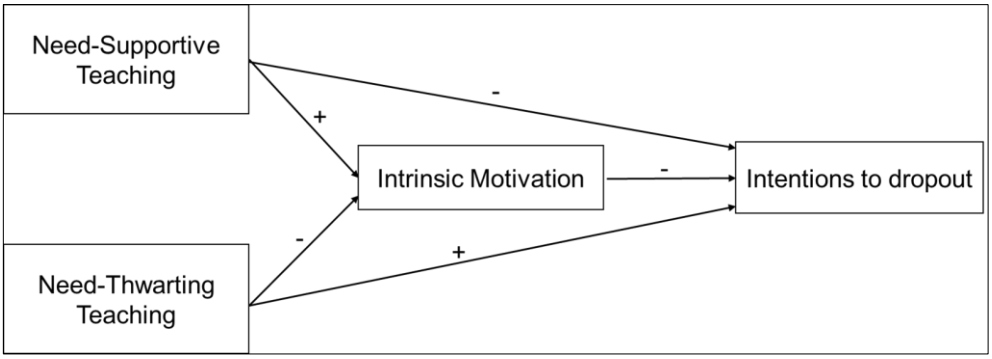
Scale (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2008). The subscale consists of 4 items (example item: "Because school allows me to continue studying topics that interest me") rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = not at all to 4 = very much). Students were asked to evaluate the extent to which each of the listed reasons for attending school corresponded to their personal motivations.

- *Intentions to Dropout:* this construct was measured using 3 items designed to assess students' intentions to persist in attending school rather than dropping out (example item: "I sometimes consider dropping out of school") (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011). Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

2.2. Data Analysis

The process of data analysis was carried out using a Path Analysis, assuming (as shown in the hypothesized model in Figure 2) that Need-Supportive Teaching increases intrinsic motivation and is also negatively and directly associated with fewer dropout intentions. Conversely, the model assumed that Need-Thwarting Teaching decreases intrinsic motivation and directly increases dropout intentions. Additionally, the direct association between intrinsic motivation and intentions to drop out was tested.

Fig. 2. Hypothesized model



Following the SDT framework, which posits that motivation can mediate the relationship between context and various outcomes, the model also examined the indirect effects of teaching style (supportive/thwarting) on dropout intentions as mediated by intrinsic motivation.

Descriptive and reliability analyses were conducted as the initial step. The

analytical model was estimated using the Maximum Likelihood method, with a significance level of p. < 0.05.

2.3. Results

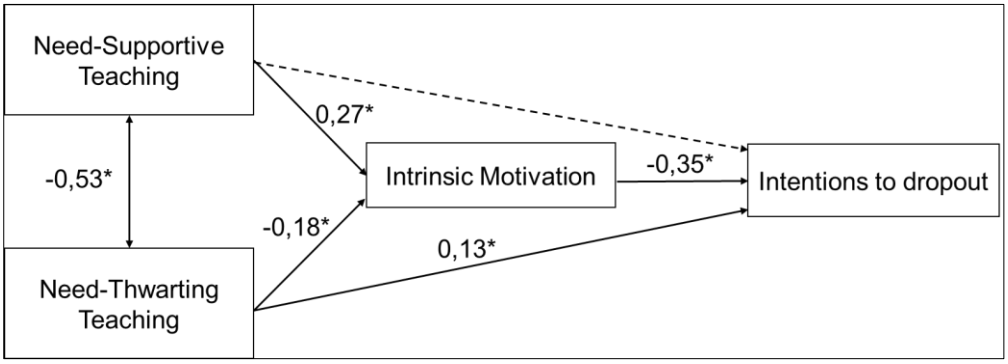
The descriptive and reliability statistics are presented in Table 1, including the mean, standard deviation (SD), and Cronbach's alpha (α) for each construct.

The model (Fig. 3) shows standardized (β) coefficients, and as we can see, all direct paths are significant except for the one between Need-Supportive Teaching and Intentions to Dropout.

Tab. 1. Descriptive and reliability statistics

Scale/dimension	Mean	SD	α
Need-Supportive Teaching	2,37	0,65	0,83
Need-Thwarting teaching	2,34	0,72	0,85
Intrinsic motivation	2,67	0,68	0,83
Intentions to dropout	1,75	0,86	0,86

Fig. 3. Direct paths. The dotted line indicates a non-statistically significant result. *$p < 0.001$.



Notably, while Need-Supportive Teaching does not show a significant direct association with dropout intentions, Need-Thwarting Teaching is directly and positively associated with dropout intentions. Additionally, intrinsic motivation is positively influenced by Need-Supportive Teaching and negatively impacted by Need-Thwarting Teaching. Intrinsic motivation also shows a direct and negative relationship with dropout intentions, meaning that students who are more intrinsically motivated have a lower chance or reduced tendency to

develop intentions to drop out of school. Regarding the indirect effects, results indicate that both Need-Supportive and Need-Thwarting Teaching styles indirectly influence dropout intentions through intrinsic motivation:

- Need-Supportive Teaching → Intrinsic Motivation → Intentions to dropout: β = -0,10 (p<0,001).
- Need-Thwarting Teaching → Intrinsic Motivation → Intentions to dropout: β = -0,06 (p<0,001).

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present paper addressed the critical issue of school dropout using the framework of Self-Determination Theory to understand the role of teachers in preventing this phenomenon. A key aspect is what teachers do and say to engage students in their learning. Therefore, the teaching style, which can be either motivating or demotivating, plays a central role.

Results showed that the teaching style adopted by teachers in the classroom is significantly associated with the interest and enjoyment students exhibit toward school and academic activities. Need-Supportive Teaching plays an important role, especially in fostering intrinsic motivation, which, as observed, contributes to reducing dropout intentions, even when it acts as a mediating factor. Building on the findings, this paper offers some practical and pedagogical insights to address school dropout. By emphasizing the role of teachers' behaviors in supporting or hindering students' intrinsic motivation, the results suggest several potential areas for intervention. For instance, teacher training programs focusing on motivational strategies could not only enhance teachers' ability to support students' psychological needs but also reduce need-thwarting behaviors (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Additionally, implementing systems for student feedback could help teachers adjust their methods in response to students' perceptions. By addressing these areas, educational institutions can foster a more supportive and effective teaching environment, reducing dropout intentions and enhancing students' learning success.

However, this study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. The research relied on a convenience sample, focusing on students from a general high school, whereas dropout rates are typically higher in vocational schools. Furthermore, only intrinsic motivation was examined, excluding other types of motivation that might have different impacts (Bureau et al., 2022; Howard et al., 2021). Moreover, future research should take a more comprehensive approach, exploring the combined roles of teachers, parents, and classmates in fulfilling

students' needs and motivation, to increase a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to students' overall school success.

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AN INVESTIGATION ABOUT THE RISK FACTORS OF SCHOOL DROPOUT IN CAMPANIA

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This study delves into the determinants of school dropout in Campania. According to the literature (Trinchero and Tordini, 2011; Batini and Bartolucci, 2016; Nuzzaci and Marcozzi, 2019; Rumberger, 2011; Lundetræ, 2011; Nakajima et al., 2018), there are many risk factors for school dropout. They can be traced back to individual, family, socioeconomic and institutional dimensions. As part of a PhD at the University of Salerno, an empirical investigation was conducted. It involved a sample of students, teachers and school managers from Campania schools where dropout rates are high. A mixed methodology was adopted (Creswell and Clark, 2011). It combines quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The former were collected through semi-structured questionnaires, adapted from validated tools (Batini and Bartolucci, 2016). Qualitative data were collected through interviews and focus groups. The final objective of the research is the design of targeted prevention interventions. The preliminary results of the descriptive analysis of the quantitative data highlight a significant divergence of perceptions between the actors involved. Students place greater responsibility on factors outside their control. While teachers and school leaders focus on the socioeconomic and family context of students.

descriptive analysis; school dropout; risk factors; prevention.

INTRODUCTION

School dropout is a complex phenomenon. It can be confused with others. This makes its definition difficult. The need to define school dropout in a precise and unambiguous manner is not only linked to a terminological issue, but to the