

Investigation of Stressors Teachers Face in Schools

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DOI: 10.26907/esd.16.3.16

Submitted: 20 April 2021; Accepted: 25 June 2021

Abstract

Teachers have to face many different stressful situations in schools. In this context serious attention has been paid, and much research has been carried out, to investigate the issue of potential stressors occurring in school or class environment. Although pre-service teacher training does not usually include training related to the development of the teachers' competence to solve stressful situations in lessons, as soon as teachers start their teaching career, they are automatically considered to be equipped with this competence. In the research, presented in this paper, the main goal was to identify the most frequent stressors that primary and secondary school teachers face in their everyday teaching. Two methods were used to collect necessary research data: a semi-structured interview with teachers, and observation of teachers during the lessons they taught. Based on the interview data analyses the following nine stressors were identified as the most frequent and most serious (in order): difficult students, mismatch between students' performance requirements and their abilities, disruptive behavior of students, inadequate student attention, social and emotional factors of the environment in which students live, use of mobile phones during lessons, overwork and fatigue of teachers, insufficient school equipment and lack of teaching aids, conflicts among students. The aim of the observation was to confirm in practice, the types of the stressors identified from the interview data. Analysis of the records from observations, confirmed some of the previously (in interviews) identified stressors and also identified some further stressors.

Keywords: stress, stressors, teachers, stressful situation, solving stressful situation.

Исследование факторов стресса, с которыми сталкиваются школьные учителя

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DOI: 10.26907/esd.16.3.16

Дата поступления: 20 апреля 2021; Дата принятия в печать: 25 июня 2021

Аннотация

Учителям приходится сталкиваться в школе с различными стрессовыми ситуациями. В этой связи проведено много исследований, направленных на изучение потенциальных факторов стресса, присутствующих в школьной среде. Как правило, подготовка учителей не подразумевает развитие компетенций по разрешению стрессовых ситуаций на уроке. Однако, как только учителя начинают свою профессиональную карьеру, в список их навыков и умений автоматически включается и данная компетенция. Цель настоящего исследования – определить самые распространенные факторы стресса, с которыми сталкиваются учителя начальной и средней школы в своей повседневной преподавательской деятельности. Для сбора данных были использованы два метода: полуструктурированное интервью и наблюдения учителей во время их занятий. На основе данных, полученных в ходе интервью, были определены девять наиболее распространенных и серьезных факторов стресса: трудные ученики, несоответствие между требованиями к успеваемости учащихся и их способностями, деструктивное поведение учеников, недостаточное внимание учащихся, социальные и эмоциональные факторы среды, в которой живут учащиеся, использование мобильных телефонов во время занятий, чрезмерная нагрузка и усталость учителей, недостаточное материально-техническое обеспечение и отсутствие учебно-методических материалов, конфликты между учениками (указано в иерархическом порядке). Наблюдение было проведено с целью подтвердить на практике типы стрессоров, выявленных в ходе интервью. Анализ записей наблюдения подтвердил некоторые стрессоры, выявленные ранее, а также определил новые факторы стресса.

Ключевые слова: стресс, факторы стресса, учителя, стрессовая ситуация, разрешение стрессовой ситуации.

Introduction

Work-related stress can be viewed as an imbalance between work demands and personal or environmental (working conditions, facilities) resources at work. Workers can experience stress when the work demands/requirements placed on them do not match their support at work, their knowledge, skills or ability to cope with work (Kyriacou, 2001). Teachers are not an exception. They face many different stressful situations every day in schools (Kozík, Kuna & Vanek, 2016). Though the stressful situation can follow various causes, in relation to teacher professional performance, so-called 'response-based stress situations' are more significant (Butler, 2003). In this context serious attention has been paid, and much research has been carried out, to investigate the issue of potential stressors occurring in school or class environment (Petlák, & Baranovská, 2016; Scrivener, 2012). However, pre-service teacher training does not usually include any training related to the development of their competence to solve stressful situations in lessons. But as soon as teachers start their teaching career, they are automatically considered to have acquired

this competence. Moreover, different research studies also show why it is so important to deal with this issue. Their authors have proved existence of a strong link between working conditions and occupational stress (Collie, Shapka & Perry, 2012; Descrumaux et al., 2015; Klassen et al., 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016).

When thinking about the stressors teachers face, people often picture a hectic scene inside a disruptive classroom. But, maintaining classroom discipline is only one of the factors that cause teachers stress, and it is not even the most common stressor. In general, it can metaphorically be considered to be the top of the iceberg in relation to teachers' stressors (Vaško, 2017).

A unique international comparative survey about teaching and learning environments, teachers and their backgrounds, professional development, beliefs and attitudes about teaching at schools, generally known as TALIS (The Teaching and Learning International Survey), was initiated and sponsored by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It was first administered in 2008 and then in 2013 and 2018. The survey carried out in 2018 asked teachers, for the first time, to what extent they experience stress in their work. The survey identified sources of teachers' stress related to three areas:

- sources related to workload (having too much administrative work – 49 % of teachers; having too much work in marking/grading the learners – 41 %; having too much work in lesson preparation – 33 %; having to teach too many lessons – 28 %; having extra duties due to absent teachers - 25 %);

- sources related to student behaviour (being held responsible for students' achievement – 44 %; maintaining classroom discipline – 38 %; being intimidated or verbally abused by students - 15 %);

- sources related to responsiveness to stakeholders (keeping up with changing requirements from local and national authorities – 41%; addressing parents' concerns – 34 %; modifying lessons for students with special needs – 31 %).

On average across the OECD, 18 % of teachers report experiencing a great deal of stress in their work. But of course, there is a great of variation across the countries surveyed (OECD, 2020). Besides that, the study also found other differences across the results. As examples of the most significant were:

- Female teachers experience stress a lot more frequently than their male peers (20% of female teachers compared to 15% of male teachers).

- Teachers under 30 reported experiencing stress a lot more often than teachers aged 50 and above 50 (20 % of teachers under 30 compared to 15 % teachers of 50 and above).

- Teachers working in schools in city areas are more likely to report experiencing stress than teachers in schools in villages and rural areas.

Research problem

The main goal of the research was to find out which situations lower secondary school teachers in Slovakia consider to be stressing for them and in this way to identify the most frequent stressors they face in their everyday teaching. To collect the necessary research data two research methods were used. One of them was a semi-structured interview of teachers and the other one was direct qualitative observation of teachers during the lessons they taught.

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to find out which specific situations the teachers perceive to be stressful for them. As the data collection in this part of the research was based on the teachers' opinions and experiences, the findings derived from them might not be adequate, due to the subjective views of the teachers about the assessed situations. Thus, this part of the research was by observation in which the same teachers, ie. the interviewed teachers, were observed during some of their lessons.

The purpose of the direct qualitative observations of the teachers' performance during the lessons was to compare the findings from the interviews with their real teaching the classes. During the observation, attention was paid to the ways the teachers cope with potential stressful situations they experience while teaching. To eliminate subjectivism of the findings from the first part of the research, the set of the stressors identified in interviewing the teachers was compared with teacher behaviour during the lessons they taught. In this paper we present the data collected in the second part of the research in more detail.

Concept and methodology of the presented research

The research sample consisted of 11 lower secondary school teachers from three different towns (four from Nitra, five from Levice, and two from Čachtice). Two of them were novice teachers with less than five years' experience, five of them were teachers with between five- and ten-years' experience, and four were teachers with a long experience (18, 20, 23 and over 30 years of teaching). The sample, on the average, had about 11 years of teaching experience. Of the 11 teachers, 10 were females and only one was a male. Originally 20 teachers were asked to participate in the planned research but nine of them refused to be involved, mainly because of the second part of the research within which they were to be observed.

Within the semi-structured interviews carried out during the first part of the research, all teachers included in the sample were given a series of questions asking them to list the most frequent stressors they face in a classroom. The key questions in the interviews were:

- What do you consider to be the most stressful situation while teaching the class?
- Do you think your colleagues tend to experience the same problems?
- Can you recall any specific stressful situation you have recently faced in a class?

Could you describe it in more detail, step-by-step?

- What, in your opinion, are the most frequent triggers of stressful situations?
- Do you think you can cope with stressful situations you face in classrooms? How do you cope with them?
- Do you think the teacher training institution you graduated from has prepared you for coping with stressful situations?
- Have you ever reflected on what happened in the class?

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Subsequently the transcripts of the interviews were analysed in a multistage process during which the processed information and data were categorized and tabulated together with frequency of their occurrence.

Based on the interview data analyses of the subjective teachers' opinions and experiences, the following nine stressors were identified in descending order of the most frequent and most serious:

- difficult students,
- mismatch between students' performance requirements and their abilities,
- disruptive behaviour of students,
- inadequate student attention,
- social and emotional factors of the environment in which students live,
- use of mobile phones during lessons,
- overwork and fatigue of teachers,
- insufficient school equipment and lack of teaching aids,
- conflicts among students.

However, a question was whether the situations reported and described in the interviews were identical with the situations the teachers experienced while teaching. For this reason, in the second part of the research, the teachers were observed so as to

compare findings from observations with the findings from the interviews. So, the research question in this part of the research was whether the situations which were described in the interviews were identical with the situations recorded while observing the teachers. The aim of the observation was to find out whether the types of stressors observed during the lessons coincide with the stressors reported by the teachers in the interviews. To identify the issues which cause stress to teachers during lessons we designed special observation sheets devoted to learners' and teachers' behaviour. The sheet was divided into three columns in which different data related to the category of *Student*, *Stimuli* and *Teacher* were recorded in narrative form.

Within the category of *Student*, the description of the undesirable situations and students' activities and behaviour in the situations were recorded. The category was divided into two subcategories:

- *Description of misbehaviour/stressful situation*: Description of the event identified as a stressor for the teacher while teaching, provision of a general framework of the whole incident.

- *What happened*: Description of what the students were doing, what was their behaviour like in the recorded situation or event.

The category *Stimuli* was also divided into two subcategories, within which the aim was to describe briefly events which elicited the undesirable situation:

- *What triggered the situation*: Description of the reasons which made the teacher to feel stressed out (on the basis of the findings resulted from the interviews this could have been, for example, disruptive behaviour of students, lack of time to prepare for the lesson or dysfunctional lesson plan).

- *When it happened*: Description of the time and phase of the lesson the event (stressful situation) occurred (for example, shortly before the end of the lesson or at the beginning of the lesson) and what were the students and the teacher doing at that moment.

In the category *Teacher* (re)acting of the teacher to manage and cope with the stressful situation was recorded and the column was also divided into two subcategories:

- *Response*: Description of the teacher's steps and behaviour occurring in response to the potentially stressful event (description of the acts, gestures, pitch and tone of their voice, from which one can make assumptions about the feelings and emotional status of the teacher), evaluation of the teacher's ability to cope with the situation or the used strategy, whether they were relevant and reasonable in managing the stress or not.

- *Solution/Results of the solution*: Comparison of the situation in a classroom at the beginning of the stressful event with the situation after the teacher's intervention, considering whether the teacher succeeded or not to cope with the stressor or to manage the situation successfully or whether they failed, considering other possible, alternative approaches that the teacher could have taken in order to cope with the stressful events.

Table 1. Example of the observation sheet

STUDENT		STIMULI		TEACHER	
Description of misbehaviour/stressful situation	What happened?	What triggered the situation?	When it happened?	Response	Solution/Results of the solution

Research results and their discussion

Analysis of the observation records confirmed some of the previously identified (in interviews) stressors but on the other hand, identified some further stressors. In general, the teachers believed themselves to be able to cope with stressful situations by taking necessary problem-focused coping strategies. However, while observing, as well as while analysing the notes recorded in the observation sheets, we noticed that many stressful situations were left unsolved. The teachers did not cope with the stressful situations: they either ignored stressors or could not cope with them. But we also have to acknowledge, that some teachers took very efficient steps in order to manage stressful situations. These teachers seemed to be more experienced and have already acquired deeper understanding of class relationships, wider range of class management procedures, techniques, and routines. Novice teachers were far more likely to ignore stressful situations and questioned their knowledge of instructional content. Very frequently, teachers dealt with such issues as interruptions or disruptions in their lessons, lack of attention, lack of interest and motivation of students, verbally abusive behaviour of students, time pressure and students' passivity. Many stressful situations were caused by difficult (integrated) students who had been diagnosed with emotional or behavioural disorders, students discipline problems and their disruptive behaviour and, on the part of the teachers, by inadequate classroom management techniques which were used to intervene in stressful situations and contribute to their solutions. In a case of a novice teacher one stressful situation recorded was due to the teachers' inability to interact effectively with a partially deaf student. At this point we should also mention that teachers caused several of the observed stressful situations due to their inadequate reactions or responses to students' behaviour or by lack of teachers' skills needed to work with students efficiently. On the other hand, some teachers have mastered effective classroom managerial techniques at a very high level and they have been able to manage stressful situations very well. It has been shown, that highest priority stressor is associated with an inadequate, abusive or intimidating behaviour of difficult (integrated) students.

To summarize the findings of the observations, we can say that the most significant stressors which triggered the stressful situations were:

- difficult students,
- disruptive behaviour,
- inadequate and inefficient use of class management techniques and inadequate teacher reactions,
- group-work management,
- inattentive and shy students,
- working with integrated (disabled or SEN) students.

Difficult students

The most frequent stressor appears to be interaction with difficult students. We recorded situations in which difficult students who were suffering from behavioural disorders were verbally attacking teachers or other students, but the majority of the teachers we observed ignored these incidents. This is a contradicting finding as almost all teachers interviewed stated they took actions in order to stop or prevent such situations. Even though some teachers were trying to control the situations, they eventually gave up their effort and ignored inappropriate students' behaviour. A 7th grade student diagnosed with ADHD can be mentioned as an example of this issue. He was constantly disrupting classwork and abusing various situations. Even though the teaching staff had agreed not to allow him to go to the toilet during the lesson, the teacher lost her patience and she allowed him to go there. He remained there until the end of the lesson so the atmosphere

in the classroom improved and the disruptions stopped. We believe that such coping strategy was not appropriate since the teacher did not know what the student could do outside the classroom or where he could go.

Another other example of this kind of the situation was another difficult student with the same diagnosis of ADHD, a student of the 8th grade who had a quarrel with his female schoolmate. We (the observer and the teacher) did not know what triggered their conflict, but it escalated and the student left the classroom yelling swear words and slammed the door. Everybody was surprised by his behaviour. Even the teacher was in a slight shock and did not take any steps to control the situation. She could have been scared of the student unpredictable and impulsive behaviour. But still, she sent another student to find the one who had left. However, the incident did not have any consequences for the students involved. The teacher just asked the student to come to her office as she wanted to speak to him during the break which followed the lesson.

One more example of a difficult student was a student in the 8th grade. Even though the teacher coped with his intentional misbehaviour, she told us that other members of the teaching staff gave up their efforts and they simply decided to treat him as other students were treated and engage the student in activities and discussions as the other students were. As we were told, teachers did not care whether the student was working or not, they ignored him so as to avoid the additional problems he caused. Assessment of his school achievements was not good enough to enable him to transfer to the next grade, so it looked like he would have to retake the 8th class. But his teachers wanted him to finish the lower secondary school attendance and let him study at upper-secondary school, so they were grading him so that he could pass. In this stressful situation, the teacher sat next to him in order to calm him down and stop his disruptive behaviour. This is exactly what Scrivener (2012) recommends when one student or a number of students in one part of the classroom starts being disruptive; to sit down next to the student wordlessly, without any shouting or mentoring, simply going over to the student and sit next to them, and then continue the lesson from there as if nothing unusual happened. When we looked at the student's social background we could see that he was living with his grandmother. As we were told by the class teacher, the grandmother was the person responsible for his upbringing and education. Considering her advanced age, she was not able to give him proper upbringing and satisfy all his social and material needs. The boy was living in an economically disadvantaged environment, in poverty, without his parents. These factors certainly have contributed to his difficult, disturbed behaviour. It is not easy to prove the relationship between difficult behaviour and inappropriate parenting, even though Sutherland points out that children with difficult temperament tended to elicit maladaptive parenting, leading to later behavioural deviance (Sutherland & Oswald, 2005).

Disruptive behaviour, inadequate and inefficient use of class and group-work management

As mentioned above, serious disruptive behaviour is often associated with difficult students. Smaller discipline problems manifested by disturbances may, however, be caused by the interplay of various factors. For example, we observed a situation in which a difficult student influenced another student sitting next to him to disturb the lesson. The inappropriate seating arrangement meant that they were disturbing others and many students did not work. Due to these conditions, the class was perceived as the difficult one to control and the teaching staff did not want to teach there. As Sutherland states (Sutherland & Oswald, 2005) a student may disrupt class, thereby escaping or avoiding academic instruction, and the teacher may subsequently provide less academic instruction

to this student and make fewer academic demands in order to escape or avoid aversive interactions.

Another example of the kind of similar disruptive behaviour was four male students in the 7th grade who did not bring their school things regularly and were refusing to work during lessons. The teacher tried both liberal and authoritative approaches to make them cooperate with her. However, they were not willing to interact and tried to ridicule her. As a consequence, the teacher gave up her efforts and shifted her attention to students who were willing to work and interact with her. The four students were sitting at the back of the classroom next to each other. This seating arrangement helped them interact with each other and influenced their behaviour aimed at disrupting the teacher's and other classmates' work. Inappropriate class management techniques and inappropriate seating arrangement caused the lesson to be less efficient and successful.

Disruptive behaviour is an element which often accompanies group-work activities. We could observe this in the 7th grade where group discussion turned into a disruptive behaviour of its members. They started to chat about things which were not related to the task and to what was going on in the lesson. The problem-solving activity which was designed by the teacher ran out of control and students started to chat with each other. Some of them even moved around the classroom without any permission from the teacher. In this case, the groups were formed randomly; the teacher let students to decide on who they would like to work with in groups. This situation would require more precise instructions and setting stricter rules to be followed in order to avoid chaos. Better class management would definitely prevent the occurrence of the situation.

Inattentive and shy students

Students who are passive and shy are usually afraid to speak and are not willing to interact and cooperate with teachers. In the 7th grade, the students were supposed to retell a story in English on the basis of its synopsis. They, however, did not want to speak and they were using only ungrammatical fragments of sentences to answer the teacher's questions. The teacher even introduced a short video, mentioned interesting facts in order to help his students to speak. Much effort and the teacher's input was in vain. Despite considerable effort, students remained silent and not willing to interact. As we have mentioned, a series of factors may influence the occurrence of stressful situations. In this case, we expect, there could have been a mismatch between the assignment and students' abilities, but we think such a scenario is less probable.

A similar scenario was been observed in the 8th grade, when students were asked to speak about the art and describe a portrait. The teacher tried hard to motivate them, but they used only incomplete sentences and were not at all active. We were told that the class was considered to be below average in their achievements. Other aspects that could have had impact on the students were the time of the lesson and curriculum content. The lesson was scheduled to be 5th in the timetable, so the students were tired and their attention was naturally lowered around noon. Moreover, we were told that the students were not interested in art or painting, so it was difficult for them to talk about the topic. The teacher admitted that he felt deeply disappointed, because he invested a lot of energy into the lesson preparation and the students' outcomes were not at all satisfactory for him.

Coping strategies are broadly divided into emotion focused and problem focused coping strategies. Emotion focused coping with a situation involves trying to reduce the negative emotional responses associated with stress, such as embarrassment, fear, anxiety, depression, excitement and frustration. This may be the only realistic option when the source of stress is outside the person's control. Problem focused coping targets the causes of the stress in practical ways which tackle the problem or stressful situation

that is causing the stress, consequently directly reducing the stress (Nazeer & Zubair, 2015). Teachers do not have the possibility to select emotion focused strategies while teaching. They have to tackle the problem in order to be able to proceed in the lesson. On the other hand, even problem focused coping strategies sometimes cannot be tackled in a satisfactory way. Even though teachers are trying hard, there can always be students or situations which are not easily to be changed or coped with. Interaction with shy students is always problematic. It certainly triggers stress in teachers if they are expected to meet certain standards with such students and they even may occur under the time pressure if the pace of lessons is slower than expected and planned.

Working with integrated (disabled and SEN) students

We did not record a stressful situation which would be related to disabled students in the answers from interviews. But the observations showed, that work with these students represents a significant potential stressor for teachers. As already mentioned, there was a female student in the 5th grade who was partially deaf and had great difficulty in hearing instructions. She was an integrated student and we felt that she was socially rejected by her peers. Nobody wanted to sit next to her and nobody talked to her. The novice teacher introduced activities based on the previous listening. She played the recording and then she set the limited time for students to finish exercises in their books. Then, she started to ask students individually about their solutions (completion of exercises). The first student asked was the disabled girl who was not able to complete the task because she could not hear the recording clearly. She also had speech problems, so it was difficult to understand what she said. The teacher realized what was happening only after other students reminded her that the girl was handicapped. The situation (behaviour of the teacher) elicited an awkward feeling in the class as the teacher did not feel sorry either for the girl or for her own behaviour; she just shifted her attention to other students. It appeared that the teacher wanted to avoid the stressful situation and so did not make any comment about it. On the other hand, the students definitely noticed the teacher expressions. After the lesson, we were told that other teachers were also not able to involve the student properly into learning activities. The girl was tested individually and teachers tried to involve her just in a few activities. This is a big problem in Slovak schools as they do not employ sufficient teaching assistants, and subject teachers blame the system. Because they do not have enough time to deal with such students, the situation escalates as such an approach exacerbates the situation and social isolation of disabled students integrated in regular schools.

According to Konza (2008) teachers' resistance reflects a lack of confidence in their own instructional methodologies, and in the quality and amount of support offered to them. This leads to a reluctance to integrate any students who place additional demands on them. Many teachers were trained in the period when mandatory special education modules were not included in their pre-service training. They do not see themselves as having the skills to teach students with widely varying abilities, nor do they have the desire to do so. But as the example of the novice teacher presented above shows, to cope with the work with integrated disabled students remains even now a stressor for teachers. Neither does the situation does seem to be different for teachers who studied more recently. Inadequate training of future teachers was also reported in the teacher interviews. All of them openly expressed the view that higher education studies did not prepare them for what they face and experience in schools. The above case clearly shows that teachers were unwilling to engage the deaf female student in their lessons and they did not know how to approach her. Instead of making any effort, they chose to ignore her. They decided not to experience stress caused by not having relevant competences and skills.

Other discipline problems

Another phenomenon causing stress were problems connected with cell-phones. Many schools applied a policy that students are not allowed to use their mobile phones during lessons. Some teachers may find using these devices stressful, because they may distract students' attention, and students stop paying attention to what is going on in lessons. Ringing phones may divert students' attention from the study material and completion of activities in the lesson. Moreover, these electronic devices can easily be misused for cheating. Such a situation occurred in the 9th grade and in consequence, students did not pay attention to what the teacher was explaining and the topic had to be explained again. Then, there was insufficient time for all the activities which the teacher planned to do with the students and he felt stressed under the time pressure. The student whose cell-phone was ringing was asked to switch it off and put it into her schoolbag. But she left the phone on her desk and it was not clear whether she turned it off or not. The teacher could have prevented such stressful situations by making students aware of the behaviour rules during lessons and by strictly insisting on obeying the rules agreed.

Other discipline problems were connected with novice teachers. Not having developed and acquired necessary routines and competences, these teachers may easily find themselves in a stressful situation. Due to their lack of experience and inappropriate use of class management techniques students may not respect them or be disruptive in their lessons. This occurred in the 9th grade where students remained disruptive after the teacher entered the classroom; they behaved as if they did not notice their teacher was there. The teacher was not able to discipline them and gain the necessary amount of respect and attention, even though she tried to address individual students.

In another class students did not prepare for the lesson. They did not write their homework assignments – a short essay. The lesson was planned to use the essays and these should have been read and discussed. It was evident that the teacher was angry, but she tried to hide it. She improvised, so the students were doing exercises from their Work-books. At the end of the lesson, the teacher told the students that each of them would be given the grade 5 (fail). Her behaviour could be understood as a certain kind of revenge or punishment which for sure neither improved the relationship of the students with their teacher nor motivated the students to work harder and love the subject. However, as Tarman (2016) states, discipline is not consistent with such forms of punishment as isolation, removal, denial of privileges, or corporal punishment. In fact, punishment is viewed as a poor form of discipline since it stresses only what not to do rather than teaching what to do.

Conclusion

The research was carried out before the Corona pandemic started. This means the stressors the teachers faced were studied in relation to face-to-face teaching. Under the Corona virus conditions, education was shifted on-line – a space without any personal contacts between teacher and students. It could therefore be assumed that a lot of stressors disappeared in the on-line teaching. But the question is whether they really disappeared. As experience with on-line education shows, the opposite is true – a lot of new stressors have appeared, and not only the technical stressors. Using new technology platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, which many teachers had never used before, to simulate a normal teaching process and school operation, posed a lot of challenges, some out of the teachers' control. At the same time, the very sudden and unexpected shift to distance teaching and learning has placed an unprecedented type of stress on teachers to adapt, quickly, their curricula into an on-line format accessible for all their students. Additionally, this work stress has been multiplied by the needs of many

teachers to manage their homes (for example, teaching and feeding their own children, helping aging parents, arranging their homes to become home-offices and many others).

In America in the years before the Covid-19 pandemic, according Goldring et al. (2014) about 8% of public-school teachers were leaving the profession annually, either via retirement or attrition. According to the results of a survey carried out by the RAND Corporation (an American non-profit research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges) almost half (44%) of the American public-school teachers who voluntarily stopped teaching during COVID-19 and before their scheduled retirement cited the pandemic as the primary reason for their exit (Diliberti, Schwartz, Grant, 2021). The Covid pandemic seems to have exacerbated what were high stress levels pre-pandemic by forcing teacher to, among other things, work more hours and navigate an unfamiliar remote environment, often with frequent technical problems. A very interesting finding of the survey, was that stress in general is given, almost twice as frequently as insufficient pay, as the reason for leaving public school teaching early. This is corroborated by the fact that a majority of early leavers went on to take jobs with either less or around equal pay. Moreover, three in ten went on to work at a job with no health insurance or retirement benefits. About three in ten of the teacher leavers who are currently employed hold a non-education related job, three in ten have a different type of teaching position, and the rest are non-teaching education jobs.

In Slovakia the number of students enrolling in programs to become teachers has fallen over the past decade. It is too soon to tell whether Covid-19 will result in a further fall and whether, it will also increase the overall number of teachers leaving the profession. But even if some pandemic-related problems may eventually fade, the persistent structural stressors will still remain and they will likely outlast the pandemic unless there are changes to the teaching profession (decreasing the amount of administrative work, lesson preparation, number of lessons per week and number of students in classes, and others).

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract N° APVV-17-0071 and VEGA 1/0062/19.

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