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Teacher at the Center of Attention – Subjective Perception of Difficulty and Satisfaction of Elementary and Kindergarten Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This article is aimed at the teaching profession and describing partial outcomes of subjective perception of workload and satisfaction of educators. The research uses the measurement tools Assessment scale: Perception of the burden of work activities and Life satisfaction questionnaire. The paper is focused on four dimensions – the subjective perception of workload related to the teaching process, related to the extracurricular activities, satisfaction with the job and satisfaction with one's free time. The research sample consisted of 874 Slovak teachers (232 in kindergarten, 411 in elementary school, 219 in leadership position, 12 “other”). The workload is perceived as a slight burden in the teaching process ($\bar{x} = 2.057$), but also outside of it ($\bar{x} = 2.040$). In general, teachers are satisfied with their jobs ($\bar{x} = 4.787$) and impartial towards their personal free time ($\bar{x} = 4.313$). In some areas there was a significant difference between kindergarten and elementary educators in perception of difficulty. Elementary educators deem the workload as more distressing. A significant difference was also demonstrated between the perception of satisfaction with free time between kindergarten teachers, primary education teachers and teachers in management positions, with kindergarten teachers being more satisfied. Our findings point to the need to differentiate the actions of teachers at different levels of education, in their job positions, and to provide them with support for their work well-being and satisfaction.

1. Introduction

Historically, the teaching profession came to the forefront and became the centre of interest after the 1970s-1990s. In that period, after the onslaught of changes, the teaching profession suffered a crisis in the form of a period of deprofessionalization, caused by the society's criticism (also from practice), directed at insufficient preparation of graduates for the rapid economic development. Since the 1990s, the view of the teacher role has been changing, a new professional identity has been sought, and the teacher has been placed in the main position within building a learning society. People's understanding of the word education is changing and the concept of lifelong learning is

being promoted (more on lifelong learning strategies in Slovakia in *Organization and management: Lifelong learning strategy*). Despite the desire for change, during the crisis it became apparent that there are persistent extrinsic issues of the teaching profession which have been threatening it until present: aging of the teaching staff, feminization of the profession, lack of qualified teachers, low salary, unattractiveness of the profession, impossibility of career growth or high demands on the profession (more Kasáčová, 2009; Kasáčová et al., 2009, pp. 10–13; Rovňanová, 2015). Nowadays, education, not only in Slovakia, is on the verge of new possibilities and opportunities. This forces us to perceive pedagogy and the teaching



profession in a new way. Researches on teachers and education in general, addresses questions aimed at improving the conditions of teachers and the quality of their education, with an emphasis on gradual innovation in this day and age.

As is mentioned above, various requirements are placed on teachers, as participants of building a learning society. "Teachers Matter" project, under the auspices of the OECD, deals with these requirements, as well as various other topics, in the form of comprehensive studies on the teaching profession. The goal is to perceive the teaching profession and describe its specifics, as well as to understand the impact teachers have on the education of individuals, but also on society as a whole. In this context, the "Teachers Matter" project, under the auspices of OECD describes four levels of requirements placed on teachers: a. the level of individual students: initiate the teaching process and classroom management, effective response to the individual educational needs of students, integration of formative and summative assessment. b. class level: teaching in multicultural classes, innovative cross-curricular emphasis, integration of students with special needs. c. school ranking: cooperation and planning in teams, evaluation and planning of systematic improvement, use of ICT in teaching and administration, management and leadership. d. the level of parents and the broader environment: providing professional advice to parents, building a community for education (OECD, 2005a, 2005b).

From a scientific point of view, all the above-mentioned theories and findings are the results of pedeutological research within the teaching profession. In general, we can talk about the division of said research to specific areas - pedagogical, psychological and sociological. In the last twenty years, in the pedagogical research of teachers, topics are generally related to: motivation to study teaching and the performance of the teaching profession, expectations of students from their studies and the

educational needs of student teachers, opinions of teachers on teaching, pupils and other phenomena associated with the job, methods and forms of work used by teachers, competencies and pedagogical abilities of the teachers and students, the teacher's concept of teaching, reflection and self-reflection, the teacher's pedagogical communication, the teacher's professionographic research, the expectations of teachers, society and school management from continuous education (Kasáčová, 2009, pp. 12–13).

Among the most frequent, within the framework of psychological researches on teachers, we include, for example: typology of the teacher and the personal character of the teacher, professional satisfaction, creativity of the teacher, critical thinking of teachers, stress and risk factors, feminization, attitudes towards various phenomena (personal and professional), socio-psychological phenomena and relationships of teachers (Kasáčová, 2009, pp. 13). A detailed overview of pedeutological research, in all three areas, was processed as a part of the publication by Cabanová (2010).

Slovakia is currently facing another challenge, in the form of the upcoming school reform. The purpose of ascertaining the satisfaction and subjective perception of the workload difficulty among teachers is to identify the current state and risk areas, which could be the subject of discussion and improvement in accordance with the upcoming reform. The main goal is to point out the current state of teachers in Slovakia, considering their satisfaction and subjective difficulty and to identify and highlight areas that should be the subject of discussions to improve conditions for teachers.

We set the eight research questions: To what extent do teachers perceive the difficulty associated with the teaching process? To what extent do teachers perceive the difficulty associated with extracurricular activities? To what extent are teachers satisfied with their work? To what extent are teachers satisfied with their free time? Which activities are significantly



different between kindergarten and primary school teachers, within subjective perception of workload? Is there a significant difference between teachers' satisfaction with their free time and the teachers' place of work (kindergarten, primary school, leadership position)? Is there a significant relationship between the perceived burden of work activities and job satisfaction? Is there a significant relationship between the perceived burden of extracurricular activities and satisfaction with free time?

2. Literature Review

Research that concentrates on the above-mentioned areas (pedagogical, psychological and sociological) includes one by the author Telef (2011), where it was shown that life satisfaction is higher among secondary school teachers rather than among elementary school teachers, and the perception of personal success for teachers with 20-25 years of experience is higher than for teachers with 1-5 years of experience. Another research by Marinette and Hui (2021) points out that teachers' participation in decision-making is the best predictor of teachers' job satisfaction and the second predictor in order is motivation. They also show that school environment strongly correlates with teacher job satisfaction. Further research by Toropov et al. (2021) aims to investigate the relationships between teacher job satisfaction, school working conditions and personality characteristics of 8th grade mathematics teachers in Sweden. They found that teachers who have the opportunity for professional development and are considered to be more efficient showed higher levels of job satisfaction. They point to a significant correlation between job satisfaction and working conditions at school.

In Slovakia, Kasáčová et al. (2022) compiled a review study based on the analysis of 48 foreign studies, in which she paid attention to the description of factors affecting the job satisfaction or dissatisfaction of teachers. Based on the analysis of

those selected studies, they mention salary, social evaluation, administrative burden and working conditions as factors of job dissatisfaction. In addition to the aforementioned factors, they associate job dissatisfaction with burnout syndrome. On the contrary, they attribute job satisfaction to the quality of school leadership and management, the quality of the working environment and the educational program. They also point out that the work environment significantly influences teachers' motivation.

Professional activities closely related to the job satisfaction of teachers were processed in the professionography by Kasáčová et al. (2011). The output presents a picture of the professional activities that are at the heart of the teaching profession. The bottom line is that the teaching profession differs significantly from other professions in terms of the demands placed on the job performance. The work consists not only of the direct activity of the teacher during the lessons, but also of the preparation for this activity outside of working hours, which directly affects their private life and subsequently life and work satisfaction. The study by Kreuzfeld et al. (2022) demonstrated that teachers who work more than 45 hours per week suffer more often from inability to recover (46%) and emotional exhaustion (32%) than teachers who work less than 40 hours per week. Also pointing at the alarming fact that a substantial part of teachers (36%) work longer per week than allowed by European guidelines (> 48 hours per week). Also important is the differentiation of the positions held by teachers in the school and the grades at which they operate. These factors are also related to professional activities and time demands. In the last TALIS measurement (NÚCEM, 2019) it was shown that 89% of teachers in the Slovak Republic (95% of principals) are overall satisfied with their work (OECD average 90% teachers; 95% principals), 80% of teachers in the Slovak Republic (73% of principals) are satisfied with the conditions in the contract (except salary) (OECD



average 66% teachers; 66% principals) and 18% of teachers in Slovakia (23% principals) are satisfied with their salaries (OECD average 39% teachers; 47% principals).

3. Methods

The research was conducted through the online distribution of a questionnaire that measured two constructs – subjective perception of difficulty and teachers' satisfaction. The measurement tool Assessment scale: Perception of the burden of work activities (Kasáčová, Babiaková, et al., 2022) was used to measure the first construct, the subjective perception of the burden: dimension "with regard to the teaching process" (5 items), dimension "with regard to activities outside the classroom" (5 items). Based on scale: 1 – no burden; 4 – unbearable burden; 0 does not concern me.

To measure the second construct *teacher satisfaction* was used Life satisfaction questionnaire (Fahrenberg et al., 2001): dimension "satisfaction with work" (6 items), dimension "satisfaction with one's free time" (6 items). Based on scale: 1 – very dissatisfied; 7 very satisfied. The questionnaire was administered via an online platform – teachers' email boxes and JASP program was used for statistical processing.

4. Results and Discussion

Subjectively perceived difficulty among teachers

Based on our research, which involved 874 teachers (232 in kindergarten, 411 in primary school, 219 teachers in management positions (vice principal, principal) and 12 teachers were categorized as "other"), we found that teachers perceive activities connected with the teaching process as slightly burdensome ($\bar{x} = 2.057$), as well as activities associated with work outside of class ($\bar{x} = 2.040$).

If we look at the results separately, taking into account the teachers' place of work (kindergarten and elementary school), the average for the perception of the difficulty was as follows: in the area of workload

"activities connected with the teaching process" for kindergarten teachers ($\bar{x} = 1.905$) and for elementary school teachers ($\bar{x} = 2.127$), in the area of workload "activities connected with extracurricular activities" for kindergarten teachers ($\bar{x} = 1.902$) and for primary school teachers ($\bar{x} = 2.127$).

Subsequently, we analysed the results and defined which specific activities are more burdensome for primary school teachers than for kindergarten teachers. Significant differences ($p < .001$) in the perception of burden appeared in the following activities: planning and designing the educational process, ensuring conditions and didactic aids, activation and motivation of pupils, resolving conflicts in the classroom, activities related to children's safety and children's self-care, activities related to the management of the library, chronicle and website.

Satisfaction among teachers

When determining the level of satisfaction, we found that teachers are rather satisfied with their work ($\bar{x} = 4.787$), but they could not express either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their free time and held a neutral attitude ($\bar{x} = 4.313$). When comparing the level of satisfaction with regards to the teachers' workplace (kindergarten and elementary school), we found that kindergarten teachers show a higher level of satisfaction ($\bar{x} = 4.617$) than elementary school teachers ($\bar{x} = 4.203$) in the satisfaction with their free time. When comparing teachers in leadership positions to primary school and kindergarten educators, we found that there is a significant difference ($p < .001$) between satisfaction with their free time for kindergarten teachers ($\bar{x} = 4.617$) and teachers holding management positions ($\bar{x} = 4.166$). In this context the Table 1 below presents evaluated differences through the ANOVA analysis, between variables: satisfaction with free time and position of teachers (kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers, leadership position teachers). ANOVA analysis of variance for one factor showed a significant



difference between the position of teachers on their satisfaction with free time ($F(2, 859) = 8.752$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.020$).

Table 1: ANOVA analysis – Satisfaction with free time (author: own processing)

ANOVA - Satisfaction with free time						
Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
Select the position in which you are employed	31.131	2	15.566	8.752	< .001	0.020
Residuals	1527.755	859	1.779			

Note. Type III Sum of Squares

The post hoc test (Table 2) shows significance between kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers ($t = 3.783$; $p = < 0.001$; $d = 0.311$); and kindergarten teachers and teachers in leadership position ($t = 3.591$; $p = 0.001$; $d = 0.338$).

Table 2: Post Hoc Comparisons – Position of teachers (author: own processing)

Post Hoc Comparisons - Select the position in which you are employed							
		Mean Difference	SE	t	Cohen's d	p_{tukey}	$p_{scheffe}$
Kindergarten	Elementary school	0.414	0.110	3.783	0.311	< .001	< .001
	Leadership position	0.451	0.126	3.591	0.338		0.002
Elementary school	Leadership position	0.037	0.112	0.330	0.028	0.942	0.947

Note. P-value adjusted for comparing a family of 3

Table 1: Disparity in the perception of satisfaction according to the position (author: own processing)

Group Descriptives							
		Group	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
With the amount of free time after work and on weekends, I am	kindergarten	232	4.409	1.696	0.111	0.385	
	elementary school	411	3.835	1.649	0.081	0.430	
	leadership position	219	3.658	1.747	0.118	0.478	
With the amount of time available for my hobbies, I am	kindergarten	232	4.366	1.614	0.106	0.370	
	elementary school	411	3.730	1.691	0.083	0.453	
	leadership position	219	3.717	1.671	0.113	0.449	
With the diversity of my free time, I am	kindergarten	232	4.578	1.572	0.103	0.343	
	elementary school	411	4.034	1.601	0.079	0.397	
	leadership position	219	4.055	1.683	0.114	0.415	



Relationship between the perceived burden of work activities and job satisfaction; and perceived burden of extracurricular activities and satisfaction with free time

In the correlation matrix (Table 4) was detected significant moderately strong negative relationship

between perceived burden of work activities and job satisfaction ($r = -0.349$) and also between extracurricular activities and satisfaction with free time ($r = -0.270$), at the significance level < 0.001 .

Table 4: Correlation matrix - burden and satisfaction (author: own processing)

Pearson's Correlations		1.	2.	3.	4.
Variable					
1. Burden – teaching process	Pearson's r	—			
	p-value	—			
2. Burden – extracurricular activities	Pearson's r	0.484	***	—	
	p-value	< .001	—		
3. Satisfaction – with the work	Pearson's r	-0.349	***	-0.349	***
	p-value	< .001		< .001	—
4. Satisfaction – with the free time	Pearson's r	-0.275	***	-0.270	***
	p-value	< .001		< .001	< .001

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Our findings show that primary school teachers feel more burdened than kindergarten teachers. The reason may be the pressure on systematic preparation for each lesson, whereas in kindergarten the preparation is less demanding and more independent. It may be related to the plans that teachers have to create and follow in relation to the curriculum. There could be the involvement of teaching assistants in the preparations and class management as a support system.

We consider the perception of difficulty associated with children's self-care skills to be an interesting finding. In this area, primary school teachers feel more burdened than kindergarten teachers. The reason may be the assumption that kindergarten teachers are expected to have to facilitate children's basic self-care abilities, while primary school teachers expect better self-care habits from children.

In the dimension of satisfaction with their leisure time, it was shown that primary school teachers are less satisfied than kindergarten teachers. The premise of this finding is precisely the regular and continuous preparation of elementary school teachers for several

subjects and correcting students' written works. It has also been shown that teachers in management positions are less satisfied with their free time in selected areas. The reason may be the increased administrative burden associated with management positions. Specifying the activities that burden teachers in leadership positions may be the subject of further investigation.

5. Conclusion

Our research containing 874 teachers shows that they perceive activities related to teaching and also extracurricular activities as moderately burdensome. We found that teachers are generally satisfied with their work, but they have a neutral attitude towards satisfaction with their leisure time. The division into kindergarten and elementary school teacher groups shows significant differences in the perception of workload. Elementary school teachers have a heightened subjective perception of workload in activities such as planning the teaching process, student activation, motivation, and conflict resolution than kindergarten teachers.



In general, teachers expressed that they are rather satisfied with their work, and with regard to satisfaction with spare time, kindergarten teachers expressed a significantly higher level of satisfaction than elementary school teachers and teachers in management positions. These findings indicate the necessity of considering the different needs and burdens of teachers at various levels of education and job positions while at the same time they show the requirement for providing support for their well-being and job satisfaction.

In our research, we show statistically significant findings, as it is a notable sample representing all regions of the country. The research outcomes also have their limits in including the classification of teachers among individual levels of education and their positions. The division of primary and kindergarten teachers is obvious, but we cannot say whether teachers holding leadership positions work in kindergarten or primary schools. The study is the result of the project VEGA 1/0415/22 "Subjectively perceived difficulty of teachers' professional activities versus their life satisfaction".

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