



## Challenges of Teachers and Leaders in Education During the Covid-19 Period

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### Abstract

*The previous year turned out to be a very intense period for all of us. Packed full of unusual challenges which cause a heavy psychological burden on anyone. Different individuals coped with this situation in different ways. The most affected persons to be included in the study are teachers and heads of educational institutions. This paper aims to highlight the challenges faced by teachers during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the way it is run and the impact and this situation on their psychological health. The participants of the study are 173 teachers from the city of Durrës, part of the preschool cycle, elementary education, lower secondary education, as well as 14 heads of public and private educational institutions (school and kindergarten). The teachers were interviewed through the platform "Google Form", according to the Pandemic restrictions. At the end of the paper, it was concluded that the difficulties during this academic year the teaching process faced, was of high level. Student negligence, lack of technological equipment or even the non-cooperation between teachers and parents brought various problems. Too much quarantine, online learning, excessive documentation, remain a key stress factor for teachers. It was noticed as a positive point the cooperation between teachers and heads which led to the successful closing of the school year.*

**Keywords:** teacher, leader, creation, stress, pandemic

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### 1. Introduction

Ever since the coronavirus pandemic in the spring of 2020 began disrupting people's normal lifestyles, the virtual world has come to the rescue.

Across the globe, shopping, entertainment, work and education moved online. The spread of COVID-19 has had profound effects on global education. As schools and universities closed, many turned to technology in an effort to continue the teaching and learning process.

Teachers returned to the classroom for the new school year 2020-2021 and faced new and challenging environments, guiding approaches and roles as educators. Already the teachers had left behind a year full of difficulties, unbearable emotional load and coming from an aggravated psychological situation.

The COVID-19 pandemic found everyone unprepared and the best way to deal with it was to keep calm and implement safeguards. Among the people most affected by this situation were the teachers who faced a new form of teaching, totally different from the traditional one which was online teaching. But not to forget also the leaders of educational institutions who day by day were waiting for the latest instructions and directives from the competent bodies regarding the situation in which they found themselves.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the problems encountered by teachers and leaders during their work process, the changes that have occurred in the way of teaching before and during the pandemic period and their impact on the personal and professional aspect. The importance of this study is closely related to the psychological state of teachers and leaders in educational institutions in both ordinary and extraordinary situations. This paper clearly shows the reality of the situation of teachers by highlighting personal and professional problems, which affects their mental health. Also, this paper clearly reflects the various challenges faced by teachers and leaders during this period, showing the way in which they faced them.

## **2. Pandemic in Europe**

As the covid-19 pandemic worsened, in countries across the globe most governments took precautions to close their schools in an effort to prevent the virus from spreading. The teaching process has also encountered significant problems being influenced by this situation.

The capacity of schools to renew, adapt and support staff varies from country to country and school to school, however these school capacities can prove to be valuable assets in responding to crises and uncertain times, as well as building resilience. when we face challenges in giving guidance.

## **3. Psychological Well-Being of Teachers in Some EU Countries**

The well-being of teachers at work is centered on European and national policy agendas. The Council Conclusions on European Teachers and Trainers for the Future underline that the well-being of teachers is a key factor in increasing the attractiveness of the profession. The European Commission study on policy measures to improve the teaching profession in Europe highlights stress as one of the factors that make the teaching profession particularly difficult (European Commission, 2013a, p. 175). OECD (2020, p. 102) and points out that teachers experiencing high levels of stress at work are more likely to report their intention to quit teaching and move on to other careers in the next five years. One study found that teacher stress levels also affected the stress levels of primary school students in the morning when they arrived at school (Oberle and Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

This study was attended by teachers of various public and private schools and kindergartens in the city of Durrës as well as leaders of educational institutions. Specifically, 173 teachers of private and public schools in the city of Durrës, respectively: lower cycle, 9-year education, secondary education. Also part of the study are 14 principals of 9-year and high schools in the city of Durrës. Teachers in the city of Durrës, primary, 9-year and high school, as well as principals have been presented with a questionnaire in Google Form in which they will give answers about the situation in which they are and the problems or difficulties they have encountered during this time in their work.

## **4. Study Results**

From this study it was noticed that 86.7% of teachers in the city of Durrës are employed in the public sector, where most of them offer teaching in 9-year education. Teachers were asked a series of open-ended questions related to the presence of stress in their workplace, how satisfied they were with their work, how safe they felt and what the teacher-parent-student relationship was or leader-teacher. Also attached to the fact how the period of isolation has affected in personal and professional aspect.

Specifically, out of a total of 173 teachers, only 9 of them stated that they do not feel stressed. 163 meanwhile stated the opposite by expressing the reasons which lead the teacher to experience stress before, during or after the pandemic.

The main reason is irresponsible parents and students. Students who do not fulfill the main obligations they have and often exceed their rights by violating those of others. On the other hand, the lack of continuous control of parents over their children, leaving them with too much freedom. Meanwhile, cooperation at low levels of teacher-parent is the reason that leads to low productivity and failure to meet objectives.

Indiscriminate use of technology by students is also a stress factor in the workplace of teachers. Students create dependence and turning them into passives during the learning process which has negative consequences on students' results.

Also as a result of the earthquake, shortly before the pandemic, teachers and students moved to new schools where due to the heavy workload it was necessary to develop teaching in two groups, simultaneously with shorter hours.

After the earthquake they faced another situation, the pandemic which brought changes in the learning process and

not only.

Online learning was one of the most affected points by all teachers. Dealing with such a situation came very unexpectedly and the teachers were found unprepared. The new online learning platform, technological equipment and expanded documentation to be completed was new to everyone and a large number of teachers were not updated with teaching updates. The time to develop teaching was insufficient, the teaching was not carried out at normal rhythms as in the classroom, there was overload and at the same time a pronounced lack of teaching aids. The pandemic, in addition to problems in teaching, also had a major impact on teachers' psychology. Everyone felt threatened to return to the school premises, anticovid measures and hygienic-sanitary conditions were stress in themselves. Leaders also have a great influence on the psychology of teachers. Leaders appointed according to political beliefs and not according to the basic criteria set, influenced teachers as there was a lack of cooperation between them.

#### *4.1 But what was the teacher-leader or teacher-parent-student relationship like?*

Regarding this ratio, a relatively high percentage, mainly 95%, led to the conclusion that this relationship was mainly positive, tolerant, understanding and cooperative. Leaders have tried to help their colleagues as much as possible, which is worth noting.

Meanwhile, positive responses were received for the teacher-parent-student ratio. Collaborative, correct, supportive, successful, continuous communication were the terms used by teachers to describe the situation. Few in number were those who noted that this report has been extremely difficult, weak and complicated. This is due to the distance or lack of technological tools.

What is also striking is the fact that older teachers have stated that they have encountered difficulties in the online teaching process due to the lack of sufficient information about the technology or the various platforms which helped in online teaching.

This study also included 14 heads of educational institutions from the 9-year cycle and the secondary cycle. They were asked questions about the management of their institution during the pandemic situation and before it. The experience of the interviewed executives ranged from 2 to 27 years.

#### *4.2 What have been the problems or obstacles that executives have faced during their many years of experience?*

Numerous answers have been received regarding the problems faced by the leaders, among the most recent of which we can mention the development of the online educational process and the earthquake that caused great damage in the city of Durrës. Other problems turned out to be school-community cooperation which has always brought difficulties in school institutions.

#### *4.3 We can also list other issues*

- The difficulty that teachers face in adapting to innovations in education, the tendency of students to disobey the rules within personal freedom.
- Infrastructure, lack of laboratories or gyms.
- The phenomenon of school dropout for children from the Roma and Egyptian communities.
- Lack of material base in the school and maintenance of facilities.

What is worth mentioning is the cooperation which has been maximal all the time, at every moment, especially during the pandemic. All have shown solidarity with each other and offered their support.

The key to success during the pandemic was communication as it took on new dimensions.

#### *4.4 How has teaching changed based on the experience of leaders?*

Major changes have been noticed in the way of expression as well as the documentation, programs, curricula, the way of assessment and the way of organizing the lesson, passing from "teacher-centered teaching" to "student-centered teaching". The requirement to evaluate a teacher's work is more efficient if it is based on lesson observation.

Student-centered teaching and competence learning has given students space to highlight their creativity. The topics of knowledge-practice combination as well as the performance of quality tasks and dedication by the teacher-student-parent trinity, has been a success in this aspect. But surely a proper infrastructure would motivate everyone. Teaching is also

based on the experiences of experienced teachers, the experiences of young teachers on the technological innovations they bring, ongoing training, collaboration with parents and the orientation of teaching in new techniques. The quality of teaching should be emphasized more and more as this prepares the student to be an active and useful citizen for the society. Efficiency is the art that should be part of every teacher's work to create a successful school. For effective teaching, the cooperation of all school actors should be appreciated. Teaching has moved towards digital technology, improving staff and students towards digital classrooms as well. The need arose for teacher training to keep pace with the times.

#### *4.5 How has the pandemic affected the psychology of leaders?*

Leaders say they have dealt with this situation in the best possible way while others say it has been an unusual situation managed only through online communication.

A good teacher-student-parent cooperation has been achieved by strictly implementing the regulation drafted based on the instructions received. It was initially very stressful but gradually they adjusted.

It had psychological significance, but successfully managed. Instructions from MASR, DRAP, ZA, health centers have come to help in managing the situation. It is also emphasized that the work of teachers in these difficult moments has been appreciated.

All the required anti-covid measures were taken and there was no problem to be alerted. Everything went well, of course the stress and fear was great but all together we have managed miracles so far.

As mentioned above, not only in Albania but also in other countries of the world, the best way for teachers to achieve the desired results in their work is their specialization to teach in different ways and for cope with various situations in which they may find themselves in the future.

From the above data we notice that even the most developed countries than Albania have encountered major problems during the teaching process. This is for various reasons, among which we can mention the lack of special training for teachers, the lack of individual technological equipment or the sharing of a technological equipment with all family members.

Lack of interest on the part of students or lack of interest on the part of parents turned out to be one of the most stressful factors for teachers.

Despite the professional problems, what affects the psychological well-being of teachers are the personal problems of each of them which they try not to transmit in their work environment to help the teaching progress by giving their best for the conditions in which we find ourselves.

The use of technology by "old" teachers who have encountered difficulties in using different platforms and as a result hinders the normal development of the learning process.

## **5. Conclusion**

From this study it was concluded that for various reasons, among which we can mention the lack of special training for teachers, the lack of individual technological equipment or the sharing of technological equipment with all family members, has brought many problems in development of the educational process. Lack of interest on the part of students or lack of interest on the part of parents turned out to be one of the most stressful factors for teachers. Despite the professional problems, what affects the psychological well-being of teachers are the personal problems of each of them which they try not to transmit in their work environment to help teaching progress by giving their best for the conditions in which we find ourselves.

The use of technology by "old" teachers who have encountered difficulties in using different platforms and as a result hinders the normal development of the learning process.

## **6. Recommendation**

What is recommended in such cases is the possibility of specific training for teachers regarding the management of various situations which leads to increased quality of the teaching process.

Organizing more frequent meetings with parents, identifying the problems and progress of students and how to improve them.

Provide special training for teachers regarding the necessary ICT skills.

Schools and kindergartens should be equipped with the appropriate didactic tools as well as with the necessary

laboratories for certain subjects.

*It is also necessary to increase the number of support teachers in schools for children with special needs.*