

Teaching Emotions, Stress, and Burnout among Teachers in Secondary Education

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the emotions and stressful events experienced by secondary education teachers. A number of 132 teachers in lower and upper secondary education were sampled following a convenience procedure. A mixed and transversal design blending both qualitative and quantitative research was preferred for the present study. During the last month of the school year, seven focus groups were conducted with teachers in secondary education. The focus groups aimed to identify a corpus of events and experiences considered to be stressful. A number of 43 events were identified. The second stage of the study consisted of applying the instruments to assess job-related stress, burnout, and teaching emotions. To measure teaching emotions, the TES questionnaire (Frenzel, Pekrun, Goetz, Daniels, Durksen, Becker-Kurz, and Klassen, 2016) was applied. To measure burnout among teachers in secondary education, the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) was administered. The paper reveals the presence of negative emotions associated with teaching. In addition, the level of distress and burnout are described and discussed. To conclude, the article reflects on the effects of teachers' emotions on their performance, students' motivation, and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Stress; Emotions; Burnout; Organisational Environment; Educational Organisation; Stressors.

1. Introduction

The term etymologically originates in the Old French word “estrece” meaning “narrowness, oppression” and in the Latin word “stringere” meaning “to compress, to tighten”, both referring to a constraint.

If, at the beginning of the 16th century, the word “stress” referred, in English, to hardship or affliction, and later the term designated a series of nouns having related meanings, such as: strain, pressure, burden, force, effort, load, constraint; in the 19th and 20th centuries, numerous researchers intuited the existence of stress the bodily response to exterior pressures. Even Charles Darwin said that fear mobilizes the body, thus helping it to overcome danger. However, the history of stress started in the physiology laboratory of Dr. Hans Selye, M.D., who continued the researches performed by Cannon and Claude. He introduced the concept of “general adaptation syndrome”, later referred to as the stress, and the notion of “adaptation disease”. Selye is also the one who admits that no diseases are caused by stress, however, a too high an intensity of stress may lead to exhaustion, namely to the collapse of the adaptation mechanisms.

Stress is a complex phenomenon, which is yet to be fully elucidated by the scientists. The specialised literature teems with definitions given to the notion of stress, some more comprehensive, others more restrictive. Here are some of them below:

Selye (1950) defines stress as a “general adaptation syndrome” in order to designate an ensemble of adaptive reactions of the body to the non-specific action of “physical aggressors”. Different stressors cause not only a specific effect (lesions, burns, immune reactions, infectious diseases, etc.) but also a non-specific effect, common to all these agents: the state of stress. Stress is “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change”, states Selye as well.

Paul Popescu Neveanu (1978) gives two meanings to the term of stress:

The first one refers to a situation, a stimulus placing the body in a state of tension; the second one refers to the special state of tension of the body itself whereby it mobilizes all its defense resources in order to cope with a physical or psychological aggression (strong emotion).

Mihai Golu (1981) speaks about the psychological stress as a “state of tension, strain and discomfort determined by affectogenic agents having a negative significance, of frustration or repression of certain states of motivation (needs, desires, aspirations), of difficulty or impossibility to solve certain problems”.

N. Sillamy (1996) presents stress as “a global, non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it.” Thus, this definition suggests that the being reacts to the environment demands and must adapt to the surrounding conditions.

Most of the definitions given to stress focus on the interaction between the body and the environment, but the environment demands can cause stress only when the subjects consider they cannot handle them or that by complying with them, reaching other purposes may be endangered.

Some authors emphasize the motivation showing that the stress occurs when reaching a goal is threatened, while other state that it is the result of excessive stimulation that causes tension, and discomfort. All these seem however insufficient in defining a phenomenon as complex as stress.

Even though different visions related to the concept of stress exist, common aspects can also be found. It appears following the interaction between the body and the environment, at a certain time and in a certain situation, and in all of them the subject is confronted with a dangerous situation, which requires effort and adaptation.

1.1. Stress in the Organizational Environment

Organizational stress appears when the professional demands exceed the resources the human being has.

“The organizational stress is understood by the individual as the excessive environment or work-related pressure, and the reaction to it shall lead to the occurrence of some of the organizational stress effects”, states Gary Johns (1998).

It is important to make the distinction between “eustress” + and “distress” -, at the work place.

If a demand arising from the professional environment is motivating for the individual, it acts as a positive stress factor. Meanwhile, if a constraint is perceived as unpleasant, difficult and it manifests permanently, it may lead to stress (“distress”), and to its sale negative effects.

At the workplace, maybe the most exhaustive definition of the negative stress (distress) is: the change in the psychological, physical, emotional or behavioral state of a person, because of the constant pressure exercised on him/her in order to act in ways that are incompatible with his/her real or perceived ability, and with his/her available time and resources.

In other words, workplace stress can be defined as the most harmful physical and psychological response occurring when the job requirements do not match the Employee’s resources, abilities or needs. The workplace stress can compromise the health and even lead to diseases.

According to Cranwell-Ward (apud Sava, 2004, p.181), the most affected organizations, concerning the perceived stress, are the organizations whose scope of business is service provision, which underwent ethnological changes, and which were significantly restructured. The category of service-providing organizations also includes the educational organization.

Concerning the multitude of stress-generating factors, the following five categories can be identified in the professional activity, according to Sava (2004, pg. 182): factors intrinsic to the performed work, factors related to the employee’s role within the organization, factors concerning the workplace relations, factors concerning the career development, factors concerning the organizational structure and climate. Moreover, the stressors can also be differentiated depending on the Employee’s position and on the type of work he/she performs. For instance, workers are mainly affected by the negative workplace relations and by the inappropriate working conditions, the public

servants are stressed by the ambiguity of their role, the role conflicts and job overwork, and in the jobs involving care-taking, such as those of teachers or medical staff, the main stress-generating factors are bureaucracy, lack of material resources and of control over the activity, overwork or the lack of social support (Tennant, 2001, apud Sava, 2004, pg. 182). In the case of such employee categories, whose professional activity involves providing services in direct contact with the beneficiaries, an exhaustion syndrome may settle in (burnout), a special type of occupational stress, as it was also called. It may occur in individuals performing professional activities involving having an intense relation with the clients (attorneys-at-law, medical staff, teaching staff). Compared to the stress affecting everyone else, the exhaustion syndrome only occurs in the persons who were enthusiastic at the beginning of their career, having high expectations and objectives, which are not met later (Schaufeli and Buunk, 1996, apud Sava, 2004, pg. 183).

Other authors (Jinga, 2003, p. 111) mention other stress-generating sources also for the people working in schools in Romania: change, continuous reform of the Romanian educational system, untimely salary payment, fear they might lose their jobs, faulty management, establishment of unrealistic objectives, unfair distribution of the available resources, and of the tasks per departments and people, subjective and unprincipled assessments, favoring certain persons to the detriment of others, inappropriate application of the motivational leverages (particularly of the rewards and sanctions), states of tension and conflicts between teachers and pupils, between teachers and principals, or between the teachers and themselves.

In this context, this research aims at assessing the emotions associated to the teaching activity, and the levels of stress and burnout in teachers in the secondary education. Several hypotheses were formulated. Thus, we assume that school, as an educational environment with certain specificity elements, is an organizational environment where teachers experience stress-generating events (H1). Complementarily, we assume that the teaching activity, as a dominant activity in the school environment, also has negative deactivating state emotions associated to it (H2).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample in this study is the result of a convenience sampling procedure. A number of 132 teachers in lower and upper secondary education were sampled. Most of the subjects in the sample are female (87%). The teachers' ages ranged from 24 to 57 ($M = 39.35, SD = 10.19$). In average, the participants had been teaching for an average of 12.16 years ($SD = 10.94$ years). Related to their teaching experience, 44.9% of the respondents hold the didactical qualification level I, whilst only 14.3% are junior teaching staff. The persons residing in the urban areas amount to approximately 60 per cent of the entire sample. As concerns the residence counties, 50% of the subjects live in Bucharest and Iasi. Cumulatively, the subjects inhabiting the counties of Brasov, Bacau, Valcea and Bistrita-Nasaud create a segment of 26.8%. Less numerous are the subjects in the counties of Ialomita, Arges, Neamt, Bihor, Vaslui, Hunedoara, and Braila.

2.2. Study Design

A mixed and transversal design blending both qualitative and quantitative research was preferred for the present study. During the last month of the school year, seven focus groups were conducted with teachers in secondary education. The focus groups aimed to identify a corpus of events and experiences considered to be stressful. A number of 43 events were identified. The second stage of the study consisted of applying the instruments to assess job-related stress, burnout, and teaching emotions. The questionnaires were self-administered through the Survey Gizmo platform (WAPI method - web assisted personal interviews).

2.3. Measures

Teaching emotions. To measure teaching emotions, the TES questionnaire (Frenzel, Pekrun, Goetz, Daniels, Durksen, Becker-Kurz, and Klassen, 2016) was applied. The questionnaire for

assessing the Teacher's emotions (TES) was prepared and validated by Frenzel et al. (2016). The tool includes scales for measuring three emotions that the authors consider relevant in the didactic activity: enjoyment of teaching, anxiety, and anger. The original tool version was tested on a sample of German and English-speaking teachers ($N = 944$). The option to select within the sample German and English-speaking teachers is argued by the need to test the equivalence across languages. The initial version of the questionnaire was prepared in German, having as an ideatic basis the contributions of the teachers invited to focus groups. A base of 37 items was elaborated. The semantic redundancy evaluation was performed based on the contribution of experts. The tool fidelity can be assessed as good to very good in the case of items concerning the teaching activity. $.70 \leq \alpha \leq .77.$, namely, as very good to excellent for the items concerning the emotions associated to the relation with the pupils ($.89 \leq \alpha \leq .92$). The correlations between the items are statistically significant at a level of $p < .01$. In order to test the internal validity, the authors preferred the confirmatory factor analysis. The model with the best metric qualities is the one with three factors – corresponding to the three investigated emotions. The version applied in the context of this study has a fidelity similar to the previously mentioned one, $\alpha = .79$, for all the scales. The confirmatory factor analysis validated the model with three factors (enjoyment, anger, and anxiety). TES includes 24 items rated on four-point Likert scale labelled with strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree.

Job-related stress. In order to develop an appropriate instrument for evaluating the workplace stress, seven focus groups were organized with teachers fitting the same social-demographic profile described in the previous section. Thirty-seven teachers attended the group discussions. They were asked to describe three of the most stressful situations they had found themselves in during the school year, which was ongoing at that time. The participants' combined answers in the focus groups led to identifying 43 stressful situations and events that were considered to be stressful for the school-like organizations. The nature of these stress-generating situations varied from conflicts with the pupils or the parents to conflicts with the colleagues or school manager. The Participants in the questionnaire-based research ($N=132$) assessed whether and to what extent they had experienced these stressing events during the school year. If experienced, an event was rated on a five-point Likert scale where 1 suggests the lowest level of stress and, in opposition, 5 indicates the highest level of stress. By doing so, the author could investigate the amount of subjective experiences in teaching practice and their level of stress.

Burnout. To measure burnout among teachers in secondary education, the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) was administered. The instrument assesses three dimensions of burnout, namely Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DEP), and Personal Accomplishment (PA). The 22 items included in the questionnaire structure are drafted under the form of statements concerning feelings or attitudes. Each item is assessed on a 7-point frequency scale: 0 is "never", 6 is "every day". The fidelity analysis revealed a coefficient of good to very good $\alpha = .79$ for all the three scales.

2.4. Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected through the focus groups was based on techniques specific to the content analysis. The author was interested in identifying the events with stressor potential. The respective experiences were formulated or reformulated based on the semantic redundancy criterion. For analyzing the quantitative data, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software was used (SPSS, version 20.0). Frequency analyses, averages (and the standard average deviation), correlation analyses (calculation of Pearson's r coefficient), variant analyses (ANOVA) and multivariate regression models were applied in order to test the levels of stress and burnout, respectively, the emotions associated to teaching and the relations between them. In the following section, the results of the previously mentioned statistical analyses are presented.

3. Results

As stated in the previous sections, this study aimed at assessing the emotions associated to teaching, and the levels of stress and burnout in teachers in secondary education. The statistical analyses furthermore aimed at identifying the relations between the three variables of interest for the research.

3.1. Teaching Emotions

The application of the TES questionnaire revealed a low level of the enjoyment of teaching: ($M_{enjoy} = 8.2, SD = 1.21, Min = 4.13, Max = 15.7$). On age groups and didactical qualification level, the enjoyment of teaching shows low scores in the young persons, women and men, junior or holding the permanent teacher certification. The Tukey t test is statistically significant for the differences between the seniority segments of 1 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, and 11 to 20 years, respectively, and for the seniority segments of 6 to 10 years, 11 to 20 years, 21 to 30 years, and over 30 years, respectively. A similar situation can also be found in the persons over 41, holding, at least the didactical qualification level 2. Given the fact that the didactical qualification variable is correlated to the seniority in the educational system, we identified the same tendencies in the correlation analysis. Based on the results obtained in the context of this study, we can state that the teachers in the secondary education, who have recently entered the system, experience low levels of the enjoyment of teaching, a phenomenon that is also characteristic for the persons having a seniority of over 20 years in the educational system.

Another emotion assessed through the TES questionnaire is anger ($M_{anger} = 11.7, SD = 3.28$). Out of the entire investigated sample, 78% of the subjects stated they frequently felt upset while teaching. In the case of this emotion, the correlation coefficient, r , is not statistically significant ($p = .62$). The high average value calculated for this state emotion leads us to the decision to reject the null hypothesis and to accept hypothesis H2, according to which the school environment also has negative deactivating state emotions associated to it.

The acceptance of this hypothesis is also supported by the descriptive statistics calculated for the third emotion measured through the TES questionnaire, anxiety: ($M_{anxiety} = 9.7, SD = 2.98$). Out of the subjects participating in the research, 67% stated they were frequently concerned that the teaching activity is not heading in the envisaged direction. Almost half of the respondents (48.7%) stated that the didactical activity planning and design are activities with an anxiogenic potential.

The two negative and deactivating emotions associated to teaching influence the variance of the stress and burnout variables, as resulted from the variant analysis ANOVA.

3.2. Stress and Burnout Scores

The stress score for teachers was measured by the frequency (of dichotomic nature - presence or absence) of the events considered to be stress-generating, to which a sum-type score of the reported rating for every event was added. Thus, out of the 43 events identified within the focus groups, the teachers reported having experienced, on an average, 26.3 events ($SD = 6.17$).

In order to examine the relationship between the social-demographic characteristics of the interviewed teachers (age, gender, didactical qualification, professional experience in the educational system), several regression models have been tested. Through the regression analysis, the variables concerning the subjects' social-demographic characteristics were regressed to the number of stressful events experienced by the participants. The data in Table 1 shows that not all the B regression coefficients are significantly different from zero. Thus, age and didactical experience are variables that can explain the variation of the variable number of experienced stressful events ($p < .01$). The young less experienced teachers can experience a higher number of stressful events. The gender and didactical qualification variables do not bring additional explanations for the variation of the variable number of experienced stressful events.

Table 1. Relations between the number of stressful events and socio-demographic characteristics

	Non-standardized β	Standardized β	t	Significance
Age	-.351	-.496	6.157	.0001
Gender	.075	.089	.948	.256
Didactical qualification	.186	.197	1.962	.117
Professional experience	-.225	-.258	2.984	.001

The variables age and professional experience were introduced as predictors for the variable number of stressful events. The coefficients of multiple correlation R , of determination R^2 and the adjusted coefficients of determination are shown in Table 2. $R_{adjusted}^2 = .180, p = .001$, which means that the regression model explains the existence of approximately 18% of the variable number of experienced stressful events.

Table 2. Regression model summary

R	R^2	F	p
.437	.180	5.578	.001

As regards the burnout score obtained upon the MBI inventory, the variables defining the subjects' social-demographic characteristics hold a higher explanatory statistical power. Overall, the variables age, gender, didactical qualification, and professional experience explain 23% of the burnout variable variation. Differences could be found concerning the three dimensions measured for the burnout: EE, DEP, PA (see Table 3). Thus, the variables age, gender, didactical qualification are significant predictors of the emotional exhaustion. Young and less professionally experienced teachers have higher burnout scores.

Table 3. Standardized β and p -values for social-demographic characteristics and burnout score

	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Self-accomplishment
Age	-.358**	-.173**	.069*
Gender	.092*	-.273*	-.098**
Didactical qualification	-.068*	.224	.242
Professional experience	-.122*	.067	.233

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

As regards the depersonalization dimension, age and gender are the predictor variables. Young women have the tendency to stronger feel the depersonalization, compared to men. The final measured dimension is the self-accomplishment. The same variables as in the case of depersonalization are self-accomplishment predictors. Women recorded lower scores compared to men for this dimension. The correlation analysis showed a strong and positive correlation between the number of stressful events experienced by teachers and the burnout score: $r = .78, p = .02$.

3.3. Discussion

The scholar discussion about teachers' professional development and competencies traditionally focused on rational factors (Junjun, 2016): knowledge, skills, and capabilities. However, teaching proved to be a space of emotions. As Franzel et al. (2016, p. 148) argue

'classrooms abound in emotions'. Meanwhile stress and burnout among teachers have been largely researched, little research has been done within the field of teaching emotions. Moreover, emotions in education are seen as predictors of students' achievement and learning outcomes (Hagenauer, Hascher, & Volet, 2015).

In the context of the present study, the author aimed to explore teachers' emotions and their classroom and school-related stressful experiences.

The results recorded and described hereinabove highlighted low scores for the enjoyment of teaching in young persons, women, and men alike, juniors or holding the permanent teaching certificate. The same goes for the persons having a seniority of more than 20 years in the educational system. Moreover, young teachers having less professional experience recorded higher burnout scores.

The results revealed low levels of enjoyment of teaching for both the teachers with less than five years of teaching experience and for those with more than 20 years of experience.

In the case of young teachers (it will be preferred this expression in accord to their level of professional experience), various explanations can contribute to understanding the low levels of the enjoyment of teaching. During focus groups, young teachers reported themselves as low motivated for the teaching career. As Chen (2013) states, novices lack of development motivation and thus remain unconcerned for their professional development (p. 1405). According to possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986), the novices in the present study frequently experience a conflictual state of possible selves. Many of the teachers participating in this research stated their aspirations could be hardly fulfilled in the context of their present work. They fear that they cannot enjoy teaching and achieve educational goals because they need to focus on how to quite noisy classrooms. Moreover, these novices declare that they must struggle with the lack of motivation of the students they work with. During group discussions, the teachers mentioned different ideal self-images as teachers in secondary education. There were subjects claiming that teaching is a provisional stage in their career and they think to quit teaching after several years. This segment of teachers tend to be less involved in the teacher – student relationship. Research suggest that 'good teacher–student relationships serves as a protective factor for maintaining young adolescents' interest, active engagement in learning and healthy development' (Opdenakker & Maulana, 2010; Maulana et al. 2011; Skinner & Belmont, 1993 as cited by Maulana, Opdenakker, Stroet, & Bosker, 2013, p. 1348). Other subjects declared they want to be respectable teachers. However, in present, they do not feel like being respected by their students and, in some cases, by students' parents either. Only three participants expressed the fact that their teaching career is motivated by their passion for the educational process. These novices became teachers because they believed that the job would allow them to interact with others and increase students' interest and even passion for a certain subject matter. Thus, the decreasing levels of motivation of teachers are a real issue within the Romanian educational system. However, Romanian young teachers' beliefs and motivation are not a singular situation over the world. Other educational systems face similar issues (Kumuzava, 2013; Maulana et al., 2013; Thomson, Turner, & Nietfeld, 2012).

According to the results of a research performed by Panisoara and his collaborators (2010), the young teachers bring with them, into the educational organization, a series of fears concerning how their professional activity will unfold. They feel helpless, unsupported by the management and stressed regarding certain decisions they should make. In case the junior teachers can feel a strong level of stress in their relationship with their manager, the latter must display effective communication skills, he/she must explain to them what their role is or the type of appraisal they will be subject to and to lower their unjustified anxiety.

As stated before, lower scores of enjoyment of teaching have been computed for senior teachers with over twenty years of teaching experience. A complex of factors can contribute to the understanding of decreasing levels of enjoyment of teaching in senior teachers. Consistent with other studies (see the work of Zakari, Christian, Brefo-Manuh, Marian, & Thekla, 2016), the most powerful factors affecting the enjoyment of learning appear to be financial motivation, the extensive range of duties and paper work, and classroom realities. During focus groups, most teachers have

mentioned a gap between the ideal and the actual selves. The teachers who brought into discussion their passion for the educational process also mentioned a conflict between what they had expected to do and what do they do. A significant number of peripheral duties prevented them to pursue their initial goals. These findings are consistent with those of Kumuzava (2013). In most of the cases, the senior teachers complained about the paper work which shifted their attention from the subject matter to secondary aspects of their career. Over the passing years, some of the senior teachers lost their initial enthusiasm and even the passion for teaching. A remarkable contribution to this loss of motivation and passion had the financial issues. The financial motivation of teachers in Romania has become a matter of debate in Romania. This is also a matter of concern in the view of the fact that teachers' motivation is a key factor in the quality assurance process. Dwomoh, Agyenim-Boateng, Ahmed, Boachie (2016) state that the teachers' motivation is influenced by how equitable the employees see the financial reward in relation to the skills, effort and knowledge (p.27). The present study revealed that senior teachers perceive a large gap between their self-perception of teaching competency and the financial reward and compensations they receive. The cited authors proved that there is a significant positive association between financial motivation of teachers and their performance (Dwomoh et al., 2016, p. 33).

The specialized literature shows various opinions on how to deal with stress or not. Some authors state that it cannot be avoided, others are of opinion that the positive stress is necessary, while others provide suggestions on how to control it. For instance, Giulia Negura (apud Jinga, 2003, p. 121), a psychologist by training, is of opinion that by training to increase the capacity of adaptation, which can also be done individually, stress can be controlled. The quoted psychologist thus provides the following recommendations: Accept that you are stressed out and accept your own limits!; Admit that you need a change in the pace you live your life with!; Research the stress causes!; Change the working conditions you find stressful!; Find time to relax!; Settle the interpersonal conflicts you are involved in, but do it calmly!; Discuss with someone close about your problems!; Be positive!; Set realistic objectives!; If none of this was useful, call on a psychologist with confidence!

4. Conclusion

So, staying in good shape, but also being in a good mood, having an appropriate diet and enjoying good rest, having a proper work and life discipline, the right climate, within the family and at the workplace, and doing outdoor activities can be ways to prevent stressful situations or remediate to fight it.

Of course, solutions can be found both at individual, and organizational levels. Every manager or employee will identify the appropriate remedy for them, depending on the characteristics of their personalities and of their environment or life, and on the characteristics of the organizational climate, allowing them to prevent stressful situations, but also overcoming them.

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