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## Primary Education Teachers' Subjectively Perceived Workload, Job Satisfaction, and Emotional Exhaustion

### Abstract

The study presents the results of quantitative research aimed at measuring primary education teachers' job satisfaction (JS), subjectively perceived workload (SPW) and emotional exhaustion (EE). The research sample consisted of 249 teachers. The highest satisfaction was with the work, the highest workload in diagnostics and assessment, and emotional exhaustion was not marked. Correlations confirmed relations between satisfaction and workload (-0.237), satisfaction and emotional exhaustion (-0.463), and workload and emotional exhaustion (0.462). Mediation analysis indicated that satisfaction influenced the relationship between workload and emotional exhaustion. Results point to teachers' well-being and may help create interventions to improve the working environment. The study is an output of the project VEGA 1/0415/22.

**Keywords:** *primary education, job satisfaction, subjectively perceived workload, emotional exhaustion*

## Introduction

### Teachers' Job Satisfaction

Teachers' job satisfaction has been the subject of several studies, whether as a primary research subject (Baroudi et al., 2020; Crisci et al., 2019; Guoba et al., 2022; Lam & Yan, 2011; Lopes & Oliveira, 2020; OECD, 2020; Schroder, 2008) or in relation to other areas, such as school working conditions and teachers'

personality characteristics (Toropova et al., 2021); life satisfaction and workload (Li et al., 2021; Rogowska & Meres, 2022); teachers' efficacy, life satisfaction and burnout (Ma & MacMillan, 1999; Telef, 2011); school environment (Marinette & Hui, 2021); interpersonal relations (Pedditzi et al., 2021) or personal life balance (Gedvilienė & Didžiulienė, 2019; Li et al., 2021).

Research aimed at teachers' job satisfaction (intrinsic and extrinsic factors) and the perceived job efficacy of their principals in Lebanon (Baroudi et al., 2020) revealed that extrinsic factors (working conditions and professional development) significantly correlate with teachers' job satisfaction. Results of the research by Ma and MacMillan (1999) showed the relationship between job satisfaction and working conditions in three areas: administrative control, teaching competence, and organisational culture. An important finding was that teachers who stayed in the profession longer were less satisfied. According to Pedditzi et al. (2021), dissatisfaction with working conditions and the experience of many years are the predictors of emotional exhaustion.

Lopes and Oliveira (2020) showed in a Portuguese sample of lower secondary education teachers that teachers' satisfaction was related to workplace and classroom interpersonal relations. Schroder (2008) found the same in his survey of university employees' job satisfaction, revealing moderate job satisfaction. The highest satisfaction was with relationships with students and the lowest with salaries, organisational policy, and administration. In addition to satisfaction with students, satisfaction with their parents contributed to teachers' satisfaction. This strong relationship was confirmed by Pedditzi et al. (2021). Crisci et al. (2019) dealt with job satisfaction linked with relationships at the workplace, finding that older teachers were more satisfied with relationships with colleagues. Beginning teachers' satisfaction may differ considerably from that of teachers in practice. Lam and Yan (2011) explored teachers' satisfaction at the beginning of their teaching profession and again, two years later. They found that the volume of non-teaching duties, school work distribution, and professional autonomy influenced teachers' job satisfaction and motivation. The above shows that teachers' working environment is a significant factor coming to the fore in connection with job satisfaction.

### **Emotional Workload Perception and Emotional Exhaustion**

The teaching profession significantly differs from other professions in the demands placed on the profession's performance. The work consists of teachers' direct activity during the specified time and preparation for this activity outside working hours. The working time and time after school that teachers devote to their work were analysed in the research by Kasáčová and Tabačáková

(2010). Based on their findings, members of the project VEGA 1/0415/22 team (Kasáčová et al., 2022) designed a measuring tool for subjectively perceived workload with specific activities (Babiaková et al., 2023).

Authors Yuliani et al. (2022) state in this context that job satisfaction and workload significantly relate to teachers' performance. Increased workload and emotional exhaustion cause teachers to leave their profession (Saks et al., 2022). Most male and female teachers (79%) report excessive workload as the main reason for leaving their profession early (Kreuzfeld & Seibt, 2022).

### **Research Aim**

Our research aimed to determine the levels of job satisfaction and subjectively perceived workload in selected dimensions, the level of emotional exhaustion and the presence and strength of relations between the variables.

### **Research Methodology**

**General Research Background** Related to theoretical background, six research questions and two hypotheses were formulated:

RQ 1: What is the teachers' job satisfaction level, overall and individually?

RQ 2: In which area do teachers perceive the highest and the lowest level of satisfaction?

RQ 3: What is the teachers' subjective workload level, overall and in individual dimensions?

RQ 4: In which area do teachers perceive the highest and the lowest level of workload?

RQ5: What is the level of emotional exhaustion?

RQ6: Is there a relation, and of what strength, between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion and subjectively perceived workload?

RH1: It is assumed that there is a negative relation between dimensions of job satisfaction and subjectively perceived workload.

RH2: It is assumed that satisfaction with the school environment and working conditions mediates the relation between the workload perceived in educational process management and emotional exhaustion.

### **Research Sample**

The research sample consisted of 249 Slovak primary education teachers, 98% women, 2% men, aged from 23 to 64 ( $\bar{x} = 42.40$ ;  $\delta = 10.93$ ), with various lengths

of experience, from beginning teachers to teachers with 40 years of experience ( $\bar{x} = 17.30$ ;  $\delta = 12.09$ ). Regarding the place of work, 129 (51.8%) teachers working in towns and 120 (48.2%) teachers working in villages participated in the research.

### Instrument and Procedures

The research used questionnaires measuring job satisfaction, subjectively perceived workload and emotional exhaustion.

Job satisfaction was determined using the *Teacher's Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (TJSQ)* (Lester & Bishop, 2000). The questionnaire included items measuring the level of satisfaction in the areas: work itself (8<sup>1</sup>), school environment and working conditions (7), and salary conditions (6). The items were scaled by the degree of agreement from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Measured was also job satisfaction in the areas: colleagues (3), children's behaviour (3), and children's parents (3) by the *Teacher Job Satisfaction Scale (TJSS-9)* (Pepe et al., 2017). The items used a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).

Workload was determined by the questionnaire *Perception of Workload* (Kasáčová et al., 2022). The questionnaire was subjected to exploratory factor analysis, based on which subjectively perceived workload was analysed in five areas: educational process management (5), indirect educational activity (5), diagnostics, individualisation and assessment (5), and professional and personal development (3). The items were scaled from 1 (no load) to 4 (unbearable load), with 0 (does not apply to me).

Emotional exhaustion was measured by the *Maslach Burnout Inventory – Educators Survey (MBI – ES)* (Szigeti et al., 2017). Only the emotional exhaustion dimension (8) was used, where not the frequency but agreement with the statement was measured on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

The job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion measuring tools were translated and validated and their psychometric characteristics were verified. Since some items' factor loadings were insufficient, they were discarded from the measuring tool. It explains why the numbers of the items in our measuring tools do not match those in the original measuring tools.

### Data Analysis

Results were interpreted using descriptive and inferential statistics. Correla-

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers in brackets are numbers of items.

tions were evaluated using Spearman's correlation coefficient since the data distribution was not normal (the Shapiro-Wilk normality test value was  $p < .001$ ). The chosen significance level was  $p < .05$ . The mediation relation was evaluated using mediation analysis of data. The mediation analysis used standardised estimates and the bootstrapping method with 5000 repetitions to provide more precise estimates.

## Research Results

### Descriptive statistics for RQ1–RQ5

Descriptive statistics (Tab. 1) showed that teachers felt the highest level of subjectively perceived workload ( $\bar{x} = 2.316$ ;  $\delta = 0.495$ ) in the dimension of diagnostics, individualisation and assessment of pupils. They perceived the lowest workload level in the indirect educational activity dimension ( $\bar{x} = 2.024$ ;  $\delta = 0.550$ ). Overall, by the mean of all dimensions ( $\bar{x}_4 = 2.216$ ), teachers perceived a moderate workload in their profession.

Teachers reported the highest level of job satisfaction in the dimension of the work itself ( $\bar{x} = 3.979$ ;  $\delta = 0.504$ ), and the lowest level in the dimension of salary conditions ( $\bar{x} = 2.473$ ;  $\delta = 0.653$ ). Overall, teachers showed slightly above-average job satisfaction by the mean of all dimensions ( $\bar{x}_6 = 3.229$ ).

The descriptive statistics indicated that teachers felt only moderately emotionally exhausted ( $\bar{x} = 2.543$ ;  $\delta = 0.779$ ).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics – subjectively perceived workload, job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion

Descriptive Statistics									
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Coeff. of variation	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
A. Workload – education process management	249	0	2.240	0.558	0.249	0.101	0.154	-0.208	0.307
B. Workload – indirect educational activity	249	0	2.024	0.550	0.271	0.432	0.154	0.053	0.307
C. Workload – diagnostics, individ., assessment	249	0	2.316	0.495	0.214	-0.325	0.154	0.157	0.307
D. Workload – prof. and personal development	247	2	2.285	0.713	0.312	0.119	0.155	-0.234	0.309

Descriptive Statistics									
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Std. Deviation	Coeff. of variation	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
E. Satisfaction – work itself	249	0	3.979	0.504	0.127	-0.016	0.154	-0.229	0.307
F. Satisfaction – sch. environ. and work conditions	249	0	3.217	0.649	0.202	-0.056	0.154	0.567	0.307
G. Satisfaction – salary conditions	249	0	2.473	0.653	0.264	0.138	0.154	-0.017	0.307
H. Satisfaction – colleagues	249	0	3.687	0.826	0.224	-0.601	0.154	0.735	0.307
I. Satisfaction – children's behaviour	249	0	2.929	0.879	0.300	-0.113	0.154	-0.378	0.307
J. Satisfaction – children's parents	249	0	3.090	0.850	0.275	-0.496	0.154	0.278	0.307
K. Emotional exhaustion	249	0	2.543	0.779	0.306	0.296	0.154	-0.221	0.307

### RH 1 testing and the answer to RQ 6

The presence and strength of relations of individual dimensions were determined by correlations – Spearman's correlation coefficient (normal distribution of data was not proved – the value of Shapiro-Wilk normality test was  $p < .001$ ). Based on the correlation matrix (Table 2), a moderate negative relation was found between overall satisfaction and overall subjectively perceived workload ( $r = -0.237$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Partial correlation results showed 13 negative relations between job satisfaction and subjectively perceived workload. The strongest negative relation was between satisfaction with children's behaviour and perceived workload of educational process management ( $r = -0.326$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and between satisfaction with the work itself and perceived workload of educational process management ( $r = -0.257$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Other statistically significant relations at the level of significance  $p < 0.05$  are marked in the table.

A strong negative relation was found between job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion ( $r = -0.463$ ;  $p < .001$ ), and a strong positive relation between subjectively perceived workload and emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.462$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

**Table 2.** Correlation matrix – SPW, JS, EE

Variable		Spearman's Correlations									
		1 A Workload – Educational process management	2 Workload – Indirect educational activity	3 C Workload – Diagnostics individualisation and assessment	4 D Workload – Professional and personal development	5 Overall Workload	12 Overall Satisfaction				
6. E. Satisfaction – work itself	Spearman's rho	-0.257 ***	-0.110	-0.111	-0.182 **	-0.216 ***					
	p-value	< .001	0.083	0.081	0.004	< .001					
7. F. Satisfaction – school environment and working conditions	Spearman's rho	-0.179 **	-0.186 **	-0.169 **	-0.134 *	-0.187 **					
	p-value	0.004	0.003	0.007	0.035	0.003					
8. G. Satisfaction – salary conditions	Spearman's rho	-0.070	-0.138 *	-0.184 **	-0.133 *	-0.150 *					
	p-value	0.268	0.029	0.004	0.037	0.018					
9. H. Satisfaction – colleagues	Spearman's rho	-0.110	-0.176 **	-0.096	-0.109	-0.146 *					
	p-value	0.084	0.005	0.132	0.088	0.021					

Variable		Spearman's Correlations									
		1 A Workload – Educational process management	2 Workload – Indirect educational activity	3 C Workload – Diagnostics individualisation and assessment	4 D Workload – Professional and personal development	5 Overall Workload	12 Overall Satisfaction				
10. I. Satisfaction – children's behaviour	Spearman's rho	-0.326 ***	-0.039	-0.177 **	-0.086	-0.178 **					
	p-value	< .001	0.541	0.005	0.180	0.005					
11. J. Satisfaction – children's parents	Spearman's rho	-0.143 *	-0.057	-0.064	0.002	-0.079					
	p-value	0.024	0.374	0.315	0.971	0.213					
12. Overall satisfaction	Spearman's rho	-0.294 ***	-0.189 **	-0.189 **	-0.143 *	-0.237 ***	—				
	p-value	< .001	0.003	0.003	0.025	< .001	—				
13. K. Emotional exhaustion	Spearman's rho	0.466 ***	0.372 ***	0.350 ***	0.285 ***	0.462 ***	-0.463 ***				
	p-value	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001				

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

## RH 2 testing

Regression analysis between the variables under study showed significance, which, in this case, is a prerequisite for performing mediation analysis. Its results indicated that both the direct effect ( $\beta = 0.758$ ,  $SE = 0.098$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.56; 0.95]) and total effect ( $\beta = 0.863$ ,  $SE = 0.099$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.666; 1.059]) were statistically significant. Taking the mediator variance into account, it means that two teachers differing by one unit of the workload they felt differed by 0.758 unit in the feeling of emotional exhaustion. Since the direct effect was significant at  $p < 0.001$ , the mediator only partially mediates the relation of subjectively perceived workload and emotional exhaustion (X→Y).

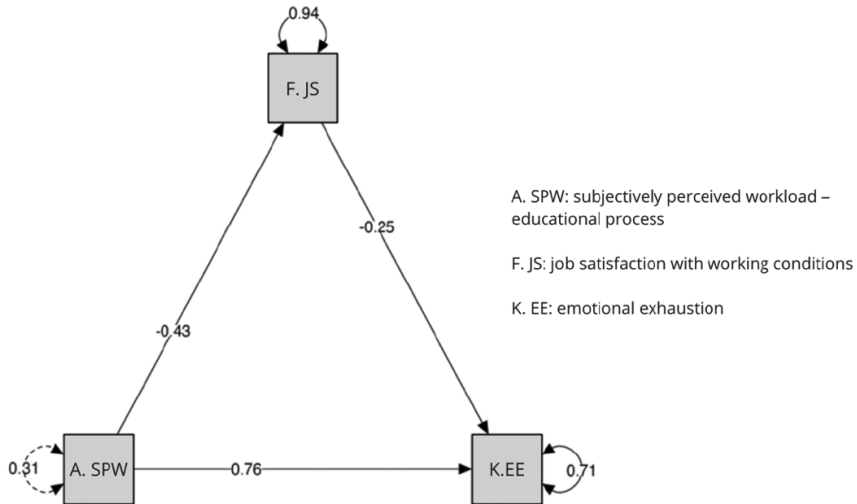
We conclude that this is a complementary type of mediation. The partial mediator effect was recorded on the relation of the subjectively perceived workload of educational process management on emotional exhaustion. It is based on the knowledge that (a x b) was significant at the level  $p = 0.003$ , (c') was significant at the level  $p < .001$ , and both values of the standardised regression coefficient for (a x b) and (c') were positive.

**Table 3.** Results for the direct, indirect and total effects

Direct effects								
							95% Confidence Interval	
			Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	Lower	Upper
A. Workload – educational process management	→	K. Emotional exhaustion	0.758	0.098	7.695	< .001	0.563	0.954
Indirect effects								
A. Workload – educ. process management → F. Satisfaction – school environ. and work. conditions → K. Emotional exhaustion			0.106	0.036	2.934	0.003	0.042	0.196
Total effects								
A. Workload – educational process management	→	K. Emotional exhaustion	0.863	0.099	8.678	< .001	0.663	1.055

Note. Delta method standard errors, bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence intervals, ML estimator.

Figure 1. Mediation analysis – path plot



## Discussion

The research results show that teachers were satisfied with the work, school environment, working conditions, and colleagues. They expressed the highest dissatisfaction with salary conditions, which aligns with other studies (Schroder, 2008). They had a neutral attitude to children's and their parents' behaviour. The figures showed that teachers felt moderate workload in all areas – educational process management, indirect educational activity, diagnostics, individualisation, assessment, and professional and personal development. However, they were found to have no marked emotional exhaustion.

Correlation analysis revealed strong relations between job satisfaction factors and subjective perceived workload. 16 out of 28 correlation relations under study were proved. The strongest negative relation was manifested between satisfaction with children's behaviour and educational process management workload and between satisfaction with the work itself and educational process management workload. A weak to moderate relation was manifested between educational process management workload and satisfaction with working conditions. This finding of ours is supported by Baroudi et al. (2020).

We found that satisfaction with colleagues correlated with the perceived workload of indirect educational activity and cooperation with colleagues in various areas. This finding extends the findings in the study by Crisci et al.

(2019), highlighting the relationship between job satisfaction and satisfaction with colleagues.

Similarly, as Lam & Yan (2011), we found out teachers' job satisfaction and motivation were influenced by non-teaching duties or distribution of work in the staff. Our study indicated a similar relation. The results proved a negative relation between the subjective workload of personal and professional development and satisfaction with the work in general. These were out-of-school and public events and various teacher courses.

Emotional exhaustion was found to be in a strong negative relation to job satisfaction and a strong positive relation to subjectively perceived workload. According to the study by Pedditzi et al. (2021), the working environment could be a predictor of emotional exhaustion and was linked with job satisfaction (Ma & MacMillan, 1999). We found a partial mediator effect on the relation made by the subjectively perceived workload of educational process management on emotional exhaustion.

Our research and the mentioned studies show that the working environment is a significant determinant of job satisfaction. Further research could examine the issue of working conditions and school environment in more detail and determine which area affects the workload the most and what teachers lack in their profession.

## **Conclusions**

The study confirms that teachers are satisfied with their work, but the marked dissatisfaction with salary conditions indicates the need for financial adjustments. Satisfaction with work is negatively related to subjective workload and emotional exhaustion. The strongest negative correlation is between satisfaction with children's behaviour and educational process management. The results also show a partial mediation of workload perception on emotional exhaustion, with the mediator being job satisfaction with working conditions. The findings indicate that the working environment has a marked impact on teachers' well-being and reveal the need for improving working conditions and school environment. Future research should investigate which aspects of working conditions correlate the most with teachers' workload.

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