

TEACHER'S EMOTIONAL DISTRESS AND BURNOUT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract. *In the context of COVID-19 pandemic that caused a world crisis which disrupted well-being world-wide, education suffered from rapid translations from face-to-face activities to online activities that affected students, families and teachers. A sample of 288 Romanian teachers was assessed with Maslach Burnout Inventory, Emotional Distress Questionnaire and a survey made by the authors, regarding teachers' quality of life during COVID-19 pandemic. The study aims to identify a relation between burnout and emotional distress and differences regarding these two variables based on the provenience of teachers (urban/rural environment) and primary/secondary level of educational system. Findings show a significant correlation between emotional fatigue and distressful emotions of teachers and differences in emotional fatigue based on mentioned grouping variables. The most distressed and exhausted groups were teachers in urban areas and teachers of the gymnasium level. Statistical results and the confirmed hypotheses are discussed in close relationship with self-assessments results from the survey.*

Key words: *emotional distress; burnout; teacher; education; COVID-19 pandemic.*

1. Introduction

World Health Organization (2020) states that the COVID-19 pandemic caused an unprecedented world crisis, disrupting the way of life of millions of people, causing significant loss of lives and undermining well-being world-wide. It is safe to say that COVID-19 was and still is to date, a virus that shut down the world.

In order to prevent the spreading of the virus, governments world-wide have temporarily closed educational institutions, security measure that impacted millions of students. Thus, in March 2020, UNESCO's statistics show that more than 859 million learners were affected, meaning a total of 49.1% of the enrolled learners. Since then, one year later, UNESCO reported almost 145 million affected learners, meaning 8.3% of the total enrolled population¹. A United Nation's Policy Brief from August 2020 states that the COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in history, with more than 190 countries on all continents being seriously affected. The UN underlines the necessity of taking urgent actions towards preventing a learning crisis from becoming a generational catastrophe. Other institutions, like the World Bank (2021) emphasize that 2020 marks both a dramatically different childhood experience that today's generations of young people will remember for the rest of their life, as well as a different teaching experience where teachers have to rapidly adapt, be creative and shift roles. In last year learners all over the world faced the fear of losing 2020 academic year, governments had to adjust, innovate and

¹ cf. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

implement alternative educational systems and assessment strategies (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021).

2. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education in Romania

Romania is one of the states that literally overnight ordered institutions to shift from face-to-face contact with students to online teaching and virtual education. The Romanian Ministry of Education and Research (MER) had to deal with unprecedented challenges (common, of course, to other countries as well), regarding the needs of students at different levels and stages, the reassurance and counseling of students and their families, the training of teachers in using virtual e-learning platforms, the changes that needed to be done in curricula, the problems of the online assessment and the finalization of the school year (Daniel, 2020). Efforts were made to ensure useful resources for teachers, parents and learners.

But, in order to better understand Romania's decisions and measures, based on UNESCO's representative's assessment, we will briefly describe the framework of Romanian's educational system. Statistics of 2019 show that 400,000 children don't go to school or don't complete the compulsory education cycle and 44% of the learners that do go to school, the latest OECD PISA results show they cannot properly read or write at age 15 (Bult, 2020). Also, Bult's report shows that the Romanian Government invests every year 38.000 million lei in education, meaning a 3.4% of Romania's total Annual National budget. It is a low amount and recommendations were that our government must at least double the investments.

Particular actions that the UNICEF's representative appoints are: 1) absorbing of all children into early education and provide inclusive schools and classrooms, capacities and services able to deal with diversity; 2) provide national parenting programs and support local school boards to address challenges in access and quality of education; 3) make the necessary changes in the National curriculum, update its contents in relation to the needs in the 21st century; 4) provide teacher training opportunities and life-long learning; 5) ensure technical support, like Internet connection, electricity and digital tools and equipment in all schools, adequate sanitary facilities and access to water in all schools; 6) significantly increase the number of school counselors; 7) address social problems like poverty, exclusion, violence against children.

Another report, published by UNICEF's Representative Norbert Fodor in May 2020, shows that there is a significant number of students that did not maintain an active communication with their teachers during restrictions. Some students were not at all present in online classes and for 54% of the respondents online courses were held several times a week or daily. Many students do not have the necessary skills to use online platforms, fact that obliged parents or other family members to be an active part of the educational process. There are teachers that opted for assigning homework before the lockdown, while others have continued to keep in touch with their classes through various online platforms, or have recorded themselves teaching (Fodor, 2020).

We can acknowledge that although the COVID-19 pandemic raised an educational crisis in our country, it also created an opportunity to reform the educational system. On March 11 2020, MER has suspended the courses in all the schools, and 2.8 million students shifted to online and virtual education (Holotescu,

Grosseck, Andone et al., 2020). Measures and actions that were taken by MER (2020a) in the lockdown period include: 1) digital textbooks and resources; 2) the implementation of the project CRED (Relevant Curriculum and Open Education for AI) and of the dedicated e-learning platform; 3) free learning platforms and applications; 4) open access tutorials, 5) TeleSchool – the broadcasting of the courses through a national TV channel; 6) filmed webinars for supporting teachers in improving their digital skills; 7) tutorials uploaded on different official channels like YouTube or Facebook; 8) involvement of local school management and inspectorates in sharing teaching experiences, good practices and resources; 9) open courses for children and open access to educational resources.

Teachers had to adapt to different scenarios in education, based on situations and variables like: access to the Internet, personal digital skills, student's digital skills, adapting the curriculum to virtual education and choosing the appropriate contents that could be adapted to online learning, the existence of the necessary devices for this type of educational process (like tablets, phones, laptops, webcams, microphones, etc.). Volunteers were used in rural or disadvantaged areas where these conditions were not met. They made great efforts to print and leave those materials in certain location from which parents could take them and bring them home (Holotescu, Grosseck, Andone et al., 2020). So, as it can be seen, several challenges had to be overcome in order for MER's actions to be implemented.

Since the beginning of the new school year in September 2020, MER had to face other challenges regarding the procedures and sanitary measures imposed by the pandemic context and by the return of students in educational institutions. Acknowledging the importance of the access to education, learners returned to school based on three scenarios (MER, 2020b). The first scenario refers to physical presence in the classroom of all learners, with the implementation of the necessary sanitary and social distance protection measures. The second scenario implied a split. Preschool and school children, the 8th and 12th graders physically attended classes daily, while all other learners attended school by rotation. The classes were split in two and each group would physically attend school every two weeks, while the other remained in online activity. The third scenario refers to online and virtual education for all students. The type of scenario chosen by authorities was based on the epidemiologic situation in every county/city. The epidemiological criterion based on which the educational units will follow one of the 3 scenarios is the cumulative incidence rate (the total number of new cases in the last 14 days compared to 1,000 inhabitants). Furthermore, MER specified that the decisions regarding the operating scenario during the school year are updated weekly or whenever necessary. This fact started different approaches in every Romanian city/county, with all of different types of arrangements in organizing the educational activity.

The first scenario raised the problem of children's compliance regarding the sanitary measures imposed by the government, such as (MER, 2020b): rigorous hand hygiene; firm cleaning and disinfection measures in the school; wearing a protective mask both by students and by all staff during the entire period when they are inside and outside the school; limiting the contact between students from different classes; ensuring a distance of at least 1 meter or the installation of separators in case the provision of a distance of 1 meter is not possible; keeping the same place for each child in the bench throughout the class; permanent information of staff, students and

parents / legal representatives on SARS-CoV-2 infection protection measures; isolating students at home in case of fever or other specific symptoms of COVID-19 (cough, difficulty breathing, loss of taste and smell) in a student or another family member. The second scenario raised the problem of purchase of UV lamps, masks, disinfectants, good Internet connection in all classrooms, high quality audio-video systems, etc. The third scenario raised the problem of national coverage of all necessary means for online education.

But only implementing these measures does not ensure the quality of the educational process. Studies conducted since March 2020 show on one hand that these measures had benefits mostly for higher education students and institutions (Juárez Santiago, Olivares Ramírez, Rodríguez-Reséndiz et al., 2020), and on the other hand that performance and satisfaction of the beneficiaries is not necessarily positive in some situations, because of several limitations of the virtual education. While faculty students were much more able to adjust to learning through online platforms (Sahu, 2020), other beneficiaries had difficulties in adapting.

Other studies show that students have accepted online learning, even if they find it less attractive than the traditional education system (Ionescu, Paschia, Gudanescu Nicolau et al., 2020). Scientists show that factors such as age, gender, prior knowledge of computer literacy and learning styles of an individual are the vital predictors of technology acceptance by students (Khan, Singh, Nabi et al., 2021; Al Kurdi, Alshurideh and Salloum, 2020). On the other hand, teachers, students and parents all agree that e-learning is an effective sustainable learning solution in current and future conditions, but it requires good collaboration between parents and teachers. Several inequalities between urban and rural areas were reported, teachers having difficulties in supporting education for students from economically weaker sections of society (Jain, Lall and Singh, 2020). Furthermore, virtual education needs to redefine its teaching methods, leadership models and interaction channels (José Sá and Serpa, 2020) and train teachers in online pedagogies. Apart from resources, staff readiness, confidence, student accessibility and motivation play important function in online and remote learning (Wahab, 2020). All these variables that we mentioned are partially included in challenges that teachers need to address while projecting the educational process. So, apart from all the directions within which human resilience was heavily tested (Matei, Ilovan, Sandu et al., 2021), the professional requirements may be more or less sources of stress and anxiety, if we also take into account students perception of a higher workload during the pandemic, boredom, anxiety and frustration (Aristovnik, Keržič, Ravšelj et al., 2020) that they report to experience. At this point we can acknowledge the main framework that allows the instalment of the burnout syndrome.

3. Burnout and emotional distress

In a non-adaptive way, burnout represents an extreme level of work-related stress (Melamed, Shirom, Toker et al., 2006), which appears when an individual cannot properly manage stress anymore (Weber and Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000), influenced by both individual and contextual factors (Leiter and Maslach, 2004). According to Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1996), burnout is characterized by exhaustion, cynicism and lack of professional efficacy.

Mäkikangas and Kinnunen (2016) state that exhaustion manifests itself as chronic fatigue, tiredness and draining of emotional resources; cynicism means that people put a distance between them and their work, developing negative attitudes toward their duties; reduced professional efficacy is the loss of competence, productivity and a negative assessment made over past or present accomplishments.

In other words, terms like depreciation, wearing out, depression, emotional distress or mental health problems are frequently associated with burnout, mainly because it affects different areas of human activities. Studies show that burnout correlates with specific anatomical and functional brain characteristics (Golkar, Johanson, Kasahara et al., 2014; Jovanovic, Perski, Berglund et al., 2011; Blix, Perski and Berglund et al., 2013), so one of these areas is physiological. The relationship between burnout and depression or anxiety (Koutsimani, Montgomery and Georganta, 2019), acceptance (Noone and Hastings, 2011), psychosomatic disorders (Bauer, Stamm, Virnich et al., 2005), distress (Zou, Shen, Tian et al., 2016) or decisional autonomy (Bourbonnais, Comeau and Vézina et al., 1998), is described in the research regarding the psychological area of burnout's impact. Other studies take into account factors like job involvement, job satisfaction or organizational commitment (Griffin, Hogan, Lambert et al., 2009; Sethi and King, 1999), which argue the organizational area affected by burnout. Burnout seems to affect domains like workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values (Maslach and Leiter, 2016). The impact over the physical area is documented in research regarding overweight and obesity (Li, Li, Lv et al., 2020) or alcohol use (Axisa, Nash, Kelley et al., 2020), while lack of social support (Elman and Dowd, 2011) also correlates with burnout, engaging its effects on the social area of human life. Basically, burnout generates frustration and a way of life that fails in producing human expectancies.

Given all these negative outcomes of burnout and taking into consideration the changes teachers had to do in their profession in order to function adequately during the COVID-19 pandemic, we addressed the question of the quality of life in professionals in education over this year.

4. Research methodology

The main **objectives** of the study are: (1) to identify a correlation between emotional fatigue and distressful emotions of teachers; (2) to identify a difference in emotional fatigue based on the provenience of teachers (urban/rural) and on the primary/secondary level of the educational system that they teach in.

The **hypotheses** of the study are: (1) we presume there is a correlation between emotional fatigue and distressful emotions of teachers; (2) we presume there is a difference between urban and rural environment regarding emotional fatigue; (3) we presume there is a difference regarding emotional fatigue between teachers in primary, gymnasium and high-school educational system.

The **sample** consisted in 288 Romanian teachers, of which 35.76% come from the rural environment and 64.24% from the urban environment. 46.53% of the subjects teach in primary school, 31.25% teach in gymnasium and 22.22% in high-school.

The **instruments** we used are: Emotional Distress Profile (EDP – Cognitrom Assessment System), adapted for Romanian population by Daniel David. This instrument assesses the dysfunctional and functional negative emotions: fear and

sadness/depression. The second instrument is the Maslach Burnout Questionnaire that assesses 3 dimensions: emotional fatigue, depersonalization and cognition of efficiency and professional achievement.

In order to identify the emotional framework of the teachers we also made a survey with questions that aim to identify the changes that occurred in both personal and professional life during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, we analysed the following dimensions: self-esteem, life goals and values, profession, learning activities, emotional background.

We used an online assessment that we carried out in February-March 2021. In order to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents, the questionnaires did not ask any personal data and they were voluntarily filled out by the respondents.

5. Results and discussions

Hypothesis 1: We presume there is a correlation between emotional fatigue and distressful emotions of teachers.

We statistically verified the hypotheses, starting with the normality curve of the data we gathered. By analyzing the Shapiro-Wilk coefficient we obtained non-normal distributions and used nonparametric statistical tests. The results are shown in the table below:

Table 1: Correlations between emotional fatigue, dysfunctional sadness and fear

| Spearman's rho | | Emotional fatigue | Dysfunctional sadness | Dysfunctional fear |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Emotional fatigue | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .606** | .633** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .288 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | | 288 | 288 |
| Dysfunctional sadness | Correlation Coefficient | .606** | 1.000 | .875** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .288 | .000 |
| | N | 288 | | 288 |
| Dysfunctional fear | Correlation Coefficient | .633** | .875** | 1.000 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .288 |
| | N | 288 | 288 | |

By analyzing the statistical data we obtained a high positive correlation, significant for $p=.000$, between emotional fatigue of teachers and dysfunctional attitudes manifested through sadness and fear.

Being a teacher is a demanding and sometimes exhausting job, posing by itself a relatively high risk of burnout (Keller, Chang, Becker et al., 2014). Overall, studies show burnout is strongly correlated with increased negative emotions, independent from the field of work: medical (Kash, Holland, Breitbart et al., 2000; West, Halvorsen, Swenson et al., 2013), religious (Büssing, Günther, Baumann et al., 2013), industrial (Hulsegge, van Mechelen, Proper et al., 2020), social work (Sánchez-Moreno, de La Fuente Roldán, Gallardo-Peralta et al., 2014), military (Ballenger-Browning, Schmitz, Rothacker et al., 2011), financial and entrepreneurial (Omrane, Kammoun and Seaman, 2018), political (Jawahar, Stone and Kisamore, 2007), etc. Emotional management is one of burnout predictors (Da-Yee, Changsoo and Sei-Jin, 2018), alongside personality

characteristics that are related to occupational stress, like anxiety or depression (Hodge, Jupp and Taylor, 1994).

Our results show that sadness and fear, as dysfunctional emotions, are strongly related to emotional fatigue. Teachers usually suppress negative or inappropriate emotions during their everyday activity. This causes a draining in their psychological resources (Keller, Chang, Becker et al., 2014) and affects their resilience. Thus, emotional regulation is strongly related to burnout. Most teachers in our sample experienced sadness and anger when confronted with the impossibility of continuing their professional activity in the traditional face-to-face approach. The quantitative analysis of the data gathered from our survey showed that 39.93% of the respondents had difficulties in frustration management, 54.16% had a pessimistic perspective on the current situation, 53.4% reported they felt bored, 68% nostalgic, 57.4% frustrated, 57.3% confused, 45.5% angry, 49.3% unhappy, 47.2% unsatisfied. Furthermore, lack of enthusiasm (70.8%), dissatisfaction (58.7%) and lack of calmness (44.1%), problems in adjusting to the new conditions imposed by the restrictions (57.63%), discomfort (55.20%) and disruptions of the overall well-being (60.06%) are also reported emotional states during COVID-19 pandemic. This framework of negative emotions reported by teachers represents a psychosocial risk that could be aggravated during this emergency situation that our world lives in, which may affect the quality of teaching activities (Prado-Gascó, Gómez-Domínguez, Soto-Rubio et al., 2020).

The shift between the traditional deployment of educational activities to online teaching and learning implied a sudden adjustment that included finding resources and solutions to all of the challenges that online activities raised. The leadership practices of the Romanian Government, County Inspectorates and school's principals set up the foundation for teachers' technical and personal resources and outcomes at work. Understanding and addressing very particular needs of schools and teachers around the country proved to be a great challenge. Professional autonomy was heavily suppressed by the pandemic and thus, teachers had to comply and embrace approaches to education that they never experienced before. The quantitative analysis of the data gathered from our survey showed that 48.61% of respondents felt they were not in control of their own life, 60.76% reported they were affected in their professional performances, while for 37.15% the personal competence was affected to a high extent. 54.86% reported difficulties in achieving their goals, 51.38% confronted lack of motivation, 61.11% reported disruptions in manifesting their independence and autonomy, 55.20% encountered challenges in innovating their activities, and 58.68% had low productivity and efficiency.

Thus, the lack of appropriate digital skills or tools led to a high level of exhaustion. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) suggest that teacher stress usually occurs when teachers feel a gap between their job demands and their abilities to manage these demands. The use and development of skills in new information and communication technologies, as well as the workload related to distance education (Amri, Abidli, Elhamzaoui et al., 2020) proved to be risk factors for teachers' burnout. Studies show that variables such as gender, age or the level of education also influence the symptomatology of the burnout syndrome in teachers (Ozamiz-Etxebarria, Berasategi Santxo, Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2020).

Research also shows that autonomy-supportive leadership promotes individuals' empowerment (Collie, 2021), while excessive control does not support

self-determination. For more than a year the Romanian educational system confronted with uncertainties in organizing activities, based on educational policies issued by the government, due to the epidemiological situation in every county and city in the country. The same educational scenario could not be implemented nationally, thus a framework for the instalment of anger, fear, anxiety, frustration or confusion was created.

Hypothesis 2: We presume there is a difference between urban and rural environment regarding emotional fatigue.

We obtained a non-normal distribution of the data, as it can be seen in the table below:

Table 2: Data normality based on urban/rural provenience

| Tests of Normality | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|-----|------|
| | Provenience urban/rural | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
| | | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| Emotional fatigue | Urban | .943 | 185 | .000 |
| | Rural | .859 | 103 | .000 |
| a. Lilliefors Significance Correction | | | | |

We used Mann-Whitney U test to compare the 2 independent samples. Results are shown in the table below:

Table 3: Comparative analysis for emotional fatigue

| | Emotional exhaustion |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Mann-Whitney U | 8173.000 |
| Wilcoxon W | 13529.000 |
| Z | -2.002 |
| Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed) | .045 |

By statistically analyzing the data we obtained a significant difference ($p=.045$) in emotional fatigue between teachers from urban and rural environment. For urban environment, the mean we obtained was 19.81, while for rural environment we obtained 18.52. We can explain these results through the fact that teachers in rural areas had most difficulties in accessing the necessary tools for online teaching, from available the Internet connections to laptops, tablets and other devices. Another important factor we feel is the number of children in a class. In rural areas the classroom is composed of fewer children, while in urban environment teachers have between 25 and 40 children in their class. Thus, it appears a supplementary volume of activities in the urban teaching environment, from the preparation of necessary materials for the entire class to the assessment of a much larger number of homework.

The quantitative analysis of the survey reveals further evidence for the differences between the perception of teachers from urban and rural environment that we synthetically present in the table below:

Table 4: Reported differences between urban and rural environment regarding sources of emotional fatigue

| Source of exhaustion | Percentage (urban) | Percentage (rural) |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Use of digital competencies | 44.86 | 41.75 |

| | | |
|--|-------|-------|
| Amount of time spent at the computer | 79.46 | 62.52 |
| Difficulties in time management | 70.26 | 70.88 |
| Growth of the number of professional tasks that need to be resolved in a very short period of time | 72.97 | 63.10 |
| Difficulties in managing the physical space available for the online activities | 60 | 50.34 |
| Challenges regarding the professional development and formation | 64.87 | 57.28 |

Our results are supported by other studies that show that for urban teachers the lack of resources, excessive workload, school-level disorganization, managing behavior problems, and accountability policies as significant sources of stress (Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins et al., 2011), while for rural teachers, poor working conditions is the main predictor of burnout (Abel and Sewell, 1999).

Hypothesis 3: We presume there is a difference regarding emotional fatigue between teachers in primary, gymnasium and high-school educational system. The descriptive statistics of the data are shown in the table below:

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics – Emotional fatigue

| | | Mean | Std. Dev. | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | | Minimum | Maximum |
|-------------|----|------|-----------|------------|----------------------------------|-------------|---------|---------|
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | | |
| Primary | 34 | 8.91 | 8.208 | .709 | 17.51 | 20.31 | | 44 |
| Gymnasium | 0 | 1.49 | 8.267 | .871 | 19.76 | 23.22 | | 45 |
| High-School | 4 | 7.27 | 6.945 | .868 | 15.53 | 19.00 | | 43 |
| Total | 88 | 9.35 | 8.093 | .477 | 18.41 | 20.29 | | 45 |

We conducted multiple comparisons based on emotional fatigue as dependent variable. Results are shown in the table below:

Table 6: Multiple Comparisons – Dependent Variable: Emotional Fatigue (Tukey HSD)

| (I) Teaching Level | (J) Teaching Level | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------|------|-------------------------|-------------|
| | | | | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| Primary | Gymnasium | -2.578* | 1.086 | .048 | -5.14 | -.02 |
| | High-School | 1.645 | 1.210 | .364 | -1.21 | 4.50 |
| Gymnasium | Primary | 2.578* | 1.086 | .048 | .02 | 5.14 |
| | High-School | 4.223* | 1.302 | .004 | 1.15 | 7.29 |
| High-School | Primary | -1.645 | 1.210 | .364 | -4.50 | 1.21 |
| | Gymnasium | -4.223* | 1.302 | .004 | -7.29 | -1.15 |

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

We can see that teachers who work at gymnasium level have the highest levels of emotional fatigue. They obtained a mean of 21.49 in emotional fatigue, compared to teachers in primary level (18.91) and high-school teachers (17.27).

We consider that teachers at the gymnasium level experience higher emotional fatigue first of all because this level of educational system has spent the largest period of time in online educational environments, compared to the other two. Furthermore, both children and teachers have to adjust to frequently change channels, teachers or class groups. Studies show that a major source of stress for gymnasium teachers relates to problems in interaction with students, lack of interest, low attainment and handling students that misbehave (Antoniou, Polychroni and Vlachakis, 2006). The curricula is also a lot more difficult at this level, so teachers need to adapt their explanations and to keep students motivated for the class more than the other teachers have to.

Further evidence is shown in other studies that emphasize that lower self-confidence, frequent use of regressive coping strategies, low personality disposition to hardiness, low levels of social support, higher levels of role stress, more custodial student control ideologies (Pierce and Molloy, 1990), school support resources, management of classroom self-efficacy and instructional self-efficacy (Betoret, 2009), student's achievements (Klusmann, Richter and Lüdtkke, 2016) are predictors of burnout at this educational level.

6. Conclusions

Our study aimed to identify a correlation between emotional fatigue and distressful emotions of teachers and a difference in emotional fatigue based on the provenience of teachers (urban/rural) and on the primary/secondary level of the educational system that they teach in. Both objectives have been achieved. We've shown that emotional fatigue significantly correlates with dysfunctional fear and sadness; urban teachers are more exhausted than rural teachers and gymnasium teachers experience burnout more than primary and high-school teachers.

We corroborated the statistical results by a quantitative analysis of the responses gathered through a survey made by the authors. Through this survey we obtained a self-reported framework of the emotional and professional challenges. Overall, teachers reported difficulties in frustration management, pessimistic perspective on the unfolding of current events, boredom, nostalgia, frustration, confusion, anger, lack of happiness and satisfaction, lack of enthusiasm, restlessness, and problems in adjusting to the new conditions imposed by the restrictions, discomfort and disruptions of the overall well-being. The picture of this negative emotional state was completed by reports of lower professional and personal performances, difficulties in achieving goals, lack of motivation, disruptions in manifesting their independence and autonomy, challenges in innovating their activities, and low productivity and efficiency.

Further research has to be conducted regarding the impact of other possibly significant variables for teachers' burnout during pandemic, like gender, age, educational level, personal digital competencies and personality factors.

We consider that these results are alarm signals that need to be addressed by educational policies and teachers should be provided with more social, financial and psychological support. 25.69% of the respondents reported that throughout the

restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic they felt the need of psychological counseling. Thus, teachers should be encouraged to access the psychological resources available and more careful policies regarding mental health in education should be implemented. Although we recognize certain opportunities that the online education raised for the Romanian educational system, we also have to address the large amount of challenges and difficulties that also appeared and are still unfolding.

In the long term, this negative emotional framework and professional dissatisfaction could be the main causes of a poor quality in education, especially if the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to severely disrupt professional activities both nationally and world-wide.

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