

# Managing teachers' well-being – a case study on sustainable development practices in education

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## Abstract.

*This paper analyzes the importance of managing teachers' well-being in achieving sustainable and quality education. The analysis is based on existing studies in specialized literature, as well as a survey conducted among teachers in Bucharest, Romania. For the education system to be sustainable, it is essential to implement strategies that help teachers remain motivated, healthy and balanced, and the present research highlights the link between teachers' well-being and their performance in the workplace, resulting in well-prepared students with remarkable results. The results of the study are relevant for teachers, school principals, trainers or other people who can contribute to the well-being of teachers. Promoting strategies to support teachers' well-being and reduce burnout among them can contribute to creating high-performing learning environments and teachers' retention in education, thus increasing the quality of education. In Romania, especially after the period of exclusively online teaching, there has been increased awareness regarding the need to manage teachers' well-being, and more resources have emerged to support them in preventing or reducing burnout. However, these resources remain insufficient and are not consistently accessible to all educators. A structured approach is needed to create a balanced educational system that can address current social and economic challenges while providing sustainable support and continuous professional development opportunities for teachers.*

**Keywords:** *managing teachers' well-being, sustainable education, teachers' burnout, educational policies, teachers' resilience.*

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## Introduction

Recently, a series of studies have emerged focusing on teacher well-being, with most placing emphasis on the negative aspects, namely stress and exhaustion. Additionally, fewer studies have explored the impact of positive teacher well-being on student learning and teaching practices [1].

Teaching is a profession that involves a high level of stress and is associated with a range of negative effects, the most evident being professional burnout. This should not be overlooked, as the relationship between teachers' well-being and both students' academic performance and well-being is a very strong one [2].

For education to be of high quality and for students to benefit from the best possible conditions for their development within the academic environment, teachers must provide them with the necessary information, resources, and all other essential elements. For a teacher to be truly capable of doing this and of helping students maintain—or even improve—their well-being, it is first necessary for the teacher to experience well-being themselves: to be motivated, healthy, and balanced in all aspects. However, this ideal seems increasingly difficult to achieve for today's teachers. It is crucial that educators, school leaders, trainers, and all other stakeholders in the educational process (including parents and students) actively participate in supporting and maintaining teachers' well-being so that students can receive a quality education. In this way, society as a whole will benefit.

In the context of sustainable development in education, teachers' well-being is regarded as the main pillar in ensuring the continuity and quality of the teaching and learning process. When teachers feel valued, supported, and mentally balanced, higher levels of motivation and resilience emerge, fostering a positive classroom climate. This, in turn, encourages students to become more engaged and motivated to learn. Conversely, a low level of teacher well-being negatively affects the quality of teaching and students' learning outcomes.

The present research was conducted to analyze teachers' perceptions of their own well-being and its role as a pillar of sustainable development in education. The research question that guided this study is: *How do pre-university teachers in a Bucharest high school perceive their own well-being, and to what extent do they consider it a pillar of sustainable development in education?*

The main hypotheses on which this study is based are as follows: *Teacher well-being directly influences student well-being and their performance, and implicitly the quality of the educational act; and the implementation of strategies to support teacher well-being can contribute to increased motivation, mental health, and performance within the school environment.*

## Literature review

### ***Teacher well-being and its impact on the educational environment***

Teachers carry out work that involves a high level of stress and common mental health disorders; however, the specialized literature contains a limited number of studies that examine the school environmental factors associated with teachers' mental health.

A study conducted in 2016 on a sample of 555 teachers from 8 schools presents data on teachers' well-being levels (measured using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale – WEMWBS) as well as depressive symptoms (measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire – PHQ-9). The authors of the study also highlight various associations between the analyzed school factors and these measures. The results show a mean score (and standard deviation) for teachers' well-being of 47.2 (8.8), which is lower than that reported in general working population samples. Additionally, 19.4% of participants presented moderate to severe depressive symptoms. Notable factors included the feeling of not being able to talk to a colleague during times of stress or sadness, dissatisfaction with work, and attending work even when sick. All of these elements were associated with lower well-being and increased depressive symptoms.

Therefore, teachers' well-being is at a low level, and depressive symptoms are relatively common. School leadership, along with other responsible stakeholders, must implement interventions aimed at improving teachers' mental health, focusing on reducing work-related stress and increasing support for teaching staff [3].

Teachers are considered the main pillars of the educational system. In Malaysia, the education sector is undergoing the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and teachers' well-being requires reassessment. Teacher well-being has become a focus of educational institutions precisely because of its importance. A study aimed at identifying the factors associated with teachers' well-being in Malaysia focused on reviewing previous research that investigated this topic. The studies analyzed were retrieved from databases such as ScienceDirect, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

Following the analysis of the selected studies, the authors concluded that the teaching profession is filled with challenges, the main ones being workplace stress, anxiety, and a heavy workload. Additionally, the reviewed studies highlighted a variety of factors that contribute to teacher well-being, such as job satisfaction, resilience, and emotional intelligence. To improve teachers' well-being, the authors also argue that it is important to explore additional psychological components. Educators should be exposed to factors that promote well-being, so that classroom learning sessions can be sufficiently effective. Moreover, teachers' well-being positively influences both student performance and, by extension, overall school performance [4].

School environment factors have a significant impact on the mental health and well-being of young people. A study conducted to analyze the association between the mental health and well-being of both teachers and students—and to explore possible explanations by examining this relationship in connection with teacher presenteeism (being at work despite illness) and teacher-student relationships—presents findings that support the strong link between teacher well-being and student well-being.

The study used data collected from 3,216 eighth-grade students and 1,182 teachers from 25 schools across England and Wales. The association between teacher well-being (measured using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale – WEMWBS) and students' well-being, as well as their psychological distress, was assessed using mixed-effects models with random effects.

The results of the study support the conclusion that higher levels of teacher well-being are associated with better student well-being and lower levels of psychological distress among students. Furthermore, teacher

presenteeism and the quality of teacher-student relationships play an important role in these associations. In addition, higher levels of depressive symptoms in teachers were linked to lower student well-being and increased psychological distress.

Therefore, the association between teachers' well-being and students' well-being, as well as their psychological distress, is a strong one. Additionally, there is a clear link between teacher depression and students' well-being [5].

## Methodology

The research methodology is mixed and consists of an analysis of studies from the specialized literature, as well as a questionnaire distributed among pre-university teachers from a high school in Bucharest, Romania. The questionnaire was created using the Google Forms extension and distributed to teachers via social media platforms. It consisted of 12 questions. The first 3 questions aimed to collect data regarding the teachers' seniority, education, and position, while the following 9 questions sought to analyze respondents' perceptions of teacher well-being and how it could serve as a pillar for sustainable development in education. A total of 23 teachers completed the questionnaire.

The main hypotheses were: *Teacher well-being directly influences student well-being and their performance, and implicitly the quality of the educational act; and the implementation of strategies to support teacher well-being can contribute to increased motivation, mental health, and performance in the school environment.* These hypotheses are also supported by specialized literature, exemplified by a study conducted in Australia. The study's results support the fact that when teachers use evidence-based strategies from positive psychology over a period of six weeks, positive effects occur on well-being, teaching practice, and student learning. Additionally, fewer cases of teachers feeling stressed were reported; they became more relaxed, positive, and engaged in classroom activities. Moreover, educators became more student-oriented in their classroom approach, emphasizing good relationships with students, who in turn became calmer, more involved, and successfully completed more tasks [6].

## Results and further discussions

Of the 23 teachers who completed the questionnaire, 8 are primary school teachers and 15 are teachers in secondary and high school education. According to their responses, the majority (43.48%) have more than 10 years of teaching experience, 39.13% fall into the 6-10 years category, and the remaining 17.39% have between 0 and 5 years of experience. Regarding their education, most teachers, specifically 56.52%, hold a master's degree, 34.78% have a bachelor's degree, and 13.04% have a doctoral degree.

The first question aimed at collecting data about teachers' stress levels was: *"On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means very little and 5 means extremely much, how stressful do you consider your workplace to be?"* Most teachers, 52.17%, chose moderate stress, 21.74% chose very stressful, 13.04% extremely stressful, and another 13.04% chose slightly stressful. Therefore, it is clear that the teaching profession is associated with a high level of stress, and teachers need support and effective strategies to cope. Agyapong et al. argue that implementing strategies appropriate to the school level is essential to improve teachers' ability to cope with stress, reduce the risk of burnout, and enhance overall well-being [7].

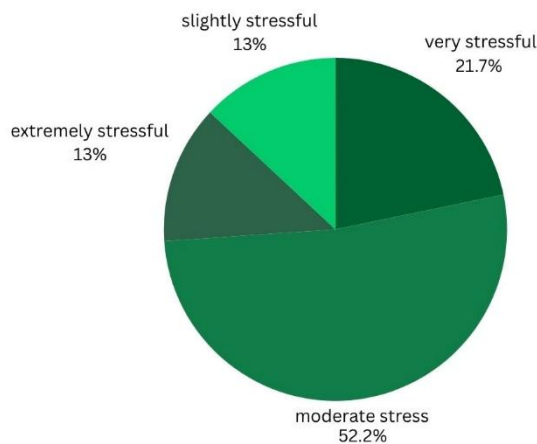


**Figure 1:** Teachers' stress level  
Source: Author's own contribution

Regarding the *most common sources of stress in teaching activities*, participants mentioned a heavy workload, lack of time, human and material resources, students' lack of involvement or disinterest, managing conflicts between students, pressure from school administration, and confrontational discussions with parents. Thus, teachers' stress arises from the lack of optimal conditions to carry out their work, inappropriate student behaviors, poor communication with parents and administration, as well as the heavy workload. All these issues cannot be solved with a single strategy; instead, individual strategies and programs tailored to each teacher's needs are required. Abel & Sewell argue that teacher stress caused by inappropriate student behavior, time pressure, weak professional relationships, or unfavorable working conditions can lead to burnout, and effective programs need to be implemented to prevent the negative effects of stress and burnout [8].

To better understand the situation of teachers, the next question was: *What strategies do you adopt to cope with stress at work?* Most participants mentioned that they try to maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal life. Additionally, more than half of them stated that they often go for walks outdoors or practice sports, use breathing techniques, meditation, mindfulness, talk with colleagues or family, take regular breaks, and organize tasks and time efficiently. Furthermore, five educators

mentioned feeling comfortable seeking psychological support when needed. The responses provided by the teachers align with the specialized literature. Griffith et al. also emphasize the importance of coping strategies and social support. The authors argue that these elements not only help moderate the impact of stress factors on well-being but also influence how environmental demands are perceived as stressful [9].

Next, the teachers were asked *if they had ever felt that their mental health was affected by their professional activity*. They were also asked to explain how they overcame that moment if they answered affirmatively. Most teachers responded yes, stating that they had felt at least once that their mental health was affected by their work, while only 21.74% said they had never experienced this. Participants mentioned talking with colleagues, friends, or family as the most commonly used strategy that helped them get through difficult times, as well as attending therapy or counseling sessions. Additionally, more than half of them listed various hobbies or sports they engage in to maintain their mental health. The study conducted by Hidalgo-Andrade et al. also supports the idea that teachers use social support, physical exercise, and involvement in relaxing activities as strategies to help maintain their mental health [10].

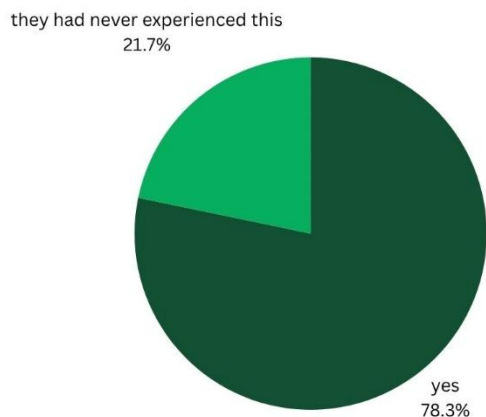


**Figure 2:** Teachers' perception of the impact of their professional activity on mental health  
Source: Author's own contribution

The next question explicitly asked teachers to *rate their well-being at work on a scale from 1 to 5*, where 1 means very low and 5 means extremely high. The chart below shows the teachers' responses.

It can be observed that the majority (34.78%) rate their well-being as moderate. A concerning 21.74% consider their well-being to be very low, which should raise alarm for both teachers and school management, as this is a significant percentage and calls for the implementation of strategies to help teachers improve their well-being.

However, it is also important to note that 13.04% reported having a high level of well-being. This is encouraging, as it indicates that there are solutions and conditions in place that allow some teachers to achieve higher well-being, which could potentially be extended to others.

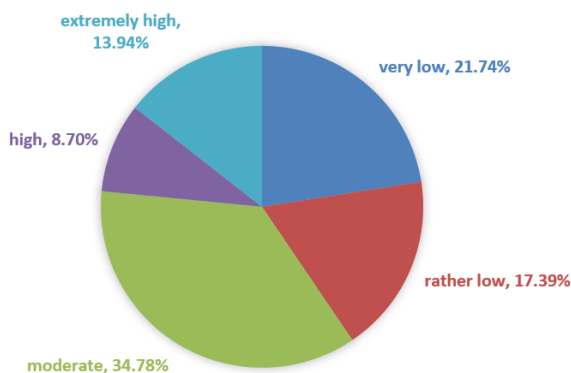


**Figure 3:** Teachers' well-being  
Source: Author's own research results

Next, the participants were asked *if they had noticed any reactions from students when their own well-being was poor*. More than half of the teachers, 65.22%, stated that they observed negative reactions from students when they were not feeling well, while 34.78% said they did not notice any reactions. Maricuțoiu et al. also support the idea that teachers' well-being is strongly associated with student-related variables but emphasize that this topic requires further research [11].

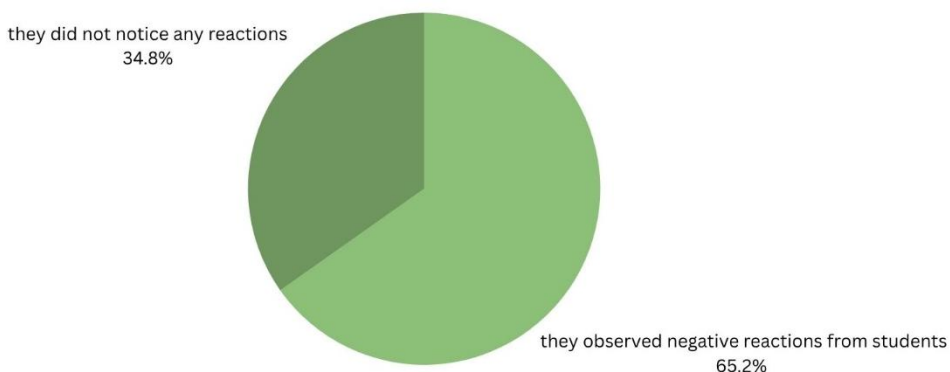


**Figure 4:** Impact of teachers' well-being on students' behavior

Source: Author's own contribution

To analyze in more detail the influence of teachers' well-being, they were asked *whether they believe that teachers' well-being affects students' well-being and, implicitly, the outcomes of the educational process*. A percentage of 73.91% of teachers stated that they had observed the influence of their well-being on the students' well-being and educational outcomes. This significant percentage highlights the strong connection between teachers' and students' well-being, as well as its importance in achieving good educational results. Therefore, it is necessary for schools to provide support and the necessary resources so that teachers can maintain a general state of well-being, which in turn contributes to improving the quality of education and, implicitly, the good results of students.

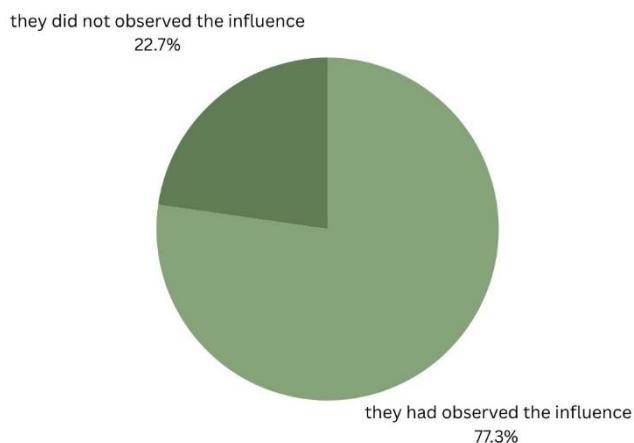


**Figure 5:** Teachers' perception of the impact of their well-being on students' well-being and educational outcomes

Source: Author's own contribution

To analyze the real needs of educators in maintaining or achieving well-being at work, teachers were asked *what they need in order to maintain or achieve well-being at school*. Their answers varied, but the following stood out: support from the school administration and other involved institutions, sufficient and diverse human, material, and financial resources, a relaxed and friendly work environment, support from the psycho-pedagogical counseling office, healthy relationships with students and their parents, regular breaks, and a reduced workload. Nwoko et al. also emphasize that elements such as healthy relationships between teachers and students, stress reduction, collaboration with colleagues, and the leadership team contribute to the professional well-being of teachers [12].

The final question was related to *the existence of concrete programs or strategies dedicated to supporting the mental health and well-being of teachers*. Since the teachers surveyed were from the same school, their responses were quite similar. Firstly, teachers mentioned the support received from the school administration, colleagues, and the psychological counseling office. They also noted the resources provided by the institution, rewards offered by the

school (small symbolic gifts, team-building activities, days off), as well as periodic meetings with specialists who offer advice or strategies to ease their work. Thus, an important aspect, which is less frequently found in the specialized literature but was mentioned by the teachers, is the presence of rewards that contribute to teachers' well-being. Nthebe et al. support this idea, stating that among school principals, an effective reward system can enhance well-being, motivation, and commitment [13]. This also seems to be true among teachers.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the teaching profession is quite demanding, and teachers need support from school leadership, colleagues, students, parents, and other individuals involved directly or indirectly in the educational process. *The main sources of stress for teachers stem from a heavy workload, lack of time, human and material resources, students' lack of involvement or disinterest, managing conflicts between students, pressures from the administration, and conflicts with parents.* To cope with these challenges, educators require assistance both from those involved in school life and from their own coping strategies.

Educators are aware of the importance of adopting *strategies such as outdoor walks or sports, breathing techniques, meditation, mindfulness, discussions with colleagues or family, regular breaks, efficient organization of tasks and time, as well as psychological support.* However, not all teachers can benefit from these strategies due to a lack of human, time, or financial resources, making it necessary to implement ongoing programs and strategies in schools that support teachers.

*The relationship between teachers' well-being, students' well-being, and educational outcomes has proven to be strong and is recognized by the majority of teachers.* This is a positive aspect because it encourages teachers to pay more attention to their own well-being in order to help students achieve this state and perform well. However, teachers cannot maintain their well-being alone; they need support from school leadership and other involved institutions, sufficient and varied human, material, and financial resources, a relaxed and friendly working environment, support from the psycho-pedagogical office, healthy relationships with students and their parents, regular breaks, and a reduced workload.

In addition to the above factors, *teachers also need a reward system*, which does not necessarily have to be material but could include certain experiences, professional development, or simply free time. To meet these needs, at least partially, policies and programs must be developed that prioritize teachers' well-being. Currently, this is not happening on a national level, but there are some local courses, programs, or initiatives that support teachers in achieving well-being at the workplace.

However, the present study also has several limitations due to the small number of respondents, the use of self-reported data, and the potential for interpretation or subjectivity errors. Furthermore, the fact that all teachers come from a single educational institution may affect the validity of the results and limit their generalizability.

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