



## WHAT IS MOST DIFFICULT IN A TEACHER'S JOB FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS?

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**Abstract/Izveček** The purpose of this research lies on the fact that although teacher's job is generally considered to be satisfactory, some of its aspects are perceived as difficult. In this qualitative study, conducted in Croatia, 158 students, 78 teachers and 148 parents were interviewed. The most frequently listed difficult aspects of teacher's job were keeping discipline, transferring knowledge, motivating students, working with problematic children, communicating well with students, adjusting to students, assessing students' knowledge realistically, and working with parents. Answers varied slightly between participants, between primary and secondary schools, as well as depending on the length of teaching careers.

**Ključne besede:**

starši, učenci, učiteljeva  
poklicna vloga,  
poučevanje

### Kaj je najtežje pri učiteljevem delu z vidika učiteljev, učencev in staršev?

Namen te raziskave je v dejstvu, da čeprav se delo učiteljev na splošno šteje za zadovoljivo, je nekatere njegove vidike mogoče opredeliti kot težje. V tej kvalitativni študiji, izvedeni na Hrvaškem, je bilo intervjuvanih 158 učencev, 78 učiteljev in 148 staršev. Najpogosteje navedeni najtežji vidiki dela učitelja so bili: ohranjanje discipline, prenos znanja, motiviranje učencev, delo s problematičnimi otroki, dobro komuniciranje z učenci, prilagajanje učencem, pravično vrednotenje znanja učencev in delo s starši. Odgovori so se nekoliko razlikovali med udeleženci, med osnovnimi in srednjimi šolami, pa tudi glede na delovno dobo učiteljev.

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## Introduction

For student teachers, it is beneficial to learn about various challenges in their future job, so they can be better prepared for preventing and treating these. The richest resources for learning about difficulties or demands related to teaching are their experienced colleagues. A teacher's job is public, influential and exposed. Hence, it is valuable to explore how other relevant participants in the educational system, students and parents, view the teacher's role (Diković and Plavšić, 2019) as well as the difficulties they face at work. It has been confirmed that students' perception of teachers' behaviour relates largely with their academic engagement and success (e.g., De Jong and Westerhof, 2001; Maulana et al., 2011; Maulana, Helms-Lorenz and van de Grift, 2015). It is thus relevant to find out if students recognise the difficulties that their teachers face, because they very likely notice how the teachers cope with these. If students perceive that their teachers cope with difficulties successfully, they will be more likely to engage in the foreseen learning activities. If they perceive their teachers as lacking effective coping skills, they will be less likely to become actively involved in the learning activities.

Findings confirm the connection among students' achievement, parents and teachers' relationship and parental attitudes towards school (e.g., Fan and Williams, 2010; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Westergård and Galloway, 2004). Parental satisfaction or dissatisfaction with school is significantly based on their attitudes about the school system, and one of the most important single predictors is parents' perception of the difficulties related to teaching (Maričić, Šakić and Franc, 2009). Therefore, the importance of parents' perspective in recognizing the difficulties teachers face may indirectly influence their children's school engagement and achievement.

### *Difficult aspects of a teacher's work*

A teacher's job is usually considered to be pleasant, satisfying and fulfilling (e.g., Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2015). However, this does not imply that it is easily implemented. According to the job demands-resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), teachers' health (impairment) and (de)motivation result from interaction between job-related demands (e.g., mental, emotional, physical etc.) and resources (e.g., support, autonomy and feedback). Working with children, being a part of their development, and having the opportunity to learn continuously are usually seen as benefits or resources in a teacher's job.

On the other hand, there are aspects of their work that are recognised as difficult, even strenuous, and there is a plethora of research confirming this. Generally, if teachers invest more in working and communicating with students and collaborating with colleagues than they receive back, they face emotional, psychological and professional difficulties in their work (Van Horn, Schaufeli and Taris, 2001). Besides personality-related factors, there are external factors, such as problems with classroom discipline, time constraints, deficiency of materials and resources, absence of professional recognition, insufficient support, workload and the variety of compulsory duties (e.g., Harmsen et al., 2017; Klassen and Chiu, 2010; Prilleltensky, Neff and Bessell, 2016; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011). Such demanding aspects can lead to adverse consequences for teachers' health (e.g., Bartholomew et al., 2014; Philipp and Schüpbach, 2010) and motivation (e.g., Hakanen, Bakker and Schaufeli, 2006), resulting in poor organisational outcomes including aggravated social relationships and job attrition (e.g. Harmsen et al., 2018; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011).

Some authors found that teaching behaviour, grouped into domains or types, can be associated with various levels of *difficulty* (Kyriakides, Creemers and Antoniou, 2009; Maulana, Helms-Lorenz and van de Grift, 2015). However, additional evidence is necessary in identifying more concrete difficulties teachers encounter in their work. Although many aspects identified as difficult are stressful, with harmful consequences, not all of them are necessarily like that; they can be viewed as challenging, hence leading to different ways of solving them.

#### *The Primary and secondary school perspective*

Working with children and young people of various ages makes diverse demands on teacher competences. Besides individual differences among their students, teachers face developmental differences among children and young people in cognitive, social, emotional, and physical aspects (Jablansky et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2011). Although educational outcomes are clearly articulated in curricula, there are different expectations from *primary* and *secondary* school. The former is still more distant from the professional orientation and is seen as necessary basic education that is not too comprehensive. The latter offers either a more demanding general education as a preparation for further university education, or a more profession-focused education.

There are common difficulties teachers face in both primary and secondary schools, such as dealing with classroom disruption, lack of student motivation, or adjusting to student needs. However, specific difficulties in primary and secondary schools stem from students' distinct developmental stages. Thus, teaching approaches should be adjusted according to children's and young people's cognitive, emotional, physical and social maturity level (Wang et al., 2011).

Generally, there is a lack of literature comparing the job difficulties of teachers in primary and secondary schools. Some findings point to greater work satisfaction among primary-school teachers (Koludrović, Jukić and Reić-Ercegovac, 2009), while some show that teachers of primary education experience higher levels of stress compared to teachers in secondary education (Antonioni, Ploumpi and Ntalla, 2013).

#### *Length of teaching experience*

When looking at the length of teaching experience, few models can be found that elaborate the development of a teaching career. Huberman's model (Huberman, 1989) describes the challenges and attitudes teachers face through three phases: novice, mid-career and late-career. At the beginning of the novice phase, a teacher's main concern is to survive in the newly discovered shocking reality. After that, the teacher focuses on the task of teaching and less on other duties. Finally, attention shifts from delivering content to making sure that students learn. The mid-career phase usually begins with stabilisation, when teachers start to feel confident about their competences, but become aware of institutional and system constraints. Some teachers feel it is time for additional contributions, like writing articles, organising events etc. Mid-career usually ends with reassessment, as teachers reflect on achievements and failures. They either cope with and solve the difficulties or leave them unsolved. In their late-career phase, teachers often reach professional serenity, accepting themselves, handling difficulties with greater ease and supporting younger colleagues. Approaching retirement, teachers gradually distance themselves from school, colleagues and students. Some reflect positively on their career, while some are bitter about it. The model is not linear, and phases are not distinct sequences. It foresees different lengths, regressions, jumps and plateau effects, as well as various factors influencing it: personal experiences, the social environment, or organisational specifics (Huberman, 1989). There is confirmation in the research for this model. Gavish and Friedman's (2010) research highlights that there are differences among novice teachers and teachers who have worked for several years in teaching.

Novice teachers have deficits: in appreciation and professional recognition from students, in appreciation and professional recognition from the public, and in a collaborative and supportive ambience. Beginning teachers are committed to their jobs, but they are unpleasantly surprised with the heavy workload and the level of errant student behaviour (Latifoglu, 2016). Teachers with more years of work experience adapt better to the school environment and working circumstances (Antoniou, Ploumpi and Ntalla, 2013).

We can conclude that there is abundant research about job satisfaction, as well as about stress in teaching work, but it is unclear what is considered difficult in a teacher's job. Moreover, in the majority of studies, teachers are participants, while other stakeholders' perspectives are not taken into account. The purpose of this research is therefore to recognise what aspects of teachers' work are perceived as most difficult from the perspective of various stakeholders, and the objectives are as follows:

- 1) to explore the most difficult aspects of teachers' work from the perspective of students, teachers and parents;
- 2) to identify potential differences among primary and secondary students, teachers and parents in assessing the most difficult aspects of teachers' work; and
- 3) to examine if teachers' assessment of the most difficult aspects of their work depends on the length of their teaching experience.

## **Method**

### *Procedure and participants*

This study formed part of a study related to teacher motivation for learning and competences for teaching. Questions in this study were created for both scientific and educational purposes. To fit the purpose, the research design was qualitative and involved structured interviewing. With the aim of discovering more about the expectations of students, teachers and parents about teachers, student teachers of humanities and music were instructed about the selection of participants and interviewing as a method of data collection. They received course credits for this task. Their task was to select and interview the following: one student from primary school (aged 7 through 15), one student from secondary school (aged 15 through 19), one teacher from either primary or secondary school, and one mother and one father of a primary or secondary school student.

The total sample included 384 interviewed persons. There were 158 students ranging from 7 to 18 years ( $M = 14.40$ ,  $SD = 3.02$ ), 98 girls and 59 boys. The primary school subsample numbered 81 students, 7 to 15 years old, and the secondary school subsample gathered 77 students, 15 to 18 years old. There were 78 teachers included with an age range from 26 to 77 years ( $M = 39.43$ ,  $SD = 10.38$ ), comprising 57 women and 21 men. The sample consisted of both primary school teachers (two-thirds) and secondary school teachers (one-third). There were 148 parents in the sample, 29 to 62 years old ( $M = 42.81$ ,  $SD = 5.97$ ). Half of them were mothers ( $n = 72$ ), and half were fathers ( $n = 76$ ). Parents reported having children in primary (50 percent) and secondary school (50 percent).

### *Measures*

For the first objective, to explore the most difficult aspects of teachers' work from the perspective of students, teachers and parents, the research variable was explored with an open-ended question: *What is most difficult in teacher's work?* Collected answers were then categorised, as part of the data analysis in the Results section. For the second objective, to identify any differences between primary and secondary students, teachers and parents in assessing the most difficult aspects of teacher's work, the research variable was a closed-ended question, depending on the participant: *Do you attend primary or secondary school?* (for students) / *Do you work in primary or secondary school?* (for teachers) / *Does your child attend primary or secondary school?* (for parents). For the third objective, to examine if teachers' assessment of the most difficult aspects of teacher's work depends on the length of their teaching experience, teachers were asked the open-ended question: *How long have you been worked in school as a teacher?* Their answers were then grouped according to the length of their teaching into three categories: 1) up to six years ( $n = 27$ ); 2) 7 – 14 years ( $n = 25$ ); and 3) 15 years and more ( $n = 26$ ).

## **Results**

### *The most difficult aspects of teacher's work*

To explore the most difficult aspects of teachers' work from the perspective of students, teachers and parents (the first objective), the most difficult aspects of teacher's work were listed from the three perspectives. Each participant offered one answer, and a joint list was made for all of them.

These answers were distributed into 54 categories, i. e. aspects of teacher's work; the separate lists show that students recognised 30 aspects, teachers pointed to 26 and parents identified 32. The five most frequent answers were ranked for each group. The joint list narrowed to 8 characteristics, and the rankings according to students, teachers and parents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency of the most difficult aspects of teacher's work from the perspective of students, teachers and parents

Rank	Students (n = 156)	Teachers (n = 77)	Parents (n = 148)
1	to keep discipline (35)	to keep discipline (13)	to keep discipline (36)
2	to transfer knowledge (29)	to evaluate students' knowledge realistically (10)	to transfer knowledge (17)
3	problematic children (16)	to motivate students (7)	to motivate students (15)
4	to motivate students (13)	problematic children; to work with parents (6)	to adjust to students (11)
5	to communicate/relate well with students (9)	to communicate/relate well with students (4)	problematic children; to communicate/relate well with students (8)

#### *Primary and secondary school perspectives*

The second objective was to identify differences among primary and secondary students, teachers and parents in assessing the most difficult aspects of teacher's work. Therefore, rankings of the most difficult aspects of teacher's work were compared by primary and secondary school. Again, all three perspectives were analysed. The results appear in Table 2. Altogether, there are 13 aspects listed because some descriptions have the same frequency. Equal frequency also led to fewer rankings in the case of teachers in both primary and secondary schools.

#### *The length of teachers' teaching experience*

The third objective was to examine if teachers' assessment of the most difficult aspects of teacher's work depended on the length of their teaching experience. Accordingly, the rankings for the most difficult aspects of teacher's work were compared regarding the length of teachers' experience. Table 3 lists nine aspects. Only the first three rankings are shown because the fourth rank has a frequency of one.

Table 2: Frequency of the most difficult aspects of teacher's work by primary and secondary school

Rank	Students		Teachers		Parents	
	Primary school (n = 80)	Secondary school (n = 76)	Primary school (n = 45)	Secondary school (n = 25)	Primary school (n = 72)	Secondary school (n = 65)
1	to keep discipline (22)	to transfer knowledge (18)	to keep discipline (11)	to evaluate students' knowledge realistically (4)	to keep discipline (15)	to keep discipline (17)
2	to transfer knowledge (11)	to keep discipline (13)	to motivate students (5)	to keep discipline; problematic children. to motivate students; to communicate/ relate well with students; to work with parents; to adjust to students; the beginning of working at school (2)	to motivate students (10)	to transfer knowledge (7)
3	problematic children (9)	to motivate students (8)	problematic children; to evaluate students' knowledge realistically; work with parents (4)		to transfer knowledge (8)	to adjust to students (6)
4	to review exams (7)	problematic children (7)			to adjust to students (5)	problematic children; to motivate students (4)
5	to motivate students (5)	to communicate/ relate well with students (6)			to be fair (4)	to communicate /relate well with students; to evaluate students' knowledge realistically; to be fair; to stay calm and rational (3)

Table 3. Frequency of the most difficult aspects of teacher's work regarding teachers' length of teaching

Rank	Up to 6 years of experience (n = 25)	7 – 14 years of experience (n = 25)	15 and more years of experience (n = 26)
1	to keep discipline (5)	to evaluate students' knowledge realistically (5)	to keep discipline (5)
2	problematic children, to motivate students (3)	to keep discipline, to work with parents (3)	to evaluate students' knowledge realistically (4)
3	to communicate/relate well with students; to work with parents (2)	to motivate students; the beginning of working at school (2)	problematic children; to motivate students; responsibility for students; to stay calm and rational (2)

## Discussion

### *The most difficult aspects of teacher's work*

The first objective explored the most difficult aspects of teacher's work from the three perspectives. Parents identified the greatest range of most difficult aspects (32), students a slightly shorter list (30), while teachers provided the least variety (26). The joint list produced eight difficulties (Table 1). The explanation for this overlap is that all three groups share the experience of being students, so they have shared opinions. According to the job demands-resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), all the concretely listed difficulties can clearly be identified as emotional and mental constraints.

Parents, teachers and students put *keeping discipline* at the top. Classroom discipline implies an encouraging atmosphere for teaching and learning. However, keeping discipline in school is not easy, and teachers find it both an obstacle and a challenge. By pursuing successful discipline, teachers can be perceived as competent by students and parents. Teachers who are more emotionally invested in their students and show more love for them are also more emotionally engaged in the classroom (Macuka, Burić, and Slišković, 2017).

Hence, it is important for efficient teachers to maintain discipline in the classroom. Lack of discipline in the school context is often a predictor of emotional exhaustion, and emotional exhaustion and teachers' feeling correlate with job satisfaction and further with motivation to leave the teaching profession (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011).

Students and parents assign *transferring knowledge* to 2nd place, while teachers do not rank that in the top five. This clear difference in perspectives can be explained by the fact that transfer of knowledge is the core job of a teacher; if teachers considered this the most difficult part, this would be worrying (Babar et al., 2016; Calderhead, Denicolo, and Day, 2012). However, the second position from the teachers' perspective is *evaluating students' knowledge realistically*. Besides being difficult, grading is a central ethical dilemma for teachers (Alm and Colnerud, 2015). The difficulty of evaluating student work raises issues of reliability, validity (Alm and Colnerud, 2015), objectivity, and sensitivity of a teacher as an assessment instrument.

Teachers and parents locate *motivating students* in 3rd place, while students place it slightly lower. Teachers and parents probably share similar challenges in encouraging children to study school subjects. The students are also aware that their motivation is low and assign the teacher the job of boosting their interest in the subject (Lamb, Astuti, and Hadisantosa, 2016; Nilson, 2016). In the context of learning and teaching, a teacher needs to establish and maintain the "classroom as a learning community" (Brophy, 2013). Students' motivation is greater if teachers believe in its effectiveness (Thoonen et al., 2011).

Students put *problematic children* in 3rd position, teachers place this 4th and parents assign this 5th place. The term refers to students whose behaviour negatively deviates from the expected. Expectations among students, parents and teachers about appropriate behaviour in school can differ, even within each of these groups. Some results (Lopes et al., 2004) recommend that teachers' sense of efficacy moderates as problematic learners become older. Also, educators express the awareness that problematic learners could benefit with defined individualised programs.

All three groups rank *communicating/ relating well with students* in fifth place. Appropriate definition and articulation of messages, instructions, expectations and responsibilities is crucial for reduction of misunderstandings. As the main facilitator of the classroom climate, the teacher is either a positive or a negative model.

When students communicate with teachers with relational, functional, participatory or even sycophancy motives, they employ more effort in the classroom (Myers and Thorn, 2013).

From the teachers' perspective one of the most difficult aspects is their *work with parents*. It is ranked in 4th place. In contrast, students and parents do not mention it in their top five. As important mediators in the process of schooling, parents manifest a wide range of attitudes and behaviour that can be either ameliorating or aggravating for teachers. Some parents can be very involved in various aspects of their child's interaction with school, while some are uninvolved. Teachers emphasise the importance of having parents as partners in the education process with students. LaRocque and colleagues (2011) argue that parental involvement is influenced by a range of factors such as comfort level, knowledge, self-confidence and motivation. On the other hand, teachers should make sure that parents' participation is familiar and meaningful. Irresponsible parents and everyday stress at work can contribute to exhaustion in professional teachers (Macuka, Burić, and Slišković, 2017).

For parents, the 4th rank comprises teacher's *adjusting to students*. Teachers and students do not rank this in their top five. Parents realise that children differ in personality and needs, so they (the parents) must adjust their parenting skills. This may be why they have some empathy for teachers who must adapt to a broader range of student diversity. Suldo and colleagues (2009) emphasise that students perceive teachers to be helpful when they put effort into connecting with them on the emotional level, employ various and effective teaching methods, encourage learning achievement, act fairly and justly and nurture a classroom climate where questions are welcome.

The recognised difficulties of a teacher's job from all three perspectives can be seen as risks for teachers' health and motivation, thus contributing to the demands-resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

#### *Primary and secondary school perspectives*

To address the second objective, rankings of the most difficult aspects of a teacher's job were compared by primary or secondary school, again, from all three perspectives (Table 2).

Although *keeping discipline* was identified as the most difficult aspect of teacher's work, students and teachers ranked it slightly higher in primary than in secondary schools, while the parents' answers did not differ regarding the type of school.

This could be related to the evidence that teachers in primary school experience higher levels of stress (Antoniou, Ploumpi and Ntalla, 2013). It could be that discipline is more associated with keeping the atmosphere physically calmer, and that happens more easily in secondary school because young people are physically less active than children (Trost et al., 2002).

The highly ranked item, *transferring knowledge*, mentioned by students and parents, but not by teachers, was recognised as more difficult from the secondary school perspective. In secondary school, the content is more structured, and adolescents have more questions that interest them, while teachers may find it difficult to answer or respond to their requests. Teachers in some secondary schools in Croatia are professionals in their subject and perhaps less often have the pedagogical competencies that are important for teaching.

While teachers' answers suggest it is equally difficult *to motivate students* regardless of school, students think it is more difficult in secondary school, and parents guess this to be the case in primary school. Teachers' point of view is confirmed by research that shows stability in students' extrinsic motivation in primary and secondary schools (Lepper, Corpus and Iyengar, 2005). So, a teachers' job in creating a motivational atmosphere is always demanding. On the other hand, the same research shows that students' intrinsic motivation decreases with the years of schooling. This finding is supported by our results (Table 2), where students find motivation to be a bigger problem in secondary school. Parents may think that it is more difficult to motivate younger children because their level of sustained attention is lower than in older children (Betts, 2006).

From the primary school students' perspective, *problematic children* seem to be more of a challenge for teachers than from the perspective of the secondary school students, probably because their physical activity dominates more than in secondary schools. From the teachers and parents' point of view, it is more of a problem in secondary schools. They may see more cognitive and emotional challenge in managing attitudinal conflicts with older students than with younger ones. It is also possible that elementary school teachers are more satisfied with their work because they have chosen it and are better trained, compared to secondary school teachers, who might have chosen the teaching career as their less preferred option.

Secondary school teachers put *realistic knowledge assessment* higher than their primary school colleagues.

Secondary school parents recognise this as a difficult aspect of teacher's work, while the primary school parents and students at both types of schools do not mention it in the top five. It is likely that knowledge assessment in secondary schools is perceived as more of a burden because marks obtained in secondary school are more related to the greater complexity of learning content (in contrast to elementary school), the high pressure of the state graduation exam at the end of the final school year, and a probable wish for enrolling at university.

From all three perspectives, *communicating or relating* well with students becomes more difficult in secondary school, since none of the groups from primary school mention it among the top five. This can be supported by findings that primary school teachers are more satisfied with their job and have significantly more positive attitudes towards students than their colleagues in secondary school (Koludrović, Jukić and Reić-Ercegovac, 2009). In adolescence, students have more elaborated attitudes and they are readier to express and advocate for them, so it can be more demanding for teachers to communicate with them.

Secondary school parents think it is more difficult for teachers *to adjust to students* than the primary school parents. Parents have probably noted how challenging it can be to raise adolescents, so they empathise with secondary school teachers. Teachers' perspective is similar; only secondary school teachers identify it among the top five most difficult aspects of their job, while their primary school colleagues do not mention it.

Secondary school teachers see *work with parents* as a greater difficulty than do their primary school colleagues. This can be explained by findings that primary school parents assess school programmes and teacher quality more positively and see themselves as more involved in their children's education compared to secondary school parents (Kranželić and Ferić Šlehan, 2008). Expectations that parents have from secondary school are higher and related to preparation for either further formal education or work.

Regardless of school type, only parents consider it as most difficult for a teacher *to be fair*. Parents assume a protective role when their children are in question, so they expect teachers not to harm the children by treating them unfairly because this could have a range of unfavourable effects (e.g., Berti, Molinari and Speltini, 2010; Lenzi et al., 2014). By being unfair, teachers can, in the long run, deprive students of improved prospects for further education and even careers.

Only secondary school students' parents have the opinion that it is difficult for teachers *to stay calm and rational*. They may be extrapolating from their experience how difficult it is to cope with their adolescent children's demanding behaviour.

Only primary school students mention *reviewing exams* as one of the most difficult tasks for the teacher. Teachers give written exams more frequently in elementary than in secondary schools because learning units are smaller, so they notice that teachers must assess knowledge more frequently.

Only secondary school teachers mention that it is the most difficult aspect of their work *to begin with it*. It could be that secondary school teachers feel greater responsibility and accountability because they face a more demanding population and higher expectations to prepare them for either work or further formal education. The results of the primary and secondary school comparison fill the gap in the research related to these two educational stages.

#### *The length of teachers' teaching experience*

For the third objective, rankings of the most difficult aspects of teacher's work were compared regarding the length of teachers' experience (Table 3). Only three ranks are listed. One rationale is that there were fewer teachers than parents and students in the sample. The other reason is that teachers' answers are diverse, many of them appearing only once. This could indicate teachers' more thoughtful responses, reflecting their insight into and contemplation of their careers.

*Keeping discipline* was the most difficult aspect of a teacher's job from the perspective of the longest and the shortest teaching experience. For teachers with medium experience, this was ranked slightly lower. These results confirm the non-linear change in teachers' self-efficacy related to classroom management over the years of teaching experience: it increases from the beginning and later decreases (Klassen and Chiu, 2010), although the shift happened almost a decade earlier in this study. Teachers with less experience are not that skilled at maintaining discipline (Latifoglu, 2016). They might not have expected it to be part of their job, or they might have insufficient competences for that. In contrast, teachers with the most experience are more tired of leading the class, and the lack of discipline is a burden in their work. From the perspective of teachers with the least teaching experience, the second position was assigned to *motivating students*, while this was perceived as slightly less difficult for their colleagues with more teaching experience.

This is in line with research showing an increase in teachers' self-efficacy related to engaging students across the first 20 years of teaching (e.g., Klassen and Chiu, 2010; Wolters and Daugherty, 2007). Teaching experience, along with continuous professional development, helps teachers in motivating students. Teachers with less experience must find various methods to motivate students for learning, while more experienced teachers already have a wide repertoire of methods.

Teachers with medium-length experience find realistic *evaluation of students' knowledge* to be the most difficult aspect of their work, while their colleagues with the most experience in teaching find this somewhat less difficult; meanwhile, their colleagues with the least experience did not put this item on their list. A similar finding emerged for *working with parents*, as a difficult aspect of teachers' work. For teachers with medium-length teaching experience, the *beginning of working at school* is one of the most difficult aspects of a teacher's job, while others did not mention it. As Huberman (1989) suggests, teachers in their mid-career years (7–18) often re-evaluate and question their career related choices. These reassessing processes probably extend to all aspects of their work, including assessment of students' knowledge and work with parents. Those who remain in a teaching career probably reach a period of serenity in which they feel more self-confident (Huberman, 1989).

For teachers with the least teaching experience, working with *problematic children* is slightly more difficult than for teachers with the most teaching experience, while those with medium experience did not mention it. Similar to the result with classroom discipline, experience helps in work with problematic children, as well as further formal, non-formal and informal learning. Some authors suggest that because of attrition, teachers with more teaching experience report better self-efficacy related to this topic (Wolters and Daugherty, 2007). Those who give up teaching careers could be, on average, less competent compared to their colleagues who remain.

Only teachers with the least experience placed *communicating or relating well with students* among the top three most difficult aspects of teacher's work, while teachers with more experience did not. This, too, could be the result of improved self-efficacy with years of experience. Communication competences can be improved in interaction, so teachers with more experience feel more comfortable in their communication roles. Gavish and Friedman (2010) support these results with the finding that novice teachers lack appreciation and professional recognition from students.

Only from the perspective of teachers with the most teaching experience are *responsibility for students* and *staying calm and rational* considered to be among the most difficult aspects of a teacher's job. Teachers who have had the chance to reflect on a long period of teaching probably realise that their work is relevant and that they are responsible not only for the time while they teach, but also for the future. They have had experience of meeting former students who give them feed-back about what learning was useful in their life after school. So, after impatience at the beginning of their career, teachers' self-confidence increases through evaluation and feed-back. Huberman (1989) suggests this phase can be recognised as serenity, although he identified this phase as appearing after almost 20 years of teaching experience.

The results of this research contribute to Huberman's model of teachers' career development.

## Conclusion

Results of this study suggest that there are major commonalities in understanding the difficulties of a teachers' job among the most important stakeholders in the educational system: students, teachers and parents. The fact that all three groups share the experience of being students probably contributes to the overlap. However, two colliding paradigms can be recognised: one in which all the responsibility and power lies in the teacher's hands, and the other in which teachers are facilitators of mutual processes with shared responsibilities. The former paradigm can be seen in the aspect of *transferring knowledge*, whereby in the process of teaching, teachers are supposed to load products into empty containers. It can also be viewed from the perspective of *keeping discipline*, which can read as if teachers should have obedient followers that are expected to obey students' demands. The latter paradigm can be recognised in the items *motivating students*, *communicating or relating well with them* and *adjusting to them*, because without students' interest and active participation in the process, learning and teaching do not take place. However, it is possible that some participants view *transferring of knowledge* and *keeping discipline* as participatory processes in which teachers are facilitators that in fact do motivate students, adjust to them and relate well with them. Hence, the implication of the results is to alert student teachers to these varying paradigms and encourage them to identify the advantages and disadvantages.

Another implication is that clear recognition of teacher's job demands from the three perspectives could indicate concrete risks for teachers' health and motivation, according to the demands-resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

There are some methodological limitations in the present research. The choice to list only the most difficult aspects makes it difficult to access a more thorough elaboration of what precisely participants meant. Participants mentioned the first thing that came to their mind. A different research design, such as listing more than one aspect, or having more time for reflection, could have yielded different answers. It would be beneficial to explore what students, parents and teachers with different characteristics, such as academic achievement, view as most difficult in a teacher's job. One recommendation for further research would be to explore how teachers, students and parents perceive teachers' resources and coping with difficulties. Such information could serve as useful feedback for teachers to encourage their self-reflection (Den Brok et al., 2004).

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